WHAT IS THAT WHICH IS ALWAYS BECOMING, AND WHAT IS THAT WHICH ALWAYS IS?[1]

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This paper explores the Neoplatonic interpretations of the distinction that Plato draws at the beginning of *Timaeus* (27d6 – 28a1) between "that which always is and has no becoming" and "that which is always becoming but never is". Philoponus tries to show that Plato understands "generated" in the sense of "generated in time", rejecting Aristotle's incompatible thesis. According to the Neoplatonic reading that Plotinus inaugurates, and Porphyry subsequently develops, "generated" (γενητόν) has two meanings: to depend on a cause and to exist by virtue of a composition. The first meaning is assigned to the incorporeal – the Intelligence and the Soul; the two meanings, on the other hand, are assigned to bodies. The Intelligence depends on a cause, the One-Good; and, in turn, the Soul depends on a cause, the Intelligence. These realities are not in the range of "that which is always generated and never is", but of "that which always is and is not generated", i.e. of "that which is without ceasing to be".

Keywords: Plato – *Timaeus* – Neoplatonism – Becoming – Generated – Cosmology

The distinction that Plato establishes in *Timaeus* (27d6 – 28a1) between "that which always is and has no becoming (τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον)" and "that which is always becoming but never is (τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε)"[2] raises the hypothetical alternative between the two possible models that the craftsman has before him to manufacture his work. But then the alternative is clarified: if one generated is chosen as the model, the result will never be beautiful, while if the eternal model is chosen, the work will be beautiful (28a – b). That said, "that which is generated and destroyed" in some way is (*Resp*. V.477e – 478d), although it never truly becomes (*Tim*. 28a).

The changes involved in the notion of becoming – generation and corruption – require the principle of causality to be used: Everything that is generated necessarily has a cause – this being understood in the sense of artisanal cause – and since the world is

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beautiful, the divine artisan or demiurge has produced it by looking at the eternal model, which is always identical, and not the generated model. The difference between the discourses referring to the eternal model and those referring to the copy of that model, that is to say, to the world, allows the following proportion to be established:

be : becoming : truth : belief

For Plato, becoming, that which is always generated, differs from the world for four reasons: (1) When Timaeus offers us a summary of the introduction of a "third genre", he affirms that are "being (ὄν), space (χώραν), and becoming (γένεσιν), three distinct things which existed even before the heavens came to be (καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι)" (*Tim*. 52d3 – 4; trans. Zeyl 1997, 1255, slightly modified). (2) At the beginning of his cosmogonic discourse, becoming is postulated as a hypothetical model for the generation of the world, even if it is a disregarded hypothesis (27d – 28a). (3) Becoming is "both visible and tangible and it has a body (ὁρατὸς γὰρ ἁπτός τέ ἐστιν καὶ σῶμα ἔχων)" (28b7 – 8; see 31b), while the world is not only corporeal, but also a living being that consists of a body and also a soul. (4) The demiurge "so he took over all that was visible (πᾶν ὅσον ἦν ὁρατὸν) – not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion – and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order (εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἤγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας), because he believed that order was in every way better (ἄμεινον) than disorder" (30a3 – 6; trans. Zeyl 1997, 1236). Therefore, by virtue of these four reasons, becoming, which by itself signifies disorder, differs from the world. Since what is generated, while not truly, is an object of opinion and is not intelligible, then causality is confined to the sensible.

In *Timaeus*, Plato distinguishes between two modes of apprehension, based on the radical ontological heterogeneity between being and becoming (27d5 – 28a4): (1) That which is born and perishes, that which always becomes another, can only be the object of sensible perception and of the opinion that comes from it; (2) that which always is and remains identical to itself, conversely, can only be grasped by intellection (νόησις). Since nature and the universe belong to the order of becoming, to which it never remains identical to itself but always changes, it is impossible for them to be the object of science. Therefore, by always becoming others, nature and the universe never are, because they do not belong to the order of what is.

I.

In *On the Eternity of the World against Proclus* (*De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*), John Philoponus no longer defends the thesis of a doctrinal symphony between Plato and Aristotle, but argues that between both philosophers the disagreement prevails in the capital points. A part of this mature treatise – written around 529 – is precisely dedicated to a new key project in the development of his hermeneutical architecture: it seeks to snatch the authority of Plato from his pagan adversaries, showing that the text of the dialogues coincides more with the doctrines of the Christians. In Book VI of *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* (VI.27.211.18 ff.), after citing passages from Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias about the eternity of the world,

he seeks to show that Plato construes "generated" in the sense of "generated in time", rejecting Aristotle's incompatible thesis (Segonds 1992, 478).

In the eighteen books of his treatise *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, Philoponus attacks the eighteen arguments that Proclus, in his *On the Eternity of the World* (*De aeterniate mundi*), uses to argue in favour of the eternity of the world and its incorruptibility.[3] To undertake this refutation and establish that the world had a beginning, he especially relies on a literal interpretation of Plato, who would advocate a temporal genesis of the world. Similarly, to support his refutative hermeneutics against Proclus, he also turns to Aristotle,[4] Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plutarch of Chaeronea, Atticus, Taurus, Ptolemy, Galen, Plotinus and Porphyry, in order to establish that the world had a beginning.

But Proclus's objections are not directed so much at Christians as at Middle Platonist philosophers who championed a literal interpretation of Plato.[5] For his answers, in many passages, as Share (2005a, 1-6) points out, Philoponus adopts a clearly Christian point of view, and not just purely philosophical, referring to Scripture and the Fathers of the Church.

In Book VI, starting from chapter six (134.21 ff.), he seeks to definitively establish Plato's true theory about the eternity of the world and to refute pagan interpreters to remove Plato's authority from them.

In the first place, Philoponus comments on several Plato passages that address the theme of the generation of the world (chap. 7 – 8, 135.21 – 144.15), before going on to examine the Platonic commentators Taurus, Porphyry and Proclus (chap. 9 – 23, 144.16 – 195.6), concluding that the solutions they propose are unacceptable, contradictory and based on an a priori thesis; finally, Philoponus exposes the authors who, according to his exegesis, teach Plato's true thesis: Plutarch, Atticus and Aristotle, whose passages he quotes accompanied by the comments dedicated to him by Alexander of Aphrodisias (chap. 28 – 29, 211.6 – 242.22).

But Philoponus does not directly quote *Timaeus*, as demonstrated by Segonds (1992, 466, who compares *Tim.* 35a – 36d with Philoponus's text *De aeternitate*

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[3] Edition of the Greek text that preserves argument 2 – 18 of Proclus' *On the Eternity of the World against the Christians*; argument 1 is only preserved in an Arabic translation (Rabe 1899 [1963]); German translation of the 18 arguments – argument 1 is translated by Heine – quoted in Philoponus' *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, short notes and several emendations of Rabe's edition Baltes (1978, 134 – 164); English translation of the fragments from Philoponus' *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, with commentary (Lang – Macro – McGinnis, 2001); English translation of the text of Philoponus that preserves Proclus' 18 arguments (argument 1 is translated by Adamson): Share (2005a, 2005b, 2010) and Wilberding (2006).

[4] See Gleede (2009).

[5] We do not have sufficient elements to allow us to postulate that the recipients of Proclus's treatise were Christians, as established, without sound arguments, by Rosán (1949). Plutarch of Chaeronea and Atticus were the most likely recipients of his criticisms, following the refutation he had undertaken in his commentary on *Timaeus*. As regards our topic, the world was not born in time (Proclus, *In Tim.* I.381.26 – 383.12), according to the interpretation of Porphyry and Iamblichus (*In Tim.* I.382.12 – 383.22). See Mueller-Jourdan (2011, 55).

mundi 196.25 – 197.15), but indirectly, through intermediate source(s), which include citations and summaries of passages from Plato's physical discourse.

Who are these intermediary commentators? "For those who are interested, a more detailed examination of these matters may be found in the earlier commentators (παρὰ τῶν προϋπομνηματισαμένων) we mentioned above (πρόσθεν ἐμνήσθημεν)" (198.4 – 5; trans. Share 2005b, 60). These "earlier commentators" (οἱ προϋπομνηματισάμενοι) to whom Philoponus refers in order to carry out a more detailed examination are identified in a previous passage: "For some of the earlier commentators on Plato, including the Platonist Taurus and Porphyry the Phoenician, whom Proclus too has followed, agree that Plato says that the world is generated (γενητὸν), but not generated in the sense that it had a beginning to its being (ὡς ἀπό τινος ἀρχῆς τοῦ εἶναι ἀρξάμενον) but in accordance with another kind of generation (ἀλλὰ καθ'ἕτερον τρόπον γενέσεως); for they say that 'generated' has a number of meanings (πολλαχῶς)" (145.1 – 8, trans. Share 2005b, 28).

To counter the adversaries of the temporal creation of the world, Philoponus uses Taurus's *Commentary on Timaeus*, or Porphyry's, or both, and could even have quoted an excerpt from one of these two authors whose work has not reached us.

That said, how do the Neoplatonic exegetes read Aristotle? Philoponus accepts an exegetical subterfuge designed by some Neoplatonists: If Aristotle attacks Plato, it is only apparently; in fact, he does so to attract the attention of the restless and dynamic reader, and show him that Plato's text encapsulates a profound sense different to the apparent sense.

Philoponus experiences what Verryckehn (1991, 213) describes as "total palinode"; but this profound and radical change could be related to the adoption of a manifestly Christian point of view. Verryckehn differentiates two Philoponus, one who remained faithful to the Neoplatonic teaching conveyed by Ammonius in the Alexandrian school, and for whom defending pagan philosophy and being a Christian were not mutually exclusive; and the other, a defender of Christianity at all costs, who supported the theses opposed to the first, among which is the eternity of the world, contrary to Christian teaching. After 529, Christian Neoplatonists had to suffer pressures and threats that would have forced them to renounce the teachings received from paganism. After his conversion to Christianity, Philoponus gradually renounced Platonic theses, in particular, the thesis of the "generation" of the world, key to a literal reading of Timaeus. The "total palinode" is exegetical, but he continues to use his own comments on the drafting of his treatises against the adversaries of the temporal creation of the world (*De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* 199.22 – 200.3).

II.

For Proclus, Timaeus's discourse is a "scientific account" concerning the universe "which are brought forth externally for the purposes of instruction (διδασκαλίας ἕνεκα) and social intercourse" (*In Tim*. I.218.19 – 20). It is, therefore, a διδασκαλικὸς λόγος that exposes the birth of the world "scientifically and didactically" (I.218.26 – 27).

Proclus interprets the proposition "the world has been generated" as true, while revealing and communicating the true nature of the world, namely, that it is sensible

and that it possesses its essence in time (*In Tim*. I.227.4 – 240.12 [ad 27d6 – 28a1]). In so doing, Proclus's "literal" exegesis of Timaeus opposes the "geometric" (non-literal) interpretation advocated by members of the Old Academy, especially by Xenocrates. For Alcinous, the Middle Platonist philosopher of the second century AD, the birth of the world in Plato is an image, meaning that Timaeus's discourse is figurative and should not be interpreted literally.[6]

The influence of Iamblichus was probably crucial to the abandonment of the "geometric" interpretation by the Neoplatonic school.

> "An alternative is that he supposed (ὑπέθετο) that the universe is generated (γιγνόμενον) 'for the sake of clarity of instruction (σαφηνείας ἕνεκα διδασκαλικῆς)',[7] in order to teach how great the benefits are that it has received from the providence of the creator. This view is true as far as it goes, but it is not sufficient to do justice to Plato's theory. For, as Iamblichus says,[8] clarity is a valuable thing (σαφὲς τίμιόν ἐστι), [but only] when it is appropriate for knowledge (ὅταν οἰκεῖον ἦ πρὸς ἐπιστήμην), since, even in the case when the universe is said to be everlasting (ἀιδίου), it would still be possible to show that the goods it possesses are given by the gods" (*In Tim*. I.290.9 – 16 [ad. 28b8 – c2]; trans. Runia – Share 2008, 143).[9]

Proclus, therefore, reinterprets the formulation of the statute of the discourse as διδασκαλικὸς λόγος, remaining true to the literal exegetical proposal that Iamblichus probably inaugurated to overcome the non-literal "geometric" interpretation. The scientific nature of the physical discourse is mainly due to the mathematician Timaeus, who remained faithful to the Pythagorean way of expression, undertaking the secure and "only way of science" (*In Tim*. I.223.5 – 15 [ad 27d5]).[10]

The Diadochus considered that the two "preliminary" sections of the physical treatise itself, corresponding to *Timaeus* (27d6 – 28b5 and 28b5 – 29d5), sought to establish the existence of the first causes of the world in order to thus provide the condition of possibility of a treatise of the demiurge.[11]

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[6] See Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 32.32 – 35 (Whittaker – Louis 1990, 32).

[7] See Aristotle, *De Caelo*, I.10.280a1 – 2: "for didactic reasons (διδασκαλίας χάριν) facilitating understanding by exhibiting the object, like the figure, as in course of formation." See also Simplicius' comments on the Aristotelian passage (*In Cael*. 334.4).

[8] Iamblichus, Fr. 33 Dillon.

[9] See Baltes (1978, 51).

[10] See Lernould (2000, 67 – 68).

[11] In *In Tim*. I.276.10 – 30, Proclus distinguishes two sections ("Hypotheses" and "Demonstrations"), which precede the treatise of the demiurge itself. See (Lernould 2000, 68, n. 16). According to the second, third and fourth general "hypotheses", which precede the treatise of the demiurgy itself: (1.b) "That which is 'become' is understood by the opinion accompanied by the irrational feeling" (*Tim*. 27d6 – 28a1 – 4). (2.a) "Everything that is 'become' 'becomes' from a cause". (2.b) "That which exists not from a cause is not 'become'" (28a4 – 6). Proclus assigns as the objective of the first two "hypotheses" – the definitions of that which is "eternal" and that which "becomes" (27d6 – 28a1 – 4) the discovery of the "generated" nature of the World (*In Tim*. I.235.32 ff.) –; as the objective of the following two ("Everything that is 'become' 'becomes' from a cause"). (2.b) "That which exists not from a cause is not 'become'", the discovery of the Efficient Cause (*In Tim*.

The first "demonstration" covers three lemma: 28b5, 28b6 – 8, and 28b8 – c2. In the context of this first "demonstration" (*In Tim*. I.275.3 – 296.12), Proclus establishes the thesis that the world is both "become and eternal" (γενητὸν καὶ ὄν),12 that is to say, "become" according to essence and "eternal" according to time.

According to Proclus, Plotinus, on the one hand, and, subsequently, Porphyry and Iamblichus, share with Crantor the assignment to "generated" (γενητόν) of a sense that does not refer to time, but only to the dependence of a cause.

> "Crantor and his circle of exegetes of Plato, however, say that the cosmos is said to be generated (γενητὸν) because it is brought into existence from another cause (ἀπ' αἰτίας ἄλλης) and is not self-generated (αὐτόγονον) and self-subsistent (αὐθυπόστατον). But Plotinus and the philosophers after him, Porphyry and Iamblichus,13 say that it is being composite (σύνθετόν) which in this context has been called generated and that the fact that it has been generated (ἀπογεννᾶσθαι) from another cause is coexistent (συνυπάρχειν) with this" (*In Tim*. I.277.8 – 14; trans. Runia and Share 2008, 127).14

Proclus attributes to Plotinus and his successors the thesis that "generated" equates at the same time to "composed being" and "generated being from a cause different to itself". Plotinus's innovation lies in adding to γενητόν the composed being, that is to say, in establishing an association between generation and composition.

III.

In Treatise 3 (III.1, *On Destiny*), one of the first drafted, Plotinus affirms that everything that is produced in the things that become (γιγνόμενα), but also in those that always are (ἀεὶ ὄντα) – the three main hypostases15 – which do not always exercise the same activity – human souls16 – originates by virtue of some cause (κατ' αἰτίας) and the uncaused (ἀναίτιον) must not be admitted.17 In this way, Plotinus applies the principle of causality both to beings who always are and to those who become.

For Plotinus, intelligible forms are both "generated" (γενητά) and "ungenerated" (ἀγένητα): While they have a principle (ἀρχή), they are generated; but, since this principle is not a temporal beginning, but "that they are forever" (ὄντα ἀεί), they are

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I.258.12 ff., *ad* 28a4 – 6); of the other two, the discovery of the Model; and, finally, with the name of the World, the discovery of the Final Cause (*In Tim*. I.272.10 ff. [*ad*. 28b3 – 5]; see *In Tim*. I.226.22 ff.).

12 Proclus, *In Tim*. I.276.27 (*ad*. 28b6 – 8); 292.15 (*ad*. 28b8 – c2). See Lernould (2000, 69 – 70).

13 Iamblichus, Fr. 32 Dillon.

14 The Greek word συνυπάρχειν (coexistent) can mean either (a) "connected" or (b) "present as a subordinate". See Philips (1997, 180).

15 See Plotinus, Treatise 3 (III.1) 1.8. Those that "always are" are the three primary levels of reality, i.e. the three main hypostases – the One, the Intelligence, and the Soul – (10 [V.1]). The One, the Intelligence, and the Soul are indissoluble and indestructible.

16 See, e.g., Plotinus, Treatise 7 (V.4) 15 and 17.

17 See Plotinus, Treatise 3 (III.1) 1.13 – 16.

also ungenerated (12 [II.4] 5.25 – 28).[18] Therefore, intelligible forms are generated, but did not originate at a particular moment (33 [II.9] 3.12 – 13), as in Gnosticism, as a result of a mishap in the Pleroma, but are eternally dependent on something else (ἀεὶ παρ᾽ ἄλλου) (12 [II.4] 5.26 – 27).

> "Things that are said to have come into being did not just come into being [at a particular moment] (οὐ τοίνυν ἐγένετο) but always were and always will be in process of becoming (ἀλλ᾽ ἐγίνετο καὶ γενήσεται, ὅσα γενητὰ λέγεται): nor will anything be dissolved (οὐδὲ φθαρήσεται) except those things which have something to be dissolved into that which has nothing into which it can be dissolved will not perish (οὐδὲ φθαρήσεται)" (Treatise 33 [II.9] 3.12 – 15; trans. Armstrong 1966, 235).

Plotinus conceptually distinguishes between (1) ontological or causal dependence, which causes intelligible forms to be generated by coming from another higher level of reality, and (2) the generation of becoming, which also means corruption. The sensible world is eternal in the sense of no beginning or end, but perpetually becoming (12 [II.4] 5.27; 45 [III.7] 6.38 – 42).

In Plotinus, we can also distinguish two meanings of the term "ungenerated" (ἀγένητον): (1) "Not generated" because it lacks a beginning in time, and (2) "not generated" because it is independent of a previous principle from which it comes.[19] The first meaning is not the same as the second. Thus, the matter of the intelligible is not generated in the first meaning, since it has no beginning in time; however, it is generated in the second meaning, since it has a principle, the "first principle" and "otherness".[20]

But what happens if we apply this distinction between the two meanings of "ungenerated" for the matter of the intelligible world to the matter of the sensible world? The result is the same, because the matter of the sensible world is not generated in time, but has a principle from which it comes, the lower level of the soul (or φύσις), hence it is also generated. Although Plotinus does not expressly refer to the matter of the sensible world, we can apply the distinction between the two meanings of the term "ungenerated"; and thus, both the matter of the sensible world and the matter of the intelligible world are generated (γενητά), because they have a principle from which they come, and "ungenerated" (ἀγένητα), since they do not have a beginning in time. The relationship of matter with time, however, is different in the intelligible and the sensible world. Thus, if we continue to read the text quoted above, Plotinus distinguishes the sensible world, which becomes "forever", from the intelligible world, which exists "forever", since otherness, the constitutive principle of intelligible matter, also exists "forever"[21].

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[18] See Narcy (2005, 425 – 426).

[19] On these two senses of "ungenerated", see O'Brien (1991, 37).

[20] See Plotinus, Treatise 12 (II.4) 5.24 – 26.

[21] Plotinus, Treatise 12 (II.4) 5.25 – 28: "intelligible realities are originated (γενητὰ) in so far as they have a beginning (ἀρχὴν), but unoriginated (ἀγένητα) because they have not a beginning in time (μὴ χρόνῳ); they always proceed from something else (ἀεὶ παρ᾽ ἄλλου), not as always coming into being

In the second book of Treatise 23 (VI.5, *On the Presence of Being, One and the Same, Everywhere as a Whole*), Plotinus takes up the distinction drawn in *Timaeus* (27d6 – 28a1) between "that which always is and has no becoming" and "that which is always becoming but never is" to interpret the doctrine of the participation of the sensible in intelligible forms, which constitutes the backdrop to the thesis of omnipresence and omniabsence of the intelligible being.[22] Plotinus connects "that which always is" (*Tim.* 28a4) with the immutability of the *Sophist* (248a12). Since the intelligible being is immutable, it is "always with itself" (23 [VI.5] 3.1 – 5), that is to say, it does not experience the suffering characterised by "being in another", "being owned by another" (23 [VI.5] 3.5 – 12). Therefore, the intelligible being is "nowhere", since it needs neither a place nor a substrate to be in; and, similarly, is "everywhere", since particular things participate in it, since it is present in each one of them.[23]

IV.

In *Sentence* 14, Porphyry contrasts bodies with the incorporeal, wondering in what sense it can be said that they are "generated", since everything that is generated is generated from another (*Sent.* 13). For bodies, "generated" (γενητόν) means to exist as a result of a composition; for incorporeal beings, on the other hand, "generated" means to depend on a cause. In this way, generation, understood to mean composition, is inseparable from death, understood to mean dissolution. However, nothing similar can happen in the case of incorporeal beings, which are neither born nor destroyed, that is to say, in the same way that they have not been generated temporarily, they cannot experience dissolution either. Thus, the soul, the intermediary between the sensible and the intelligible, can ascend, but it can also descend. If it descends, then it divides and its power decreases; if it rises, it is unified and its power increases (*Sent.* 11).

> "Everything generated owes the cause of its generation to something else (πᾶν γενητὸν ἀπ' ἄλλου τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς γενέσεως ἔχει) – if it is the cause, that is, that nothing is generated without a cause (ἀναιτίως). But of things generated, such as have gained their existence through composition (διὰ συνθέσεως) would be subject to dissolution (λυτὰ), and thus to destruction (φθαρτά); those, on the other hand, which, being simple and incomposite (ἁπλᾶ καὶ ἀσύνθετα), have gained their existence while maintaining simplicity of subsistence, as they are indissoluble (ἄλυτα), are indestructible (ἄφθαρτα), but yet are said to be generated (γενητὰ), not through being composite (σύνθετα), but through their being dependent on some causal principle (ἀπ' αἰτίου τινὸς)" (*Sent.* 14.1 – 7; trans. Dillon 2005, 798).

Thus, Porphyry defends the most radical point of view of the first Neoplatonists as regards the interpretation of the axiom of causation. For the philosopher of Tyre,

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(γινόμενα ἀεί), like the universe, but as always existing (ὄντα ἀεί), like the universe There (ὁ ἐκεῖ κόσμος)" (Trans. Armstrong 1966, 115 – 116).

[22] See Plotinus, Treatise 23 (VI.5) 2.9 – 19; Porphyry, *Sentences* 38.9 – 10.

[23] See, for example, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, propositions 98, 86, 88, 108, 112, 122. For a commentary on prop. 112 and 122, see Dodds (1963, 257 ff. and 264 ff.).

"generated" meant two things: (1) to depend on a cause and (2) to exist by virtue of a composition (*Sent*. 14.6 – 9). The first meaning corresponds to simple realities, intelligence and soul (14.9 – 10); to bodies, however, both meanings of the term correspond. That said, these two meanings are interconnected in two different ways: (1) from the point of view of extent, the first includes the second; but (2) from the point of view of comprehension, both meanings are juxtaposed, side by side.[24] The concept of composition requires that of causality, since every composite presupposes the cause that brings together the components.[25] Generate by composition is then equivalent to a kind of causality.

How does Porphyry explain, from the point of view of comprehension, this juxtaposition between causality and composition? To attempt to answer this question, it is necessary to turn to the distinction that Plato draws in *Timaeus* (28b5 – c2). Although the interpretation of this passage seeks to establish the compatibility between being generated and incorruptible, in *Sentence* 14, this compatibility is only valid with respect to the first meaning of "generated".

The hermeneutical key of certain Platonists focuses on preserving the exegesis of this passage of *Timaeus* from criticism directed at it by Aristotle. In his treatise *On the Heavens* (I.10.280a28 – 32),[26] the Stagirite affirms that it is impossible to defend, as Plato proposes in *Timaeus*, that the world is generated and incorruptible. If it is said to be generated, it must be maintained that it is also corruptible.[27] Consequently, and faced with this Aristotelian objection, a number of the members of the Platonic school sought to demonstrate that the assertion of the generation of the world does not signify

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[24] The adverb διχῶς, "in two ways", indicates this juxtaposition: the two meanings are on the same plane: τὰ μὲν οὖν σώματα διχῶς γενητὰ (Porphyry, *Sent*. 14.7 – 8).

[25] See Proclus, *In Tim*. I.280.2 – ;4.

[26] See also Aristotle, *De Caelo,* I.10.279b26 – 33, and I.12.282b4.

[27] In *De Caelo* (I.10.279b4 – 280a35), Aristotle discusses "physical" foundations against those who argued that the world has a beginning but not an end. The main objective is clearly focused on the cosmology of *Timaeus* understood literally. In chapter 12 of Book I of *De Caelo*, Aristotle states that, contrary to Plato's thesis in *Timaeus*, a generated being is obligatorily corruptible, and, conversely, an ingenerated being is necessarily incorruptible. See Longo (1962, 312); see Federspiel (2017, 287, 312); see also Broadie (2009, esp. 29 – 33, 39 – 42). For Simplicius: "The argument seems to be directed mainly against Xenocrates and the Platonists (δοκεῖ μὲν πρὸς Ξενοκράτην μάλιστα καὶ τοὺς Πλατωνικοὺς ὁ λόγος τείνειν)" (*In De Caelo,* 7.303.33 – 34 Heiberg). William Moerbeke, in his Latin translation of Simplicius, *On Aristotle On the Heavens*: "Videtur quidem adversus Xenocratem maxime et adversus Platonicos sermo tendere, quia ex inordinato et fluctuoso genitum esse mundum aiun" (424.82 – 83 Bossier). On Xenocrates, see Fr. 54 Heinze (1892), and Fr. 73 – 78 Isnardi Parente (2012, 375 ff). On Aristotle's interpretation of the problem, see Plutarch, *De animae procreatione in Platonis Timaeo* 1013A-F; see Cherniss (1944, 421 ff., and 1976, 170); see also Claghorn (1954, 95 ff.). On Theophrastus' interpretation, see Fr. 241A: "Theophrastus however, in *On the Opinions of the Natural Philosophers,* says that the universe has an origin (γενητὸν) according to Plato, and makes his objections accordingly. But he (also) suggests that perhaps (Plato) adopts the hypothesis that it has an origin for the sake of clear exposition (σαφηνείας χάριν γενητὸν)" (trans. Fortenbaugh – Huby – Sharples – Gutas 1992, 430 – 431; see also Fr. 241B).

its corruptibility.[28] Indeed, to achieve their objective, the Platonists proposed a new meaning for "generated", different to having a beginning in time.[29]

In *Sentence* 14, Porphyry interconnects the two meanings of "generated" introduced by members of the Platonic school: according to Proclus, Crantor provides the first meaning of "generated",[30] which appears in *Sentence* 14, and, in the second century AD, Taurus, as John Philoponus conveys in his treatise against Proclus,[31] incorporates a new meaning close to the second meaning. For Taurus, the world is generated in the sense that it is possible to conceive it as composed of certain elements. According to this, from the interpretation of Taurus, the composition is not real, but rather corresponds to a way of conceiving the world as generated, that is to say, as a composite of qualities and from a first substrate.

The fragments of his *Commentary on Timaeus* preserved by Philoponus show that Taurus stood on the side of the Platonists who argued that the world was ungenerated and incorruptible.[32] In opposition to Atticus and Plutarch, he does not interpret the passage from *Timaeus* (28b7) literally: the world was not manufactured at a particular time. It is necessary to overcome the surface level of the letter and not interpret the terms "generated" (γενητόν) and "starting-point" (ἀρχή) temporally.

In light of Taurus's proposal, Porphyry addresses the following question in *Sentence* 14: If the composition were real, would the decomposition of the world be possible? As we know again thanks to Philoponus (*De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* 148.9 – 15; 154.23 – 26), Porphyry, in his commentary on *Timaeus*, considers the second definition as the most appropriate: "generated" is that which is conceived as composed specifically of matter and form. However, Philoponus's treatise does not convey Porphyry's interpretation of the first meaning of "generated" introduced by Crantor, nor in what way these two meanings interconnect. We have to turn to Proclus (*In Tim*. I.277.10 – 14) again to discover that Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus innovated with respect to Crantor's thesis by defending the second meaning. But these first Neoplatonists would also admit that the composed is also characterised by dependence on a cause (*In Tim*. I.277.10 – 14). Consequently, for these three Neoplatonists, the second meaning signifies the first.

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[28] Porphyry, in the context of a similar argument, also immediately addresses the Aristotelian objection (*In Tim*. II, Fr. 51.103 – 111 Sodano = Proclus, *In Tim*. I.395.1 – 10). See Gleede (2009, 286 – 287).

[29] See Proclus, *In Tim*. I.279.30 – 32; see also 276.30 – 277.3. See Festugière (1967, 122).

[30] Proclus, *In Tim*. I.277.8 – 10. See *supra*, n. 14.

[31] See John Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundo contra Proclum* 146.13 – 20: "Also described as 'generated' (γενητὸν) are things that are notionally composite (σύνθετον), even if they have not [actually] been put together. In this sense the middle note [of the scale] is composed of the highest and the lowest (ἡ μέση ἐκ νήτης καὶ ὑπάτης); even though it has not [actually] been put together [from them], we detect in it the value that they have relative to each other. And the same applies to flowers and animals. In the case of the world, composition and blending (σύνθεσις καὶ κρᾶσις) can be seen to the extent that we can reduce it to the first substratum [*sc*. prime matter] (εἰς τὸ πρῶτον ὑποκείμενον) by removing and separating off its qualities" (Trans. Share 2005b, 29).

[32] On the interpretation of Taurus' *Timaeus* 28b7, see Baltes (1976, 105 – 121), Verrycken (1997, 283 – 317), Kühn (2005, 423 – 424), see also Karamanolis (2006, 179 – 184).

That said, it would seem that in *Sentence* 14 Porphyry points out that there are two different meanings of "generated", while in Proclus the second meaning signifies the first, which it should replace. However, the explanation rests on the same basis: these are two meanings that in the history of the interpretation of *Timaeus* (27d6 – 28a1) were proposed separately, and which both Porphyry and Proclus tried to articulate.

Conclusions

In *Timaeus*, Plato sets out the axiom of causality after the exposition of an ontology in which he opposes being and becoming, between "that which always is and has no becoming" and "that which is always becoming but never is". Generation and destruction are inseparable notions: that which is generated is susceptible to destruction, and that which is susceptible to destruction is generated. So Plato alludes to the eventuality of the destruction of the universe, which is generated, although later rejected (*Tim.* 38b). The changes that come with the notion of becoming – generation and corruption – precisely require that there be a principle of causality: such as that which becomes, since it is generated and destroyed, but never truly is.

Plotinus does not extend the principle of causality beyond the sensible.[33] He does not depart much, therefore, from the Platonic proposal in *Timaeus*: where Plato makes a distinction between becoming, which needs a cause, and being, which, as it is immutable, "is ceaseless", and has no cause. However, in Plotinus, the distinction between ontological dependence – through which intelligible forms are generated – and becoming is not as clearly settled as in Porphyry.

Porphyry's interpretation in *Sentence* 14 modifies the Platonic principle of causality, as it appears in *Timaeus* (28a), where that which becomes, while not truly, is the object of opinion and is not intelligible. By contrast, the statement of the principle of causality in Porphyry does not come after the ontological exposition, as in Plato, but rather precedes it. Thus, the field of the "generated" (γενητόν) extends beyond the sensible in such a way that it applies the principle of causality to the field of the supersensible, beyond becoming (i.e., the Soul and the Intelligence, generated from and by the One).

Instead of opposing being and becoming, like Plato, Porphyry introduces a distinction in the field of the "generated" in such a way that it can no longer coincide with either the sensible or becoming. Even assuming that everything that is composed, and therefore also susceptible to decomposition, is exposed to destruction, some beings are "generated" (γενητά) not because they integrate the cycle of that which is generated and that which is susceptible to destruction, but just because they depend on a cause.

In this way, Porphyry expands causality to the being and the intelligible. For Porphyry, the Platonic axiom of causality: everything that generates (= generated) necessarily generates due to a cause[34] is only valid if the meaning of "generated"

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[33] See Plotinus, Treatise 3 (III.1) 1.12 – 15.

[34] See Plato, *Tim.* 28c2 – 3: "Further, we maintain that, necessarily, that which comes to be must come to be by the agency of some cause (τῷ δ' αὖ γενομένῳ φαμὲν ὑπ' αἰτίου τινὸς ἀνάγκην εἶναι

(γενητόν) is applied to non-composed, and therefore incorporeal, realities. In the Neoplatonic distinction, these realities, being indestructible (*Sent*. 14.6), are not in the range of "that which is always generated and never is", but of "that which always is and is not generated", that is to say, of "that which is without ceasing to be". This imbalance with respect to the literal meaning of *Timaeus* is compatible with the henological-processional architecture of Neoplatonism, where ontological dependence concerns everything that is inferior to the One-Good and, therefore, prior to the generation of the sensible: hypostasis and beings, different and prior to becoming.

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γενέσθαι)" (Trans. Zeyl 1997, 1236). Plato returns frequently to the principle of causality in *Phaedo* 98c, 99b; *Philebus* 27b; *Timaeus* 29d, 46e, 57e, 68e, 69a, 87e, 38d, 44c, 46d, 64d; and *Laws* X.891e.

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