

Special Issue Reprint

Fate in Ancient Greek Philosophy and Religion

Edited by
David Torrijos-Castrillejo and Jorge Luis Gutiérrez

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Guest Editors

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Contents

About the Editors	vii
Preface	ix
David Torrijos-Castrillejo and Jorge L. Gutiérrez Fate in Ancient Greek Philosophy and Religion Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2026 , 17, 623, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17050623	1
Angela Zamora Cilento Considerations on Fate in the <i>Iliad</i> and the Remarkable Interventions of the Divine Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 557, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050557	4
Xiao Ren Disorder, Punishment, and Grace: The Harmonization of Divine Will and Fate in the <i>Prometheus</i> Trilogy Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 483, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040483	20
David Torrijos-Castrillejo Parmenides as a Thinker of Fate Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2024 , 15, 1295, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111295	32
Qi Zhao An Exploration of Fate in Plato's Theology: Focusing on the Interpretation of the <i>Timaeus'</i> Cosmology Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 495, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040495	41
Carlos A. Casanova Did God Cause the World by an Act of Free Will, According to Aristotle? A Reading Based on Thomistic Insights Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 52, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010052	64
Davide Tomaselli The <i>Symposium</i> of Methodius of Olympus and the Critique of Fatalism Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 1159, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16091159	80
José Cebrián Cebrián Free Will and Divine Sovereignty in Eusebius of Emesa: A Fourth-Century Antiochene Homily Against Determinism Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 585, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050585	96
David Torrijos-Castrillejo Nemesius of Emesa on Fate Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 573, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050573	110
Pedro José Grande Sánchez The Greek Philosophical Sources in Cicero's <i>De Fato</i> Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 824, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16070824	122
Rosario Neuman Lorenzini, Sergi Grau Guijarro and Miguel Ángel Belmonte Fate and Freedom in Ancient Stoicism and Augustine's Critique Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 874, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16070874	142

Elisabeth Kruse

Fate or Free Will? The Reception of Greek Religion in Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale* (1934)

Reprinted from: *Religions* **2025**, 16, 892, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16070892> **156**

About the Editors

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Preface

This reprint was prepared at the initiative of the Delphos research group, founded in 2013 at Mackenzie University (São Paulo, Brazil) by Professor Dr. Jorge Luis Gutiérrez, who has served as its coordinator ever since. In 2021, Professor Dr. David Torrijos-Castrillejo (San Dámaso University, Madrid, Spain) joined the group as co-director. Since its inception, the Delphos research group has maintained a sustained and dynamic program of academic activity, organizing several symposia with the valued support of Mackenzie University. Its inaugural symposium, held in 2015, was devoted to the theme “The City” (ἡ πόλις), with particular emphasis on Aristotelian philosophy. Between 2015 and 2023, the group convened five international symposia, which served as important platforms for the dissemination and discussion of scholarship on Antiquity in its scientific, educational, and cultural dimensions. These meetings have addressed a broad range of philosophical and religious topics, with a particular focus on the Greek world.

Within the framework of these research activities, Professors Gutiérrez and Torrijos have edited the present volume, which brings together contributions from scholars who have participated in the symposia organized by Delphos, as well as from other specialists in ancient thought. The resulting collection examines diverse aspects of fate, a concept of considerable philosophical and religious significance. The Reprint encompasses sources ranging from Homeric poetry and Greek tragedy to philosophical traditions from the Presocratics to Late Antiquity, while also taking into account the intellectual developments arising from the encounter between Christianity and classical philosophy. Particular attention is likewise given to the enduring influence of Greek thought, as reflected in Latin intellectual traditions and even in contemporary literature.

The outcome is a highly diverse and interdisciplinary work, comprising contributions by authors of various national backgrounds who collectively offer a nuanced and multifaceted perspective on Greek philosophy and religion through the lens of fate. As such, it provides an illuminating and stimulating account of one of the most significant intellectual developments in the history of human thought.

David Torrijos-Castrillejo and Jorge Luis Gutiérrez

Guest Editors

Fate in Ancient Greek Philosophy and Religion

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The Greek term *heimarménē*, rendered in Latin as *fatum* and in English as “fate” (and occasionally as “destiny”), designates one of the doctrinal elements at the intersection of Greek religion and philosophy. For philosophical inquiry, it presents the challenge of examining how the supposed causal force of fate interacts with other types of causality. Reflection on fate also gives rise to philosophical questions concerning contingent events, freedom of the will, determinism, divine foreknowledge, and providence, among others.

Moreover, this theme is deeply embedded in the human experiences depicted throughout Greek epic and tragic literature and, through them, has significantly shaped the imaginative landscape of Western literature as a whole. Such experiences include unexpected good fortune, human inability to resist misfortune, practices of divination, and the relationship between human beings and the divine.

Given the centrality of topics such as free will, determinism, and divine foreknowledge in contemporary philosophy of religion, it is especially illuminating to investigate how Greek philosophers—and even other Greek authors not typically classified as philosophers—addressed these issues. Late antique Greek thought revisits the themes of fate and divine providence within the framework of Christian theology, engaging in sustained dialogue with “pagan” Greek philosophy. These exchanges constitute a significant contribution to the metaphysical understanding of fate.

This book is produced at the initiative of the Delphos research group, led by Jorge Luis Gutiérrez. For more than a decade, the group has been engaged in research on a wide range of topics related to the philosophy and religion of ancient Greece. It recently published another volume containing studies on these subjects (J.L. Gutiérrez, and D. Torrijos-Castrillejo, eds., *Filosofía y religión en la Grecia antigua*, Salamanca: Pontificia Universidad de Salamanca/Sindéresis, 2024). The members of Delphos adopt a broad conception of Greek literature. Our inquiry is not confined to authors conventionally classified as “philosophers”; rather, it encompasses all reflections within Greek literary production that offer philosophical or religious insights. It is therefore unsurprising that this volume includes studies on Homer and Aeschylus alongside others devoted to philosophical figures such as Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle.

Moreover, we do not consider it appropriate to exclude Christian authors from the scope of ancient Greek literature. These writers are fully embedded within Greek cultural and linguistic traditions, and their works constitute, in their own right, part of the literary heritage of the Greek world. In line with this criterion, the present volume includes contributions on Methodius of Olympus, Eusebius of Emesa, and Nemesius of Emesa. Additionally, we take into account the reception of the notion of fate—originally formulated within Greek thought—in other cultural spheres, beginning with Latin literature, whose development proceeded in close interaction with Greek intellectual traditions. For this

reason, two articles are devoted to Cicero and Augustine of Hippo. Finally, in our treatment of the reception of Greek thought, we extend our perspective across historical periods, which justifies the inclusion of an article on Jean Cocteau.

The book is divided into three sections that reflect this diversity of perspectives on fate. The first section opens with Angela Zamora Cilento's study of *Moirai*, which she relates to the task of spinning as described in Greek myth. In the *Iliad*, the divine act of spinning intertwines with human life, and drawing on Heidegger's thought, Zamora Cilento reflects on the woven texture of human existence, linking it to death, the survival of the soul in Hades, and the will of the gods—particularly Zeus. Despite the limitations inherent to human beings, Homer preserves a sphere of human agency: although fate dominates human life and death constantly threatens, people still contribute meaningfully to the unfolding of events.

Xiao Ren examines the presence of fate in Aeschylus's *Prometheus* trilogy. Her analysis connects fate with the restoration of a cosmic justice disrupted by human actions, among which Prometheus's theft of fire is paradigmatic. For Ren, Zeus's will, shaped by justice, is not arbitrary but expresses a cosmic order that ultimately grounds the ethics of the *polis*. Thus, she identifies in the theological foundation of justice the origin of civic ethics.

The article by Torrijos-Castrillejo is the first to address an author traditionally regarded as a philosopher. Although often overlooked, Parmenides refers to *Moirai* in his *Poem*, which supports the hypothesis that his conception of the intimate connectedness of reality may be interpreted as a form of fated interweaving. In this sense, the strict unity of Parmenides' being may be understood within a fatalistic vision in which all events are pre-connected.

Qi Zhao, in his study of Plato's *Timaeus*, explores a theme that has received surprisingly little attention: the role of fate in the dialogue. Zhao rejects metaphorical interpretations of the demiurge, which, in his view, obscure the role of fate and deprive the creator of genuine personality. This reading identifies a theological teleology in the cosmos, rooted in divine providence. Fate thus emerges from rational divine agency, and although fate introduces a form of determinism, Zhao maintains that it does not extinguish human free will.

Carlos Casanova's article on Aristotle proposes a thesis that diverges from the positions of many contemporary interpreters. He argues that Aristotle does not defend a deterministic conception of divinity; rather, Aristotle's first mover should be understood as a personal being—endowed with intellect, affection, and even freedom. To support this claim, Casanova re-examines Aristotle's notion of intellectual inclination, highlighting within it the essential elements of freedom. He then analyses various passages concerning divine action in order to show that such action is not performed under necessity.

Following the studies on archaic and classical Greek literature, the second section focuses on Greek thought within a Christian framework. Davide Tomaselli examines a passage of Methodius of Olympus's *Symposium* that includes a critique of the fatalism of Greek philosophy. A comparison with *On Free Will* by Methodius reveals his coherent opposition to astrological determinism and his defence of human freedom.

José Cebrián Cebrián analyses a homily by Eusebius of Emesa in which this Christian author critiques astrological determinism, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism, situating these critiques within a broader exposition of free will. Through his exegesis of specific biblical passages, Eusebius articulates his doctrine of human freedom and formulates his objections to erroneous conceptions of fate.

A second thinker from Emesa, Nemesius, is the subject of another article by David Torrijos-Castrillejo. The study focuses on the section of *On the Nature of Man* devoted to a critique of fate. Nemesius primarily targets Stoic determinism, while also rejecting astral fatalism, which he associates with Egyptian divination. His critique even extends to Platonic conceptions of fate. In contrast, Nemesius defends a universe governed by divine

providence, which allows for the genuine exercise of human free will under the gaze of the Christian God. Although human beings do not possess absolute autonomy—since their actions fall under divine providence—they remain true agents and responsible for their conduct. God thus appears as the supreme being who governs even the necessity of fate, which remains subordinate to divine providence.

The third section of the book examines the reception of the Greek notion of fate. The earliest context for this reception is Latin thought. Pedro J. Grande Sánchez contributes an article on Cicero, focusing on the Greek sources of his *On Fate*. By linking fate with divination, Cicero creatively reinterprets his Greek sources and articulates a doctrine aimed at reconciling cosmic order with human freedom.

Another case of Latin reception of Greek fate appears in Augustine of Hippo, examined in the article by Rosario Neuman Lorenzini, Sergi Grau Guijarro, and Miguel Ángel Belmonte. They analyse Augustine's critique of Stoic conceptions of fate and explore his development of the notion of free will as the source of human action. This genuine capacity of the human spirit remains, however, within the scope of divine causality, since God is the ultimate origin even of voluntary acts.

Finally, the volume concludes with a study of a contemporary reception of Greek fate: Jean Cocteau's interpretation of the Oedipus myth. Elisabeth Kruse analyses Cocteau's distinctive portrayal of Oedipus, which diverges significantly from the paradigmatic Greek representations. The tragic destiny foreseen by the gods provides an opportunity to reconsider the relation between free will and divine foreknowledge. According to Kruse, Cocteau's Oedipus presents a more existentially charged and problematic intertwining of these elements than that found in Sophocles's ancient version.

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Article

Considerations on Fate in the *Iliad* and the Remarkable Interventions of the Divine

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Abstract: By borrowing the metaphor of the ‘tapestry of existence’ to discuss the matter of fate in Homer’s *Iliad*, we selected four threads that are interwoven in the warp of each hero’s destiny—that of necessity/fatality, the relations between Zeus and the Moira, the plots and tricks of the gods, and fate and human actions—with the aim of inviting the reader to appreciate the texture of the work with the passages that most caught our attention, without the intention of exhausting the subject. To do so, we draw upon the origin of the word Moira in anthropology, as well as some of Heidegger’s ideas and those of other commentators to enrich the discussion.

Keywords: *Iliad*; Homero; Destino

1. Introduction

To begin our reflections on fate, we borrow two concepts from Heidegger. The first refers to a passage from *Being and Time*, specifically paragraph 29. “This characteristic of Dasein’s Being—this ‘that it is’—is veiled in its ‘whence’ and ‘whither,’ yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the ‘thrownness’” (Heidegger 1962, p. 174). This statement leads us to a realm of uncertainties—not only regarding our origin but also concerning what happens after death. Heidegger starts from humanity’s ignorance of itself, as it is unaware of its origin and its destiny—here, interpreted in the metaphysical sense. It does not know where it comes from or where it is going. The man (húmus) belongs to the world—to the Earth, a mundane being who is thrown (geworfen) into the world.

The second idea we borrow is that man does not have time; he is time. And he recognizes himself primarily as time, given his understanding of his birth and death—the time that man is inscribed as an interval or the path to be followed between his becoming and his ceasing to be (Critelli 1985, p. 130, translation mine).

Such uncertainties resemble a vast ‘nebula’ because man cannot assert, if not through his belief, the true origin of the world and the creation of all things, as well as his own existence and what happens after death. In light of these uncertainties, it became necessary to create an interpretation that provides meaning, explaining the mysteries of the world and offering justifications for all the suffering.

In this sense, the first great interpretation of the world we encounter is the myth. In archaic societies, as it is explained to us by Eliade (1963), “‘myth’ means a ‘true story’ and, beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant” (Eliade 1963, p. 1).

Myth, whilst a sacred narrative, has the duty of providing meaning to existence in order to supply man a valid¹ and a truthful explanation, not only about the origin of the universe and everything within it but also about how each thing came into being. In

general, myth also tells the causes of suffering and the fate of all existing things—their finitude. Everything that exists, sooner or later, must perish.²

Thus, in archaic societies, religion is not only the first great interpretation of the world, but it also

“maintains the ‘opening’ toward a superhuman world, the world of axiological values. These values are ‘transcendent,’ in the sense that they are held to be revealed by Divine Beings or mythical Ancestors. Hence they constitute absolute values, paradigms for all human activities. [...] these models are conveyed by myths. Myths are the most general and effective means of awakening and maintaining consciousness of another world, a beyond [...] which gives birth to the idea that something really exists, that hence there are absolute values capable of guiding man and giving a meaning to human existence.” (Eliade 1963, p. 139)

In this regard, all cultures have developed their own sacred narratives throughout their historical journey. In an exceptional manner, the Greeks also created for themselves a world filled with gods and supernatural beings, placing man between two realms: Hades, the world of the dead, and Olympus, reserved only for the immortal gods. This ontological constitution—its mortality—is such that not even the gods, with their powerful interventions, can overcome it.

In the ontic domain, the Homeric man is driven by beliefs and values that culminate in a certain concept of fate. In the ontic domain, Homeric man is driven by beliefs and values that culminate in a certain conception of destiny. The relationship between these first considerations and the plots of destiny must be understood as

“the constitutive condition of being, of each person’s lot. *Moira*, being immanent to its own being, corresponds to the ontic limits of each entity. We can then understand why the gods themselves are subject to it, since it is immanent to the constitution of divinity itself. *Moira* exerts its coercion over beings due to the impossibility of any being transpassing its limits, and, when they attempt to do so, the relentless *Erinyes*, who forget nothing, will be ready to punish them.” (Gorresio 1998, p. 159, translation mine)

In light of Greek mythology, the Homeric narratives present, above all, a warrior’s morality that elevates the importance of *areté*.³ However, in Hades, the deceased are deprived of their strength and vigor, fundamental elements in the composition of the Homeric hero that mourns its death. In Hades, the dead have no bones or flesh; they have a ghostly appearance, lacking any materiality. The *Psyche* (what can be referred to as the soul) is similar to an ectoplasm.

Such a conception of the world reveals the values by which these men were educated: the value of this life and this world and the incredible desire to make this interval between birth and death as beautiful as possible, which finds its most exemplary execution in the *Iliad*. Perhaps that is precisely why Nietzsche took the Homeric man as the measure for his critique of the values of Western culture. “The Hellenic will has never felt paralyzed by this force. Men fight Fate and if they fall defeated, it is after having fought” (Schützer 1956, p. 35; Macedo 1930, p. 20).

The *Iliad*, an epic attributed to Homer, consists of more than 15,000 verses, divided into 24 books, and narrates the battle between Greeks and Trojans following the abduction of Helen by Paris, brother of Hector, prince of Troy. The war culminates in the invasion of Troy, which finally falls after ten years of constant attacks. This narrative was transmitted orally and certainly underwent many changes over time before reaching its written form. It is made up of numerous shifts: In time, we often find the lineage of a particular hero at the same time as a bloody battle in which he takes part is told. It also moves in different

spheres—on the earthly plane, with the articulation of the cunning and strength of the leaders to carry out a plan and on the divine plane, with the direct and indirect intervention of the gods, who seek to favor their chosen ones, always taking sides. They are knowledgeable of fate and try to delay the end of their favorites as much as possible, although none of them can escape Hades.

Thus, the narrative never becomes monotonous and is enhanced by vivacity and agility—as if we were watching a movie. It is in the *Iliad* that we “see a world at war: and war, we must assume, was incessant during the great wandering of the Greek peoples” (Jaeger 1946, p. 17).

Death hangs in the air; each moment may be the last, yet each man seeks to attain his immortality. The Homeric Greek, perhaps more than anyone, laments his finitude but does not abandon the actions that reveal his *areté*. He prefers a short, intense life over any other possibility, trying to embody “its beauty”. It is in the *Iliad* that we find numerous threads that weave the ‘tapestry of existence’. The first is found in what we call fate or destiny (Moîra), that which was prescribed before birth and what must inevitably happen.

The second thread is discovered in the relationship between Moîra and Zeus’ desires, which do not always coincide. There is still a third that weaves together this tapestry of existence with the successive divine interventions: rescuing their favorites from death, hiding them and even transporting them, breaking their enemies’ weapons or pushing them away, protecting them with a cloak, and so on.

Finally, a fourth thread prompts reflection regarding human actions. Is there such a thing as freedom, or are all actions influenced by divine forces? Is there truly room for action, as we see in Odysseus’ cunning plans, for example?

It is about this weaving that we wish to elaborate. First, we must make some considerations about fate, as it is conceived by the Homeric man and his life in Hades. Then, we address what is prescribed and the interference of the gods in the lives of the characters of the *Iliad*, including rescuing them, protecting them, and breaking the weapons of their enemies, using countless tricks to achieve their aims.

Finally, some passages demonstrating a degree of freedom among men are presented. However, as Jaeger reiterates, “But Homer does not, like modern authors, see every action from within [. . .] In his world, nothing great happens without the aid of a divine power” (Jaeger 1946, p. 51).

2. Some Clarifications on Fate in the Homeric Man: Moîra and Hades

The conception of destiny woven into the *Iliad* corroborates the two dimensions of Heideggerian categories: on the one hand, it reveals the ontological constitution of man—a finite being whose time is running out at every moment; on the other, it encompasses, within the innumerable possibilities of possible interpretation, a certain conception of destiny that underpins the ontic character and governs the value of life and death and the table of all other values of archaic Greek culture.

In light of these categories, destiny, for the Homeric man, is consummated in Hades—in the world of the dead. However, the tapestry of each story, individually speaking, is woven from Moîra—from what was already prescribed before his birth. In the poem, the author does not define the terms precisely. Homer sometimes uses the word Moîra or Aîsa.

“The word Moîra derives from the verb *meîresthai*, meaning to obtain or share, to obtain by luck, to divide, from which Moîra signifies part, share, or allotment—that which each person receives by fate, destiny. Associated with Moîra, as its synonym in the Homeric poems, is the Arcadocypriot, one of the dialects used by the poet, term Aîsa. It is noteworthy that both terms are feminine, which

evokes the idea of spinning, a task traditionally associated with women: fate is symbolically ‘spun’ for each individual.” (Brandão 1986, p. 140, translation mine)

Each man carries his share of pain, joy, possessions, and good fortune. There is a possibility of choice; however, the end is inexorable, as we illustrate below. The Homeric narrative, as reinforced by Rodrigues, presents the idea of a force that weaves the design of each individual’s life, irrespective of their will.

“There was the notion of the existence of a force or will understood as superior and that consisted of determining the map of each individual’s life in advance, as well as limiting their actions. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand the meaning and the use of concepts such as *Aîsa* and *Moîra*, in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.” (Rodrigues 2018, translation mine)

Secondly, fate is never personified, so *Moîra* and *Aîsa* are not anthropomorphized: they remain sovereignly above gods and men, without being elevated to the category of distinct deities. In theory, *Moîra* (fate) is fixed and immutable and cannot be altered—not even by the gods themselves (Brandão 1986, p. 141, translation mine).

The author explains that some commentators reinforce the idea that *Moîra* overrides Zeus’ will, while others say that there is an identification of *Moîra* with Zeus, as the executor of his decisions. There are also those who argue that Homer, in order to continue the work, uses poetic license. Duffy corroborates these ideas:

“The question whether or not fate or destiny is an overruling power to which the gods must bow has been earnestly discussed. Some critics believe that in the poems fate is absolute and stands above the gods. One critic maintains that Zeus is at one time subject to *Moîra*, and that is another time he takes her place as he spins out to men their fortune. Others say that the will of Zeus and fate are the same. Still others believe that fate and religion in general are used by Homer to suit his poetic needs.” (Duffy 1947, p. 1)

After the Homeric poems, *Moîra* was projected into three figures: Clotho, the spinner who holds the spindle and draws the thread of life; Lachesis, the one who draws lots and determines the name of the person who will die; and Atropos, the inflexible one, the “unturning”. Atropos is the one who cuts the thread of life. Once again, we find here the idea of spinning and cutting the threads, from which one can sometimes escape, but each person must suffer all that *Aîsa* has spun for them (Brandão 1986, p. 231, translation mine).

Finally, in line with Greek religion and culture, Homer only attributes a psyche to a man at the brink of death or at death itself, for it only exists to abandon him at that moment.

“With the death of the body, the psyche becomes an *eídolon*, an image, a semblance that reproduces, ‘like an astral body’, an insubstantial body, the traces of the deceased in their final moments [...] That is to say, in Hades, the psyche, the *eídolon*, is a shadow, a pale and inconsistent image, apathetic, devoid of understanding, without reward or punishment.” (Brandão 1986, pp. 144–46, translation mine)

Robinson (2000) corroborates this idea: for the Homeric man, it is existence and, therefore, this life that must be cherished and hold greater value than the afterlife in Hades. What truly matters are the actions that make the hero’s life as beautiful as possible. What is important is distinguishing oneself from ordinary actions, increasing one’s power in order to be recognized and remembered by future generations.

Notoriously, for the early Greeks (as portrayed, for instance, in the works of Homer) the body, at least at death, constitutes one’s ‘real’ self. One’s life principle (literally ‘life,’ psyche) may have been held to be different from the body, and even to survive

the death of that body, but this was small consolation; what survived did so in a miserable and undesirable state in Hades, whatever the virtue of one's life on earth. By the sixth century, with the advent of Orphism into certain sectors of Greek thinking, the psyche started to be seen as having a better claim than the body to the title of one's real self. Not only was it held to survive the body, it was deemed to be that whereby we are both physically alive and also alive as rational, hence responsible agents (Heraclitus, 22 B 107 [DK I. 175. I–3] and 22 B 118 [DK I. 177. 4–5]). And its ontological status was such that it was the potential subject of eternal reward or punishment for the quality of life lived, bodily existence being relegated to the status of some sort of temporal way station. (Robinson 2000, p. 37)

These considerations on the fate of the Trojans and Greeks in the *Iliad* lead us to a comparative state between gods and mortals. While the former possess eternal beauty and immortality and dwell on Olympus (at its peak), the latter find themselves under the empire of becoming, assailed by constant pain and suffering and deprived of light in Hades.

Just as men are taken over by passions, which implies a lack of guarantee regarding what we traditionally call justice, the gods, endowed with great powers, exceed men in everything—in beauty, intelligence, and strength. Their powers can provoke actions in nature. “However, the epithet ‘godlike’ (θεοειδής: *Iliad* XXIV, 217), applied to man, sometimes merely for decorative purposes, appears in other passages with a more precise meaning and is attributed to the hero to whom a god has granted his strength” (Hernandes 2011, pp. 46–47, translation mine).

Hernandes makes a list of attributes that deserve our attention, explaining that they all come from the gods:

“the beauty of Paris (‘οὐκ ἂν τοι χρᾶσι μὴ κίθαρις τὰ τε δῶρ’ Ἀφροδίτης’—‘Your lyre would not help you at all, nor Aphrodite’s gifts’ *Iliad* III, p. 45—Trans. RIEU, 1950), the strength of Ajax (‘Αἶαν ἐπεὶ τοι δῶκε θεὸς μέγεθός τε βίην τε / καὶ πινυτήν, περὶ δ’ ἔγχει Ἀχαιῶν φέρτατός ἐσσι’—‘Aias, [...], you are big, strong and able, and the best spearman on your side’ *Iliad* VII, p. 122—Trans. RIEU, 1950), or that of Achilles (‘εἰ μάλ’ ἀκαρτερός ἐσσι, θεὸς που σοὶ τό γ’ ἔδωκεν’—‘What if you are a great soldier?—Who made you so but God?’ *Iliad* I, p. 6—Trans. RIEU, 1950), as well as the qualities inherent in the superior man (the hero) or those which, occasionally, a god bestows upon his favorite, in battle.” (Hernandes 2011, p. 47, translation mine; emphasis added)

3. The Fate of the Heroes

When we revisit Heidegger’s ideas to understand the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’, we realize that, from an ontological point of view, the human being is a being for death—‘humus’, coming from the Earth and returning to it—and everything that exists will one day cease to be. Thus, we can see the life of each person or hero as a carpet full of colors, formed mainly by four plots—fatality or necessity, the relationships between Zeus and Moira, the plots and maneuvers of the gods, and human actions.

3.1. Fatality or Necessity

Achilles, at this point, serves as an example to illustrate Heidegger’s categories—ontic and ontological. The hero, the great protagonist of this epic, although of divine descent, will die, which reveals the ontological character of man. In other words, his finitude is linked to the first plot of this skein of the tapestry of existence: fatality. Achilles and all men, sooner or later, must die.

But within the framework of the possibilities of being—ontic character—Achilles is faced with two possibilities: either he leads an ordinary life, being forgotten after a few generations, or he becomes immortal, perishing in the Trojan War. By renouncing the other possibility—the two possibilities understood as ontic character—he receives his share as payment, and Moira, sovereign, provokes the actions that lead him to fulfill his destiny:

“Mother tells me
the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet,
that two fates bear me on to the day of the death.
If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,
my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.
If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,
my pride, my glory dies. . .
true, but the life that’s left me will be long,
the stroke of death will not come on me quickly.”⁴ (Homer 1990, p. 265)

Thetis, a Titanide, mother of Achilles, warns him about the two possibilities regarding his fate, which is already foreseen. If he stays in the war, his fate will find him early, but he will attain immortality; otherwise, he will live a long life but will be forgotten after a few generations.

Further along in the narrative of the *Iliad*, Zeus utters the terrible fate of Achilles, confirming the prophecy of the goddess and corroborating what had already been foreseen.

“And let Apollo drive Prince Hector back to battle,
breathe power back in his lungs, make him forget
the pains that rack his heart. Let him whip the Achaeans
in headlong panic rout and roll them back once more,
tumbling back on the oar-swept ships of Peleus’ son Achilles.
And he, he will launch his comrade Patroclus into action
and glorious Hector will cut him down with a spear
in front of Troy, once Patroclus has slaughtered
whole battalions of strong young fighting men
and among them all, my shining son Sarpedon.
But then-enraged for Patroclus—
brilliant Achilles⁵ will bring Prince Hector down.”⁶ (Homer 1990, p. 389)

We can see, first of all, that Achilles’ destiny had already been traced, as revealed by the Titaness, and that it comes to pass in the course of the work (ontological dimension—every mortal must perish). Within the ontic dimension, that is, within the belief system of the Homeric man, there is the conception of a destiny that cannot be escaped. Each person has their share of pain, joy, and luck. When we return to the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’, this skein is the one that forms the basis of all the carpets of all beings—present from birth until the last breath of life.

Moira prescribes what should happen to each person in a completely arbitrary way: it has nothing to do with any moral relationship—that is, it does not matter whether they are good or bad; unhappiness or prosperity is determined by Moira, even considering the interventions of the gods.

Now, if the first skein of this tapestry of existence concerns fatality—which must necessarily occur and in the case of man, death, in its ontological dimension. In the ontic

dimension, within the belief system of archaic Greek culture, Achilles will find glory by being killed in combat, something that had already been prophesied by the goddess and later reiterated by Zeus. However, we can see that the tapestry of existence within the narrative is not composed of a single skein. It will be necessary to consider the relationships between Zeus and Moira.

3.2. *The Relationship Between Zeus and Moira*

Zeus, in the case of Achilles, validates the designs of Moira—that Achilles will fall in Troy. By determining the sequence of events, the lord of Olympus determines not only the fate of Achilles but also that of Hector and Patroclus. Destinies are traced and intertwined: the great Hector will kill Patroclus, and the furious hero will finally enter the war, despite all the outrage suffered when Agamemnon demanded Briseis, his war prize, in front of all the Achaeans. And so it happened.

The imperious fate is also confirmed in the lives of other nobles who take part in the war; this is the case of Euchenor. Paris, filled with wrath due to the death of his friend, Harpalion, shoots a bronze arrow at Euchenor, wounding him below the jaw and ear, closing his eyes almost instantaneously.

“aimed at one Euchenor, son of the prophet Polyidus,
a decent, wealthy man who made his home in Corinth.
Well Euchenor knew that boarding the ships for Troy
meant certain death: his father told him so. . .
Time and again the strong old prophet said
he’d die in his own halls of a fatal plague
or go with the ships and die at Trojan hands.”⁷ (Homer 1990, pp. 362–63)

These examples largely illustrate a strong correlation between fate and the will of Zeus, who weighs everything in his scales, corroborating the interpretation of many renowned scholars.

However, the case of Sarpedon, Zeus’ beloved son with Laodameia, allows us to see that this is not always the case, opening up another possible interpretation. Sometimes, Sarpedon is saved in battle, yet when it is determined that he would be killed by Patroclus so that the war’s outcome could unfold, the god wonders if it would be better to rescue him and weeps, mourning deeply.

Many commentators debate this episode. Certainly, as the sovereign of Olympus, Zeus could have intervened to save his son’s life whenever he wished. However, Zeus could not intervene indefinitely to save his beloved son, for as a mortal, Sarpedon must, at some point, perish.

Still, we must consider all the tension within Olympus, since the gods are not impartial. Hera reprimands her husband in such a way that warns him of a potential and heightened quarrel among the gods. Let’s look at the dialogue between Zeus and Hera,

“My cruel fate. . .my Sarpedon, the man I love the most, my own son—
doomed to die at the hands of Menoetius’ son Patroclus.
My heart is torn in two as I try to weigh all this.
Shall I pluck him up, now, while he’s still alive
and set him down in the rich green land of Lycia,
far from the war at Troy and all its tears?
Or beat him down at Patroclus’ hands at last?”
But Queen Hera, her eyes wide, protested strongly:

‘Dread majesty, son of Cronus—what are you saying?
 A man, a mere mortal, his doom sealed long ago?
 You’d set him free from all the pains of death?
 Do as you please, Zeus. . .
 but none of the deathless gods will ever praise you.
 And I tell you this—take it to heart, I urge you—
 if you send Sarpedon home, living still, beware!
 Then surely some other god will want to sweep
 his own son clear of the heavy fighting too.
 Look down. Many who battle round King Priam’s
 mighty walls are sons of the deathless gods—
 you will inspire lethal anger in them all.
 No, dear as he is to you, and your heart grieves for him,
 leave Sarpedon there to die in the brutal onslaught,
 beaten down at the hands of Menoetius’ son Patroclus.
 But once his soul and the life force have left him,
 send Death to carry him home, send soothing Sleep,
 all the way till they reach the broad land of Lycia.
 There his brothers and countrymen will bury the prince
 with full royal rites, with mounded tomb and pillar.
 These are the solemn honors owed the dead.’”⁸ (Homer 1990, p. 427)

Hera then warns the sovereign, Zeus, about the instability that such an action could cause among the Olympian gods and assertively convinces the god to let him die as the true hero that he was.

Therefore, these heroes and many others who are present in the verses of the *Iliad* affirm the ontological character of man—his finitude. However, they also reveal the ontic character of the unshakable belief of the Homeric man and his survival in Hades, reiterating, at the end of the day, the value of this life and this world and a table of values that emphasizes the search for areté.

In this way, if the first strand of the ‘carpet of existence’ is constituted by fatality, we can infer that the second strand refers to the relationship between Zeus and Moira, which causes tensions, deviations, and interventions in the warp of this carpet for each hero, although without this strand overriding the first.

As a result, it is important to corroborate the idea that there is a true belief in the Olympian gods—on the one hand, in the systematic explanation of their origin and destination (where’ and ‘where to’) and, on the other, of these presences that watch over the preservation of their lives, which are not restricted to the interventions of Zeus.

3.3. The Plots and Tricks of the Gods

If, on the one hand, we encounter the infallibility of fate, which leads all men to Hades, on the other, we are amazed by the tricks of the gods, whether in favor of the Achaeans or the Trojans and their allies. There are countless examples that we could cite here. At times, they save their loved ones from death, hiding them, transporting them to another place, or breaking the weapons of those who could harm them.

In book 3, we find the narrative of the terrible clash between the Greeks and the Trojans. Aphrodite saves Paris from Menelaus' attack, transporting him safely back to his home:

"So now Menelaus drew his sword with silver studs
and hoisting the weapon high, brought it crashing down
on the helmet ridge but the blade smashed where it struck—
jagged shatters flying-it dropped from Atrides' hand
and the hero cried out, scanning the blank skies,
'Father Zeus-no god's more deadly than you!
Here I thought I'd punish Paris for all his outrage—
now my sword is shattered, right in my hands, look,
my spear flew from my grip for nothing-I never hit him!'
Lunging at Paris, he grabbed his horsehair crest,
swung him round, started to drag him into Argive lines
and now the braided chin-strap holding his helmet tight'
was gouging his soft throat-Paris was choking, strangling.
Now he'd have hauled him off and won undying glory.
but Aphrodite, Zeus's daughter quick to the mark,
snapped the rawhide strap, cut from a bludgeoned ox,
and the helmet came off empty in Menelaus' fist.
Whirling it round the fighter sent it flying
into his Argives scrambling fast to retrieve it—
back at his man he sprang, enraged with brazen spear,
mad for the kill but Aphrodite snatched Paris away,
easy work for a god, wrapped him in swirls of mist
and set him down in his bedroom filled with scent."⁹ (Homer 1990, pp. 140–41)

Paris, owing to Aphrodite, was saved. A little further in the narrative, we find Diomedes chasing Phegeus and Idaeus, the sons of a priest of Hephaestus, Dares. They were experts in various arts of war. In battle, Diomedes kills the first. Idaeus flees, managing to escape, thanks to Hephaestus, who protected and saved him, "shrouding the man in night" (Homer 1990, p. 165).¹⁰ Diomedes also confronts Aeneas, throwing an enormous stone that hits the Trojan hero's thigh, but is then saved by Aphrodite.

"Just as Diomedes
hefted a boulder in his hands, a tremendous feat-
no two men could hoist it. weak as men are now,
but all on his own he raised it high with ease,
flung it and struck Aeneas' thigh where the hipbone
turns inside the pelvis, the joint they call the cup-
it smashed the socket, snapped both tendons too
and the jagged rock tore back the skin in shreds.
The great fighter sank to his knees, bracing himself
with one strong forearm planted against the earth,
and the world went black as night before his eyes.

And now the prince. the captain of men Aeneas
would have died on the spot if Zeus's daughter
had not marked him quickly, his mother Aphrodite
who bore him to King Anchises tending cattle once.
Round her beloved son her glistening arms went streaming,
flinging her shining robe before him. only a fold
but it blocked the weapons hurtling toward his body.
She feared some Argive fast with chariot-team
might hurl bronze in his chest and rip his life out."¹¹ (Homer 1990, p. 174)

In book 12, we encounter a similar stratagem after the destruction of the wall that served as protection for the Achaeans. In the midst of the fierce battle, Ajax kills Sarpedon's companion, Epikles, crushing his skull. Sarpedon wounds Alcmaeon but ends up being struck by Ajax and Teucer, "and though Zeus saved him from destruction (not wishing that his son should meet his doom by the sterns of the ships), Aias now came charging down on him and struck his shield. Again, the weapon failed to penetrate [. . .]."¹² (Homer 1950, p. 219).

Soon after, in book 15, Further on, in Book XV, Teucer attacks Hector, but Zeus, who watches everything, steals his glory, causing the bowstring to break, because it was not Teucer's destiny to kill Hector, only Achilles could do so:

"But Teucer-
quick with his next shaft the archer aimed at Hector,
at Hector's brazen crest, and would have stopped
his assault on Argive ships, hit him squarely
and torn his life out just as his courage peaked.
But he could not dodge the lightning mind of Zeus-
standing guard over Hector
Zeus tore the glory right from Teucer's grasp,
he snapped the twisted cord on his handsome bow
just as the archer drew it taut against his man
and the weighted bronze shaft skittered off to the side,
the bow dropped from his hand and Teucer shuddered,
calling out to his brother, 'Oh what luck-look,
some power cuts us out of the fighting, foils our plans!
He's knocked the bow from my grip, snapped the string,
the fresh gut I tied to the weapon just at dawn
to launch the showers of arrows I'd let fly!'"¹³ (Homer 1990, pp. 402–3)

If there is deliverance, there are also impediments: Apollo pushes Patroclus off the walls of Troy three times.

"Three times he charged with a terrific cry, like the wild god of War, and every time he killed nine men. But when he leapt in like a demon for the fourth time [. . .] In the heart of the battle Phoebus encountered him, Phoebus most terrible. Patroclus had not seen him coming through the rout: the god had wrapped himself in a thick mist for this unfriendly meeting. But Phoebus Apollo stood

behind him now, and striking his broad shoulders and back with the flat of his hand...¹⁴ (Homer 1950, p. 305)

Failing to understand it was not his destiny to take the city, Apollo intervenes directly:

“Then at Patroclus’ fourth assault like something superhuman,
the god shrieked down his winging words of terror: ‘Back-
Patroclus, Prince, go back! It is not the will of fate
that the proud Trojans’ citadel fall before your spear,
not even before Achilles—far greater man than you!’”¹⁵ (Homer 1990, p. 435)

It is noticeable that, although it is men who fight, bleed, and die, the battle also unfolds within the divine plane. At times, the gods stand alongside the warriors; send messages; and, like Poseidon and Apollo, directly engage in the conflict. These same gods, deceptive in nature, delay the inevitable end for their favorites. In other words, the work reveals a relation of complementarity between the divine and the human, which cannot be dissociated.

These deliverances and impediments are isolated actions, but in the work, beyond that, interferences of another kind can be found: schemes that also involve the tricks and snares of seduction, relying on lies and deception.

Hera, from the peak of Olympus, contemplating the massacre wrought by the Trojans, seeing the Greeks defeated, craftily devises a plan to seduce Zeus in order to buy time so that Poseidon can personally participate in the battle.

“She began to wonder how she could bemuse the wits of aegis-bearing Zeus; and she decided that the best way to go about the business was this. She would deck herself out to full advantage and visit him on the mountain. If he succumbed to her beauty, as well might be, and wished to fold her in his arms, she would benumb his busy brain and close his eyes in a soothing and forgetful sleep. [...] She began by removing every stain from her comely body with ambrosia, and anointing herself with the delicious and imperishable olive-oil she uses.”¹⁶ (Homer 1950, pp. 250–51)

Homer tells us that she dressed richly; adorned herself with golden brooches; and braided her hair, earrings, and belt, ensuring her beauty with a lovely white veil and sandals.

All these adornments, in the eyes of the goddess, would not be enough, so in a cunning way, she tricked Aphrodite, a supporter of the Trojans, with the excuse that she was going to visit Oceanus and Tethys, who were at odds, in order to calm their spirits:

“‘Give me Love and Desire,’ she said, ‘the powers by which you yourself subdue mankind and gods alike. I am going to the ends of the fruitful earth to visit Ocean, the forbear of the gods, and Mother Tethys, who treated me kindly and brought me up in their home after taking me from Rhea, when all-seeing Zeus made Cronos a prisoner under the earth and barren sea. I am going to see them and bring their interminable quarrels to an end. They have been estranged for a long time now and in the bitterness of their hearts have ceased to sleep with one another.’”¹⁷ (Homer 1950, pp. 251–52)

The narrative continues with Aphrodite’s naivety, handing over the embroidered sash that carried all the charms: love, passion, and words of persuasion—all necessary elements for a conquest.

Before heading to Mount Ida, where Zeus was, Hera tries to convince Sleep to follow her orders. Initially, he refuses, but after Hera’s generous offer, he can no longer resist: “Come, do as I wish, and I will give you one of the young Graces in marriage. She shall be

called the wife of Sleep"¹⁸ (Homer 1950, p. 253). Sleep then proposes to Pasithee, and the pact is sealed with an oath.

When Zeus set his eyes on Hera, he was overcome with passion, declaring he had never experienced such intense love. Hera achieved her goals: the son of Cronos forgot what was happening and spread a golden cloud, like a cloak, to cover them so no one would see.

Sweet Sleep closed Zeus' eyes, and he slept peacefully, allowing Poseidon to incite the bravery of the Achaeans.

3.4. Fate and Human Actions

Finally, we are left to ask whether, in the *Iliad*, there is a fourth skein that makes up 'this tapestry of existence'—whether there is, in fact, in this weaving, a space for human agency. That is, although we can safely affirm divine intervention through whispers, words, dreams, and the effective presence in the War, we ask ourselves whether there would be a space for the heroes' autonomy in their plans and actions?

We believe that in the weave of this tapestry of existence, there is a space reserved for human actions. It can be argued that within the tapestry of existence, there is a space reserved for human actions. Odysseus' cunning should not be overlooked.

In book 10, Agamemnon and Menelaus, unable to sleep due to their concerns, convene a secret meeting in the dead of the night with Ajax; Nestor and his son, Meriones; Odysseus; and Diomedes. They decide to spy on the enemy camp. Diomedes selects Odysseus, one of Athena's favorites, as his companion. After preparing themselves, they set out. Before departing, however, the protagonist of the *Odyssey* prays to the goddess, who sends a heron as a sign of approval for his request. On this same night, when Hector had ordered the Trojans not to sleep, Dolon appeared, volunteering to spy on the Argives. Diomedes notices a figure off the road and, uncertain of who it is, decides to follow him, accompanied by Odysseus. Once the heroes realize Dolon is an enemy, they hastily pursue him, eventually catching him. Dolon falters, trembling with fear. Clever as ever, Odysseus persuades him to tell the truth, convincing him to reveal in detail the position of the Trojan soldiers.

After that, Diomedes "fell on him with his sword, and struck him full on the neck. He cut through both the sinews, and Dolon's head met the dust before he ceased to speak"¹⁹ (Homer 1950, p. 178). As if that were not enough, Odysseus and Diomedes ferociously kill many of the Trojan allies and release their horses. Athena, who accompanies them, advises Diomedes to return safely to the hollow ships.

This particular episode reveals not only the divine protection over the figures of Diomedes and Odysseus but also the human actions motivated by great courage.

"If the sense of inexorability is an essential element of the Homeric poems and especially of the *Iliad*, yet it is not allowed to exceed its natural limits. Events may be predetermined, but not human reactions to them—or at least those reactions are often unpredictable. [...] It is this combination of divine determination and vivid human response, of arbitrariness and involvement, that allows these poems to be at the same time heroic and humane." (Kirk 1962, p. 380)

In light of Heideggerian categories, we can understand Rodrigues' statements, which we agree with. Firstly, fatality (the ontological dimension of man)—that all men will die one day—does not exceed natural limits. No hero who was destined to die in battle was saved or transported to another place that was absolutely safe, escaping death unharmed.

Secondly, the commentator reinforces the idea of an articulation between the sphere of the divine and human reactions that are unpredictable, which make it possible to think of a share of agency. Rodrigues reiterates the inseparable composition in the work between what was determined by *Moira* and human actions. It is worth noting, in the passage mentioned

above, the courage of the heroes in spying on the enemy camp, their boldness in invading it, and Dolon's fear and cowardice—something human (all too human) that implies the terrible outcome of this episode. Although Athena was at the front, safeguarding the Greek heroes, there was no guarantee at that specific moment that they would be victorious.

On the one hand, we can infer that there is a fourth skein in this tapestry of existence—there is a portion of human agency that gives the Homeric narrative a special touch. However, on the other hand, it is worth revisiting Jaeger's words when he states that in the Homeric universe, nothing is done without the presence of the gods. Schützer states that these actions are not devoid of divine interventions: "there is no possible action—or at least no possible success—without divine help and against Destiny" (Schützer 1956, p. 26).

In our understanding, given this opposition, we opted for the interpretation offered by Rodrigues, which emphasizes the idea of articulation between human actions that may or may not be inspired by the Olympian gods. However, human reactions are not predictable and, therefore, can determine different outcomes in the episodes of battles. Such articulation does not exclude divine presence and interference, corroborating research carried out by renowned experts.

4. Conclusions

In this research, we seek to analyze the conception of destiny in the Homeric narrative in light of Heideggerian categories, although without exhausting the issue. From the work *Being and Time*, we extract two ideas. The first concerns the ontological dimension of a man who ignores his origin and destiny, that is, he does not know where he comes from and where he will go after death, revealing not only the question of human temporality but also his own ontological constitution. The ontic dimension comprises all the possibilities of being that his way of being allows him. In other words, each culture will create for itself an interpretation of the world that gives meaning to existence, explaining in its own way the 'whence' and 'where to', justified by its belief. The fact that Heidegger presents the idea that man is 'humus' can also give us a clue about the value of our existence and what we can do with the time that remains to us.

The great contribution of anthropology to these initial lines of our conclusion reinforces the relationship between the sensible and the supernatural world, which we also find in the *Iliad*. Fate, for the Homeric man, culminates in his death—the ontological condition of any mortal. However, it is full of meaning: despite the horrors of existence, the pains, the suffering, and violent deaths, the Homeric hero seeks to attain glory by being remembered for his incredible deeds by future generations, thereby becoming immortal. These values, which offer meaning to existence, awaken in us, modern men, great admiration and serve as an example for facing the adversities of life.

A second point to be emphasized in our final considerations is that we will not find in Homer the same systematization that we find in works from later periods, where there is a logical chain of ideas. There are no definitive answers to the problem of fate; we have presented an interpretation in the light of renowned commentators who have also developed divergent interpretations. According to Jaeger, the oral or written transmission of the Homeric poems extolled values consistent with the prevailing warrior morality and, in the light of mythology, uniquely revealed the value of existence and making it something worth remembering, instilling these values from the childhood of the Greek man. Therefore, these values answer the question of the ontic dimension of the Heideggerian category. Furthermore, the Homeric man, using the Nietzschean interpretation, promotes an 'aesthetic of existence' insofar as he praises the actions of the heroes.

In our interpretation, the choice made by the heroes in opting to take part in the war leads them to fulfill one of two possibilities that will inevitably be fulfilled because man

is time. And this is the fate of all mortals, which implies consideration of the ontological dimension of man. In this interval of time between birth and death, man is under the yoke and play of divine interference.

We find four skeins that make up the warp in the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’. As an ontological dimension, we consider fatality or necessity, which shapes the final fate of men and heroes in Hades.

A second thread, which reveals the ontic character—the belief system of the Homeric man—points to the relationship between Moira and the will of Zeus. In our understanding, Zeus’ will does not always correspond to the designs of Moira, as illustrated in the case of his son, Sarpédon. However, this in no way diminishes his power. We agree with Rodrigues when he says,

“it must not be forgotten that the Homeric gods are not omnipotent—which, by the way, seems to be inherent to pantheons or polytheistic systems. It must also be considered that an eventual acceptance of the idea of Zeus’ subordination to fate does not necessarily imply the recognition of a lesser power of the god, for, as Schützer further notes, in this fate ‘one must understand Zeus’ own will, which, once revealed, will always remain the same” (Rodrigues 2018, p. 34, translation mine) (emphasis added)

In other words, although Zeus tries to postpone death as long as possible for his loved ones, in the end, fatality, the determinations of Moira, will always prevail.

We also recognize a third thread in the composition of the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’, which is the responsibility of divine interventions. Between birth and death, in the *Iliad*, there is great interference from the Olympian gods, delivering their favorites from death, helping them in every way possible until death can no longer be avoided, and decisive impediments. These interventions also make use of lies, deceit, seduction, and alliances that ultimately reveal man to himself, driven by his sometimes petty and cruel passions.

Finally, covering the ontic dimension, we infer the presence of a fourth skein in the composition of this metaphor, although we find divergent opinions among many renowned commentators. We cannot help but be intrigued by the fourth and final skein of this tapestry of existence when it comes to the question of fate. After all, is there or is there not a small portion of human agency? For most commentators, what prevails in the Homeric narrative is the consent and assistance of some god in each great action performed, corroborating the idea of absolute fatalism. However, as we saw at the beginning of this article, the work has gone through numerous versions over time and has certainly undergone modifications. These prevent us from asserting with absolute certainty that there is no possibility of agency, although it is a recurring opinion found in many commentaries.

One of the examples concerns the capture of Dolon by Diomedes and Odysseus—strangely, on the same night, Dolon set out to spy on the enemy camp, and the Argives did the same. In the narrative, there is no mention that Dolon was incited by a god to take such action, nor did he receive any prohibition against doing so. On the other hand, we know that Athena assented and confirmed the attack with the appearance of a heron. This passage itself does not determine the end of the Trojan War; it had already been foretold by Moirai that the Argives would win. Now, this effectively leads us to an impasse: if the Trojans were to fall defeated, would the episode of Dolon already be part of the determining destiny and would everything happen as previously predicted or can we suggest a small part of human agency, as Rodrigues indicates?

For him, what marks this issue in the narrative is precisely the possibility of articulation between divine interferences and human reactions that are not predictable and can determine different outcomes in the episodes of the battles. When we recall the passage

of Dolon being captured by Odysseus and Diomedes, his cowardice significantly altered the fate of many Trojans that night. If he had been brave, he would not have revealed the location, and many deaths would have been avoided (they would have happened in another way). He should have intuited that he would not be spared in any way. In this way, in our understanding, we can affirm that there is a share of human agency concerning the actions and reactions of the heroes, who, with courage, cunning, and audacity, risked their own lives in the name of their *areté* to achieve immortality.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

DK Diels and Kranz (1951)

Notes

- ¹ In Nietzsche, the notion of perspectivism corroborates this idea. Every explanation provided by religion, philosophy, and science is valid yet necessarily false, as each is merely an interpretation. The German intellectual emphasizes that his interpretation is not more true than any other but that it stands above them because it acknowledges itself as an interpretation, whereas the others claim to be true.
- ² About that, we find an enlightening passage in Nietzsche: “All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation: that is the law of life, the law of *necessary* ‘self-overcoming’ in the essence of life,—the lawgiver himself is always ultimately exposed to the cry: ‘*patere legem, quam ipse tulisti*’ (submit to the law you have yourself made)” (Nietzsche 2006, p. 119). If, on one hand, the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* asserts that everything that exists must perish, as an inexorable law of life, on the other hand, for life to continue, it is necessary for man to constantly overcome himself.
- ³ *Areté*. This concept warrants clarification, as the values presented in the Homeric narratives are foundational to the Greek *Paideia*. Above all, it is the “combination of proud and courtly morality with warlike valour”. (Jaeger 1946, p. 5). It is the exploits of the nobles that are the focus of the narrative in the *Iliad*—these men are bearers of *areté*. This concept is closely related to vigor, strength, and their abilities, “his heroic valour. But such valour is not considered as a moral quality distinct from strength, in the modern sense; it is always closely bound up with physical power” (Jaeger 1946, p. 6). The ‘good’ of the noble is not related to a “moral virtue” (Jaeger 1946, p. 6) but, rather, tied to certain rules of conduct that embody a sense of duty towards ideals. *Areté* is, above all, honor—its value is ensured by deeds that are recognized by one’s peers. The main heroes of the *Iliad* are the very personification of this concept: they do not shy away from action, and they are strong and determined, even knowing that any moment could be their last. Their deeds are manifestations of great self-esteem and pride, which are the source of *areté*; what drives them is the overcoming of themselves in every action, aiming for self-glorification and that of their ancestors, embodying ‘their beauty.’ Immortality is tied to the idea of an existence that can be remembered by future generations. Jaeger emphasizes: what is at stake is not the physical self in the ultimate sense, “but the ideal which inspires us, the ideal which every nobleman strives to realise in his own life. If we grasp that it is the highest kind of self-love which makes man reach out towards the highest *areté*: through which he ‘takes possession of the beautiful’” (Jaeger 1946, p. 12).
- ⁴ Homer. *Iliad*, book 9, pp. 498–505.
- ⁵ In this same passage, we understand why Zeus does not determine the end of the war: with a nod, the powerful god confirms Thetis’ claim before Achilles is exalted. Let us examine this in detail—“But now as the twelfth dawn after this shone clear the gods who live forever marched home to Olympus, all in a long cortege, and Zeus led them on. And Thetis did not forget her son’s appeals. She broke from a cresting wave at first light and soaring up to the broad sky and Mount Olympus, found the son of Cronus gazing down on the world, peaks apart from the other gods and seated high on the topmost crown of rugged ridged Olympus. And crouching down at his feet, quickly grasping his knees with her left hand, her right hand holding him underneath the chin, she prayed to the lord god Zeus, the son of Cronus: ‘Zeus. Father Zeus! If I ever served you well among the deathless

gods with a word or action, bring this prayer to pass: honor my son Achilles!—doomed to the shortest life of any man on earth. And now the lord of men Agamemnon has disgraced him, seizes and keeps his prize, tears her away himself. But you exalt him, Olympian Zeus: your urgings rule the world! Come, grant the Trojans victory after victory till the Achaean armies pay my dear son back, building higher the honor he deserves!’ She paused but Zeus who commands the storm clouds answered nothing. The Father sat there, silent. It seemed an eternity. . . . But Thetis, clasping his knees, held on, clinging, pressing her question once again: ‘Grant my prayer, once and for all, Father, bow your head in assent! Or deny me outright. What have you to fear? So I may know, too well, just how cruelly I am the most dishonored goddess of them all.’ Filled with anger Zeus who marshals the storm clouds answered her at last: ‘Disaster. You will drive me into war with Hera. She will provoke me, she with her shrill abuse. Even now in the face of all the immortal gods she harries me perpetually, Hera charges me that I always go to battle for the Trojans. Away with you now. Hera might catch us here. I will see to this. I will bring it all to pass. Look, I will bow my head if that will satisfy you. That, I remind you, that among the immortal gods is the strongest, truest sign that I can give. No word or work of mine—nothing can be revoked, there is no treachery, nothing left unfinished once I bow my head to say it shall be done’” (Homer 1990, p. 94–95) (Book I, pp. 587–631).

⁶ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 15, pp. 75–86.

⁷ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 13, pp. 764–70.

⁸ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 14, pp. 514–43.

⁹ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 3, pp. 419–41.

¹⁰ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 12, p. 525.

¹¹ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 15, pp. 336–51.

¹² Homer. *Iliad*. Book 12.

¹³ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 15, pp. 535–50.

¹⁴ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 16.

¹⁵ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 16, pp. 824–28.

¹⁶ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 14.

¹⁷ See Note 16.

¹⁸ See Note 16.

¹⁹ Homer. *Iliad*. Book 10.

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Article

Disorder, Punishment, and Grace: The Harmonization of Divine Will and Fate in the *Prometheus* Trilogy

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Abstract: In the *Prometheus* trilogy, fate dictates critical actions taken by Prometheus, such as forming alliances, stealing fire, facing punishment, and eventual liberation. This trajectory gradually aligns with the divine will of Zeus, reflecting the theological framework of early Greek religion. Within the play, Prometheus's rebellion against the established order of distribution determines his "unlawful act", which brings about retributive justice—a theological necessity for restoring the balance between human advancement and divine sovereignty. In essence, Prometheus's punishment results from the interplay between fate and Zeus's rule, yet this suffering is essential for the harmonization of the cosmic order. Consequently, throughout this process, Zeus's divine justice undergoes continuous evolution, ultimately establishing the foundation for the legitimacy of civic ethics and providing a theological justification for the justice of human suffering. Ultimately, Aeschylus traces civic ethical norms to Zeus's justice, demonstrating how democracy gains legitimacy through theological discourse, which highlights the intricate connections among Greek religion, democracy, and tragedy.

Keywords: Aeschylus; *Prometheus* trilogy; fate; punishment; divine will

1. Introduction

"Fate" (Μοῖρα) is portrayed as a powerful force that governs both individuals and the cosmic order, representing the allocation of the cosmos's structure. This "'ordained Apportionment' is the primaevial allocation of powers and spheres to gods, men, and all physical things" (Hammond 1965, p. 50). From this perspective, fate determines the positions and roles of all entities in the cosmic order, assigning rights and responsibilities as deemed appropriate. When this distribution is disturbed by individual actions or wills, it leads to one of the central conflicts of Greek tragedy: "The heroes cannot escape their fate either, so this superhuman power prevents them from directing their lives with freedom" (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2024, p. 2). This suggests that whether gods, heroes, or mortals, no being can escape the inevitable course of events dictated by fate, and all are bound by this natural power. Consequently, fate reveals itself as a ruthless and indifferent cosmic force, reflecting humanity's and divinity's vulnerability. Meanwhile, it "may be understood as a punishment for violation of moral, religious or simply natural harmony" (Zakrzewska 2019, p. 64).

Considering these viewpoints, the workings of fate appear to be connected to Zeus's justice in Aeschylus's tragedies. This justice, frequently referred to as divine justice, is initially marked by its severity and ruthlessness, demanding retribution that adheres to the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Humans frequently commit new sins in these situations while attempting to avenge their perceived injustices. Moreover,

“the punishment will be transmitted to the descendants of the sinners if they do not receive deserved retribution in their lifetime” (Nie 2023, p. 2). Zeus himself serves as the executor of justice, and one may observe that his concepts of justice and fate exhibit certain similarities in their function of punishment. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Zeus, as a deity, is inevitably constrained by fate. The interplay between Zeus’s justice and fate forms a remarkable symbiosis: Zeus’s justice restores cosmic order through punishment, an order intricately established by fate. Justice and fate work together to foster harmony within the universe’s greater framework, while their fusion simultaneously signifies the evolution of Zeus’s concept of justice. Through a collection of tragic ancient narratives, Aeschylus depicts the gradual emergence of a flourishing family and an overall vision of meticulously crafted harmony (Owen 1952, p. 1). Consequently, the essence of divine justice transitions from severity and fear to a state of blessing, grace, and reason, ultimately expressing itself as law in the daily life of the Athenian *polis*.

This paper focuses on the *Prometheus* trilogy¹ as the textual basis for exploring Zeus’s justice. Throughout the trilogy, one can observe the evolution of Zeus’s will towards benevolence, alongside the transformation of divine justice. This shift often serves as evidence of attributing the plays to Aeschylus, a point supported by various scholars. Lloyd-Jones (1971, p. 75) argues that the linguistic, stylistic, and dramatic differences seen in *Prometheus Bound*, in contrast to Aeschylus’s earlier works, do not undermine the play’s authenticity. He argues that most doubts about the trilogy arise from theological issues rather than textual inconsistencies. Prometheus’s accusations, while seemingly defiant, subtly hint at eventual reconciliation with Zeus, portraying all suffering and violence as part of a divine plan. This interpretation aligns Zeus with the archetypal role of the defender of justice, a hallmark of Aeschylean tragedy. Hall (2010, p. 230) identifies a chronological inconsistency with the previous conclusion, suggesting that *Prometheus Bound* could be a fourth-century BCE adaptation by another playwright. Nonetheless, she recognizes that the play’s cosmological framework, elevated imagery, and serious language closely resemble those in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, thus indirectly reinforcing the theological unity of the trilogy. Sommerstein (2010, pp. 228–32) supports this view and argues that the play’s structural, thematic, and philosophical dimensions remain consistent with Aeschylus’s corpus. From the above analysis, it is evident that while the authorship of the *Prometheus* trilogy remains a matter of scholarly debate,² its theological characteristics are fundamentally aligned with the themes of Aeschylean drama. Based on this, this paper takes the theological themes present in the trilogy as its central focus of study.

In what ways does Zeus’s concept of justice develop throughout the play? This question has attracted significant scholarly attention. Podlecki (1966, pp. 103–5) views Zeus’s actions as characteristic of a tyrant. Similarly, Yu (1971, p. 31) echoes this viewpoint, depicting Zeus as a tyrannical figure and highlighting the harshness and brutality of his punishments. Meeter (1972, p. 33) also depicts Zeus as a harsh figure, linking his righteous fury to human transgressions. In contrast, dissenting voices like Dissen (Lloyd-Jones 1956, p. 56) argue that Zeus’s character evolves throughout the trilogy, transforming from a youthful tyrant to a compassionate ruler by its end. Smyth (1924, pp. 120–21) provides a nuanced examination of Zeus, suggesting that while his brutality remains, it is somewhat mitigated by his mercy and fairness, acknowledging the inherent justice in human dignity.

These scholars analyze the punishment in the *Prometheus* trilogy from the perspective of Zeus’s harsh justice and evolution. Yet, they overlook a crucial factor: the reasons and purposes behind Prometheus’s suffering and Zeus’s punishments, which are intricately intertwined with the design of fate. In light of this, the present paper aims to use the *Prometheus* trilogy as a text to study the relationship between Zeus’s justice and fate, thereby exploring the religious views of the ancient Greeks around the 5th century BCE.

This study explores Prometheus's theft of fire, the gifts he provided to humanity, and the punishment that followed. It aims to demonstrate that Prometheus's suffering and Zeus's retribution are not merely narrative events, but illustrate the complex relationship between fate and divine will. In this dynamic narrative, fate guides the actions of both Zeus and Prometheus, leading them into a preordained design. Throughout this process, Zeus's justice gradually transforms into a cosmic order that aligns with fate, ultimately forming the sacred basis of civic ethics. This article explores ancient Greek insights on justice, fate, and democracy. Additionally, it reveals how Aeschylus employed mythological frameworks to address pressing issues of his time and provide perspectives relevant to the creation of modern theater practices.

2. The Imbalance of Distribution: Prometheus's Challenge to the Established Order

From the trilogy's narrative viewpoint, the first play, *Prometheus Bound*,³ serves as the starting point of the entire story. In this play, Prometheus challenges the established order by giving fire and essential skills to humanity, which are crucial for civilization's advancement. As a result, Zeus commands the gods Power and Force to capture him and bind him on Mount Caucasus. The play clarifies why Prometheus stole fire. This act stems chiefly from the conflict between the Titans, led by Cronus, and the Olympian gods, directed by Zeus, his son. During this battle, Prometheus chose to side with Zeus, guided by the prophecy from his mother, Themis, and aided the Olympians against their relatives. Consequently, Cronus and the Titans were confined deep within the earth. Yet, after Zeus became the supreme god, "he wanted to obliterate the race altogether and create another new" (234–35). This prospect enraged Prometheus, leading him to challenge the existing distribution system. Prometheus decided to steal fire and bestow crafts upon humanity in this context. This act raises humanity to a level comparable to the gods, allowing them to employ wisdom to enhance their circumstances. In other words, "The fire intelligently used, namely, technology, is precisely what can potentially make the humans god-like, or even gods themselves" (Chiodo 2020, p. 212). This particular aspect of human fire is further affirmed in the writings of the Romantics, where it "symbolizes the raising of the human state to a quasi-divine destiny" (Bachelard 1964, p. viii).

Additionally, Prometheus equips humanity with essential life skills, including the complex rules that dictate the movements of the sun, moon, and stars; the importance of numbers as a form of craft; the art of writing through the combination of letters; the domestication of wild animals; and the ability to navigate the seas, among others (450–71). Meanwhile, in his discourse on higher crafts—prophecy and sacrifice—Prometheus details how he taught humans to interpret the characteristics of internal organs to win divine favor (493–95) and "wrapped the thigh-bones and the long chine in fat and burnt them, guiding mortals towards a skill of making difficult inferences, and opening their eyes to the signs (σημᾶτα) the flames gave, which till then had been dark to them" (496–500).⁴ The passage shows that Prometheus's contributions to humanity pertain to the domain of practical knowledge vital for daily life. As Chiodo (2020, p. 212) notes, "Through the fire, jointly with the other Prometheus's gift to humans, namely, the intelligence, they can survive animals and atmospheric agents, live under the sun, and even rule the earth". This emphasizes the significant role of fire and the technology it represents. ε

However, he overlooked that, as a deity, he was also bound to respect his own limitations. In this context, in his defiance of the established order, he was driven by excessive "spirit" (θυμός). By exceeding his limits and violating the principle of *nothing in excess* (Μηδὲν ἄγαν),⁵ he failed to act within the bounds of propriety. Generally, "spirit" is a spiritual force that maintains order, but it can result in disorder when taken to excess.

Therefore, the qualified Guardians in the *polis* “should be affectionate to their friends but fierce towards strangers—it is spirit that causes affectionateness, for spirit is the capacity of the soul whereby we love” (Aristotle, Rackham 1944). Prometheus, as a subject under the dominion of Zeus, may, to a certain extent, be regarded as assuming a role akin to that of the Guardians in Aristotle’s *Politics*. Yet, it is clear that Prometheus falls into a state of *hybris*⁶ during his rebellion, losing balance between his desires and the community he belongs to, which ultimately draws the attention of the divine retribution. Meanwhile, in his narrative about giving crafts to humanity, Prometheus reveals a strong contempt for human ignorance, weakness, and powerlessness. These conflicting attitudes serve to further underscore the *hybris* inherent in his character. According to North (1966, p. 43), Prometheus’s arrogant pride and contempt for restraint lead him to refuse to acknowledge the reality of his situation. As the chorus, Oceanus, and Hermes suggest, he must learn to control his excesses and achieve sound judgment and moderation. The play illustrates Prometheus’s weaknesses through the tragic struggles he encounters. These weaknesses also reflect those of contemporary humanity, who “envisages him as the Promethean earthly creature who has rebelled against Heaven and tried to misappropriate the role of the Divinity for himself (Nasr 1989, p. 144). In this context, the tragic hero’s inability to escape his inherent human flaws ultimately foreshadows his doom (Mokani 2021, p. 85).

The analysis reveals that Prometheus’s character plays a crucial role in his act of stealing fire. More importantly, his alliance with Zeus is intertwined with the framework of fate, supported by his mother Themis’s prophecy. Since Prometheus’s loyalty to Zeus aligns with fate’s inevitability, both his theft of fire and the subsequent conflict with Zeus must be seen within this larger context. Consequently, Prometheus’s gifts to humanity are not mere acts of rebellion; they signify an essential moment in the overarching design of fate. The rebellion initiated by Prometheus is closely tied to an inevitable punishment woven into the divine will of Zeus.

3. The Inevitability of Suffering: Crafts as a Transgression Against the Divine Sovereignty

As discussed in the preceding section, Prometheus’s acquisition of fire constitutes a component of fate’s design, and the subsequent punishment is also an essential aspect of fate’s workings, of which Prometheus is already cognizant. Consequently, when he faces retribution for the theft of fire, he asserts his capability to anticipate all future occurrences and understands that no calamity could take him by surprise (100–3). This is because all of this is predetermined by fate, as Prometheus says: “I must bear my destined fate as easily as may be, knowing that the power of Necessity is unchallengeable” (104–5). Clearly, as a tragic hero, Prometheus “has no control over his fate, and under such circumstances, he struggles in vain, dealing with his fate” (Mokani 2021, p. 82). In fact, the fate of Prometheus is similar to that of philosophers, and both must suffer for the sake of their own exploration (Pomponazzi 1567, p. 709). For Prometheus, this suffering arises from the design of fate. While he is conscious of the events bound to occur, this awareness does not entirely enable him to understand the necessity of these occurrences in the evolution of the cosmic order. This tension embodies the core of Prometheus’s tragedy: his limited foresight leads him to make careful decisions, yet his partial comprehension of the cosmos’ laws heightens his suffering and internal struggle. Prometheus’s foresight of fate did not grant him liberation; instead, it intensified his inherent suffering. As an individual, Prometheus remains trapped in a network of predetermined events that cannot be altered, reflecting the fate-related dilemma faced by characters in Greek tragedy.

In addition to the role of fate, another reason for Prometheus’s inevitable punishment is tied to Zeus’s justice. As previously discussed, within the framework of Zeus, every

entity in the cosmos is assigned a specific role and domain. This allocation encompasses the authority of the gods, the limitations of humanity, and the boundaries between the two. Fire and crafts, as attributes unique to the gods, represent the power of wisdom and creation. At the same time, in Zeus's apportionment, humans are seen as fragile and skill-less beings subject to the forces of nature. Therefore, Prometheus's granting of crafts to humanity represents a transgression against this preordained order, inevitably inviting punishment. As Nietzsche observed:

"The myth of Prometheus presupposes the unbounded value which naïve humanity placed on fire as the true palladium of every rising culture; but it struck those contemplative original men as a crime, a theft perpetrated on divine nature, to believe that man commanded fire freely, rather than receiving it as a gift from heaven, as a bolt of lightning which could start a blaze, or as the warming fire of the sun". (Nietzsche 1999, p. 49)

Clearly, from the perspective of the ancient Greeks, Prometheus's theft of fire implicitly signified a violation of divine authority. Consequently, the accusation made by the Powers against Prometheus emphasizes this idea:

"For it was your glory, the gleam of fire that makes all skills attainable (παντέχνου), that he stole and gave to mortals. For such an offence he must assuredly pay his penalty to the gods, to teach him that he must accept the autocracy of Zeus and abandon his human-loving (φιλανθρώπου) ways". (7–11)

Power's statement carries a dual implication. First, it presents Prometheus as the Titan who granted humanity the source of all skills and who represents a philanthropic spirit. Second, it depicts Prometheus as a traitor to the gods since all the power mortals have acquired involves the sacred crafts of Zeus and his Olympian kin. Fire, the source of all crafts, is part of Hephaestus's divine glory. Sharing it with humanity diminishes the divine nature. In its bestowal and application, humans lack reverence and gratitude for this divine grace and generosity.

Power further mocks Prometheus by contemptuously referring to him as a "Sophistes" (σοφιστής) (63). In early Greek contexts, the term referred broadly to poets, philosophers, experts in specific crafts, and individuals who prided themselves on cleverness or cunning. More generally, however, "σοφιστής" refers to the Sophists, the early professional educators in Athens who provided advanced knowledge (Conacher 1998, pp. 7–8). By employing the term "σοφιστής" in a mocking manner, Power belittles Prometheus's actions and subsequently asserts Zeus's far greater wisdom, reinforcing the dominance of divine law over human ingenuity. Power's accusations underscore Aeschylus's critical perspective on the emerging Sophists within the *polis*, as their rhetoric significantly threatens traditional ethical values upheld by Aeschylus cherishes.

Additionally, Prometheus's speech emphasizes the skills he bestowed upon humanity, such as shelter, astrology, mathematics, writing, animal taming (462), navigation, trade (467–8), and medical treatments (481–2). He portrays these mortal powers as derived from the sacred honors of Zeus and the Olympian gods. These divine contributions encompass Hephaestus's mastery of fire and metallurgy, Zeus's storms, the fruits of Demeter and Athena, the Muses' artistic talents, Hermes's livestock, Poseidon's expertise in horses and navigation, Apollo's healing practices, and the prophetic gifts of both Zeus and Apollo, along with potential weaving techniques from Athena (White 2001, p. 114). However, Prometheus fails to recognize the honor associated with these gods, diminishing their divine gifts to mere knowledge and artisan skills.

This suggests that the crafts granted to humanity by Prometheus are far from perfect. Since fire and sacred crafts are honors reserved for the gods, Prometheus's act of "theft"

represents a violation of divine honor and a form of religious desecration. Having received these divine crafts, humans showed no reverence or piety, allowing *hybris* to flourish amid false prosperity. This transgression suggests that Prometheus's actions were inevitably subject to Zeus's punishment, which largely aligns with the design of fate. Additionally, the implicit prophecy of reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus in *Prometheus Bound* suggests the potential evolution of Zeus's justice, a transformation that becomes evident in *Prometheus Unbound*.

4. The Formation of Reconciliation: The Completion of the Divine Plan

As divine beings, Prometheus and Zeus are subject to the authority of fate; their conflict and ultimate reconciliation are part of fate's overarching plan—a plan that develops and reaches fulfillment over the course of the trilogy. In the earlier analysis, this paper contends that the *Prometheus* trilogy consists of three plays, with the first primarily focusing on the conflict between Prometheus and Zeus. This conflict reaches a turning point in the second play, *Prometheus Unbound*. Ultimately, Zeus frees Prometheus, signaling a shift in divine will from severe retribution to forgiveness. As for the third play, “it is likely that the poet dealt with the introduction into the Attic cult of the festival of Prometheus, as a fire god” (Greene 1944, p. 117). Regarding their reconciliation, Nietzsche considers it as “Aeschylean tendency to justice”:

“The limitless suffering of the bold ‘individual’ on the one hand, and the extreme plight of the gods, indeed a premonition of the twilight of the gods, on the other; the power of both these worlds of suffering to enforce reconciliation, metaphysical oneness—all this recalls in the strongest possible way the centre and principal tenet of the Aeschylean view of the world, which sees *moira*, as eternal justice, throned above gods and men”. (Nietzsche 1999, pp. 48–9)

In other words, the reconciliation of these two worlds of suffering mentioned by Nietzsche refers to the Promethean struggle of the Titan. This struggle is fundamentally marked by sacrilege and conflict with the gods, ultimately resulting in unity. As Sommerstein (2010, p. 227) highlights, both *Prometheus Bound* and *Prometheus Unbound* share significant similarities in their content, themes, and techniques, indicating that these plays are intertwined components of a trilogy. The extant fragments of *Prometheus Unbound* help piece together the overarching narrative, leading to the ultimate reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus.

At the beginning of *Prometheus Unbound*, a chorus of released Titans appear before Prometheus (fr. 190–3). Heracles arrives and defeats the eagle (fr. 200); however, possibly fearing his father Zeus's power, he does not completely free Prometheus. The conflict between Prometheus and Zeus continues (fr. 201) until they eventually reconcile.⁷ And this revelation, perhaps facilitated by Themis herself, paves the way for their agreement.⁸ In fact, this reconciliation was initially established in the first play, where Prometheus holds the key to Zeus's downfall (910), a secret that is essential for the potential of reconciliation. As a result, once Zeus learns the secret, he frees Prometheus, bestows religious honors upon him, and declares that from now on, humanity will wear wreaths during all festive occasions to honor him (Sommerstein 2010, p. 226).

Additionally, as a form of compromise, Zeus offers a “gift” to humanity and Prometheus. To some degree, this gift serves as compensation for Prometheus's previous “failure” to incorporate ethical norms alongside the technical abilities he bestowed upon humanity. From the extant fragments, it can be deduced that this “gift” likely pertains to ethical virtues. In *Prometheus Unbound*, there are two groups that exemplify these social virtues: the “righteous and hospitable” Gabii (fr. 196) and the “law-abiding” Scythians (fr. 198) (Sommerstein 2010, p. 227).

To explore the ethical norms that Zeus imparted to humanity, we can find insights in Plato's works. The virtues given by Zeus may resonate with the ideas presented in *Protagoras*. In this dialogue, particularly in the story of Prometheus, Plato concludes by highlighting the concepts of "shame" (αἰδώς) and "justice" (δίκη) (Plato 1903, 320d–322c). Regarding the reason that Zeus's gift to humanity is termed "shame", North (1966, p. 7) has suggested that it is because "shame" embodies an ethical emotion encompassing respect, awe, self-worth, and honor. Heroes who lack this feeling of shame frequently become consumed by resentment and insults, which can obscure their judgment through pride and anger to cloud their judgment. Consequently, they may lose their self-control and give in to rage during crucial moments. Prometheus's revolt against Zeus's supposed unfair distribution clearly illustrates this, culminating in his punishment. As for "justice", it is closely associated with retribution and embodies a dual significance. It represents both a universal force—justice in a general sense—and the traditional ethical norms guided by Zeus. In essence, "shame" and "justice" are crucial in promoting harmony within the polis and guaranteeing that violations of divine and civic laws receive appropriate attention and punishment.

In addition to Plato's relevant texts, Sophocles's *Antigone*⁹ mentions nine key human achievements in the "Ode to Man": seafaring, farming, hunting, taming animals, speech, thought, civic customs, housebuilding, and medicine (Bernardete 1999, p. 42). Beyond these crafts, however, the ode emphasizes the foundational role of "wisdom" in civic life, namely "the laws of the earth and the justice of the gods".¹⁰ This is precisely what is missing in *Prometheus Bound*. Given that the crafts described in the play coincide with the nine achievements in the "Ode to Man", this parallel reflects a common mode of expression in ancient Greek texts.

Through the above analysis, we observe that throughout the entire process—from Prometheus's theft of fire to Zeus's punishment and their reconciliation—human society acquires not only the technological advancements necessary for civilization but also the corresponding ethical rules. This transformation yields a beneficial outcome, reflecting the complex interaction between Zeus's justice and fate. In this process, Aeschylus "purifies the conception of the Olympian gods, subordinating them to Zeus, who is, or becomes, all-wise and all-powerful, the embodiment of justice; his will is fused with Fate, which now is seen to be not only irresistible but good" (Greene 1944, p. 110).

5. The Gods of the Polis: The Theological Origins of Civic Ethics

The changing dynamics of Zeus's justice and fate illustrate that fate is not just a terrifying power, nor is Zeus's justice the sole metric for assessing right and wrong in ancient Greek thought. Instead, humanity actively engages in self-discipline, governance, and judgment using appropriate institutional frameworks. As Zakrzewska (2019, pp. 67–68) notes, "The precursors of the genre, Aeschylus and Sophocles, were the first to try to resolve the problem of fate, which is to realise catharsis and, in consequence, bring about consolation in a world deprived of gods".

The phrase "a world deprived of gods" highlights the reasons why Zeus enforces ethical standards among humans. It represents a time when divinity diminishes, allowing human consciousness to develop and progress. This shift aligns with the historical context of fifth-century BCE Athens, renowned for the emergence of democratic institutions and significant political advancements transformations.¹¹ As Goldhill (2004, p. 2) noted, "Ancient commentators describe a series of violent shifts of constitution—between oligarchy (rule by a few), tyranny (rule by one man), and democracy (rule by the many)". During the late 6th century BCE, Athens was governed by the tyrant Peisistratus and then his son Hippias. Later, in 507 BCE, Cleisthenes enacted reforms that laid the foundation for the first

democratic system. This era signified the rise of democratic authority—the conviction that the Athenians were shaping their own fate. Metaphysically, Greek tragedy often conveys a pessimistic view of human existence. Yet, on a socio-political standpoint, it reflects the confidence, optimism, and moral independence tied to the emerging democratic awareness in Athens (Hall 2010, p. 69). Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990, p. 27) observe that this era was marked by two opposing views on humanity’s role in the world: the political system of laws and heroic mythology. Tragic consciousness arose during a time when the relationship between humanity and the divine felt both intertwined and in conflict. This sense of tragedy brought about responsibility as human actions became topics for reflection and discussion, even though they were not seen as fully independent enough to achieve total self-sufficiency.

The political upheavals and the emergence of democracy have instigated substantial transformations, as articulated by Goldhill:

“This competitive self-scrutiny and self-criticism has been convincingly seen as a determining factor in what is known as the fifth-century enlightenment—that extraordinary burgeoning of arts, science, medicine and philosophy in the fifth century, centred on Athens (Lloyd 1987). Indeed, the institution of tragedy, and the *Oresteia* in particular, as we will see, can be viewed first as part of this continuing public debate on internal political developments”. (Goldhill 2004, p. 2)

During a time characterized by the growth of democracy, Aeschylus wove themes of democratic institutions into his works. As Mark Griffith notes, among the three major tragedians, Aeschylus most directly and compellingly addressed democracy, the rule of law, legal courts, and the lasting achievements of the polis. Although Sophocles and Euripides also engaged with political themes, Aeschylus’s works were crafted during the prosperous era following the battles of Marathon and Salamis yet before the Peloponnesian War.¹² In this context, Aeschylus emerged as a proud advocate for Athens and its democratic system. For example, the portrayal of Pelasgus and his proto-democratic polis of Argos in the *Suppliants* serves as a microcosm of early Athens. At the same time, the conclusion of the *Eumenides* largely signifies Aeschylus’s endorsement of Athens and its political institutions (Griffith 1995, pp. 63–64). Baldwin (2014, p. 190) provides a comprehensive analysis of Aeschylus’s tragedies, arguing that Aeschylus’s works primarily focus on the welfare of the polis. He emphasizes the virtues of the warriors of Marathon, the religious devotion to the gods, and the civic duty of protecting the polis.

The above scholars agree that Aeschylus examines democracy prominently in his plays. However, a distinctive feature of his work is the focus on divine justice, reflecting the religious beliefs of earlier tragic poets. In an era of rising democratic awareness and civic dialogue, Aeschylus, as a poet of the polis, responds to emerging intellectual movements and reinterpreting the legitimacy of divine justice. This synthesis comprised both traditional norms and emerging ideals, which sometimes conflicted but also, at other moments, harmonized into a coherent vision. In his study of A.W. Schlegel, Behler (1986, p. 342) notes that Schlegel views Greek tragedy as a continual struggle between fate and human nature, where interpersonal conflicts are resolved through a unique moral beauty that balances fear and compassion. A similar perspective is echoed in Chen and Shui’s (1986, pp. 134–35) study of F. Schlegel, arguing that F. Schlegel regards Aeschylean tragedy as exemplifying the progressive defeat and replacement of ancient deities and Titans by younger, more astute divine beings. This progression symbolizes the gradual diminishment and eventual decline of humanity and nature’s noble and grand elements. Aeschylus’s works embody the memories and illusions of gods while aspiring toward a life defined by rules, harmony, and civilization. His work most strikingly depicts the contrast between the old world and the new. Hegel interpreted the central conflicts in

Aeschylus's tragedies as a confrontation between nature and civilization. Here, "nature" refers to "the relation of children to parents", while "civilization" denotes "the bond between husband and wife", i.e., marriage. Therefore, it "does not issue merely from purely natural love or from a natural- and blood-relationship; it springs, on the contrary, from an inclination which is known and therefore from the free ethical life of the self-conscious will" (Hegel 1975, p. 463). Therefore, Aeschylus's works accurately portray the tension between family ties and legal obligations. Karl Marx views Aeschylus's tragedy through the lens of the dialectic of world history, recognizing it as the early onset of actions and events before the crucial turning point occurs (Prawer 1976, pp. 197–231).

Schlegel, Hegel, and Marx, recognized the novel elements and resultant complexity inherent in Aeschylean tragedy. This intricacy mirrors Aeschylus's engagement with contemporary issues and his endeavor to convey these matters to the citizens of the *polis* through tragedy. Consequently, Aeschylus offered a solution by embracing certain "new" intellectual ideas. His approach, grounded in the welfare of the *polis*, uses myth along with a series of events, actions, and suffering to convey his worldview (Nietzsche 1997, p. 236). We can observe this in the *Prometheus* trilogy, where Zeus evolves from a figure of strict punishment to one of reason. His conception of justice evolves from harsh to more benevolent, providing humanity with political virtues and legal frameworks. The nature of divine justice, initially depicted through brutal punishment, shifts to become the cornerstone of civic life and institution.

6. Conclusions

Prometheus's gifts to humanity are essential to the functioning of the cosmic order. Although these gifts may challenge the gods' authority, in the long term, they contribute to the ultimate aim of cosmic harmony. Fate dictated Prometheus's theft of fire and his subsequent punishment; however, it also guaranteed that these conflicts would be resolved through justice, ultimately restoring universal balance and harmony. As Greene (1944, p. 109) noted, "Aeschylus boldly addresses himself to no less a task than the reconciliation of timeless conflicting principles or duties; fate and freedom, justice and mercy, the individual and the universal order, suffering and happiness".

Within this framework, the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus is resolved through the evolution of Zeus's character, ultimately culminating in divine grace and the "miracle of persuasion". This resolution establishes a vision of ideal civic life. While it relies on the scientific skills and material resources supplied by Prometheus, its legitimacy stems from civic order, social ethics, and religious ritual. This vision of the *polis* embodies three dimensions of Olympian justice: the internal justice within the *polis* and its families, the kindness extended to friendly outsiders, and the reverence shown to the gods (White 2001, p. 140).

These principles collectively illustrate the interplay between the divine and the human realms, clarifying the intricate dynamics that exist between the sacred and the secular, fate and justice, along technology and divine will. In doing so, Aeschylus establishes a theoretical framework for the harmony of the *polis*, even though achieving this ideal requires dealing with considerable and complex challenges.

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Notes

- ¹ The texts related to Aeschylus's *Prometheus* trilogy used in this paper are referenced from Sommerstein (2008a, 2008b). The citations above do not include author or edition information, and line numbers are provided directly after the quotations. Other classical texts, such as those by Sophocles, Aristotle, and Plato, also follow standard line numbering conventions.
- ² The authorship of the trilogy remains a subject of debate. For example, Lloyd-Jones points out that the authorship issue of *Prometheus* trilogy was first formally raised by Alfred Gercke in 1911. In 1929, Wilhelm Schmid systematically examined the authenticity of the entire play, which generated significant responses. See Lloyd-Jones (2003, pp. 52–54). Meautis and Herington, in their article, refute Schmid's argument and defend the play's authenticity, emphasizing that ancient tradition never questioned the author's identity. Among the most prominent criticisms of *Prometheus* trilogy authorship are the discussions of authenticity found in the works of Griffith and West, see (Munteanu 2011, p. 165). This paper asserts that the *Prometheus* trilogy is likely the work of Aeschylus from his later period, likely written around the mid-fifth century BCE. J. A. Davison (1949) supports this claim by analyzing historical events, particularly the political turmoil in Athens between 463 and 457 BCE, indicating that the plays were likely composed between roughly 458 and 454 BCE. Similarly, Dana Ferrin Sutton (1983) proposes that *Prometheus Bound* may have been created just before the mid-fifth century BCE, aligning with the timeframe of Aeschylus's active writing career.
- ³ The issue of the sequence of the trilogy remains controversial. This paper agrees with William Chase Greene's view that the order of the trilogy is *Prometheus Bound*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Prometheus Firebearer*. See Greene (1944, p. 117). Mark Griffith, on the other hand, argues that the trilogy includes *Prometheus Firebearer* (Pyrphoros), *Prometheus Bound*, and *Prometheus Unbound*, with its dramatic logic as follows: (1) crime; (2) punishment; (3) regeneration. For a detailed explanation, see Griffith (1983, pp. 281–305). Additionally, Mossman (1996, pp. 61–2), following the chain of imagery in the trilogy, views it as a formal structure of the trilogy. Some scholars have raised objections to the trilogy's issues. For example, Alan H. Sommerstein argues that Pyrphoros is not the third part of Aeschylus' trilogy but might be another variant title for the satyr play *Pyrkaeus*. See Sommerstein (2010, p. 228).
- ⁴ In Hesiod's account, Prometheus's offering of fat-covered white bones to Zeus is described as a "trick", which fundamentally causes the division between humans and gods. Consequently, Zeus punishes both Prometheus and humanity. Humans receive the edible meat from the sacrificial cow, leading them toward their mortal fate, while the gods receive the inedible bones, granting them immortal life. See Hesiod (535–50, Evelyn-White 1914).
- ⁵ "Μηδὲν ἄγαν" is the maxim of the Temple of Delphi, and ancient writers generally interpreted it as a warning against pride. North points out that Prometheus displays arrogant hubris and disregard for restraint and refuses to acknowledge the realities of his predicament. As urged by the chorus, Oceanus, and Hermes, he should learn to restrain excess and acquire sound judgment and moderation. See North (1966, p. 43). Will directs attention to the multifaceted and complex nature of Prometheus's character, noting that he unites various traits—pride, benevolence, and even gentleness. See Will (1962, p. 78).
- ⁶ The term "ὑβρις" can be written as *hybris* or *hubris* and is generally translated into English as "arrogance". Spiliotopoulos notes that *hybris* or *hubris* is a complex term used to describe arrogance, offense, and wanton violence stemming from pride or passion. See Spiliotopoulos (2022, p. 13). On the other hand, Kuokkanen expands the meaning of *hybris*, which, according to her, involves both a sense of superiority and the pleasure derived from exhibiting oneself as above others while also encompassing an individual's actions and psychological state. See Kuokkanen (2021, p. 56). From the research of these two scholars, it is evident that the specific connotation of ὑβρις remains ambiguous and contentious, and further clarification is needed.
- ⁷ In the extant drama, Hermes warns Prometheus that he will never be released unless some god is willing to bear his suffering in the underworld (1026–1029). Until recently, studies have indicated that it was Chiron, who was accidentally wounded by a poisoned arrow from Heracles, and the excruciating pain led him to give up his immortality willingly. Through Chiron's renunciation of immortality, Zeus's condition was fulfilled, and a solution was negotiated between Zeus and Prometheus. See Lloyd-Jones (1971, p. 97).
- ⁸ For a detailed discussion on this issue, see Sommerstein (2008a, pp. 196–98).
- ⁹ For a detailed discussion of *Antigone*, refer to Lloyd-Jones's 1998 translation.
- ¹⁰ This quotation is taken from lines 365–75 of Sophocles' *Antigone*, as translated by Lloyd-Jones (1998), and centers on the theme of life within the *polis*.
- ¹¹ Between the 6th century BCE and the mid-5th century BCE, ordinary citizens in ancient Greece gradually acquired fundamental democratic rights. However, the traditional aristocratic elite dominated public affairs within the *polis*. During the transition between the old and new systems, tensions arose between the emerging democratic order, characterized by citizen equality, checks and balances, and the supremacy of the *polis*, and the traditional aristocratic values, which emphasized family, rights, personal worth, and honor. For discussions on the democratic system of the Greek polis, see Griffith (1995, pp. 65–66).
- ¹² Aeschylus himself also participated in the Battle of Marathon. In addition, he may have taken part in the Battle of Plataea, the Battle of Artemisium, and the Battle of Salamis. See Krikona (2018, p. 90).

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Article

Parmenides as a Thinker of Fate

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Abstract: Although some ancient sources relate Parmenides to the religious doctrine of fate, this concept is not usually prominent in the scholarly presentation of the Eleatic thinker. Here, we offer a tentative interpretation of the notion of necessity in Parmenides' poem, as a peculiar philosophical understanding of the presence of fate in reality. Necessity, divinised by Parmenides, implies that all things are bound together by the chains of fate. Therefore, his philosophical proposal consists in understanding this unity of reality originated by the connexion of fatal necessity. However, this presence of fate in all things is not bad news, but also means that everything is connected by Love.

Keywords: fate; necessity; myth; determinism; divinity; Greek mythology; Greek religion; presocratic philosophy

1. Introduction

As is well known, Parmenides' poem begins with a mythological scene in which the philosopher has a vision in which an unnamed goddess teaches him how to know the truth hidden from mortals. Such an introduction leads the renowned classicist Werner Jaeger (1947, p. 96) to understand Parmenides as a religious thinker and to give us the following description of the Eleatic thinker:

His mysterious vision in the realm of light is a genuine religious experience: when the weak human eye turns towards the hidden truth, life itself becomes transfigured. This is a kind of experience that has no place in the religion of the official cults. Its prototype is rather to be sought in the devotions we find in the mysteries and initiation ceremonies; [...] we encounter a highly individual inner experience of the Divine, combined with the fervour of a devotee who feels himself charged with proclaiming the truths of his own personal revelation and who seeks to establish a community of the faithful among his converts.

Undeniably, the strongly religious tone of Parmenides' poem cannot be ignored (Guthrie 1965, p. 34). Within this context, in this article, I intend to propose a key interpretation of its main philosophical statements as a defence of one of the main theses of the traditional Greek religious worldview, namely, that all things are connected by fate. Although fate takes on a central philosophical meaning after Plato and Aristotle, the importance of that concept, expressed by various terms, cannot be ignored in Greek religion and literature before and contemporary to Parmenides (Magris 2008, pp. 17–138).

Although it is not a central theme in the scholarship on Parmenides, it is not unreasonable to see Parmenides as a thinker of fate. Among the ancient sources, we can cite Aetius, who, despite expressing himself probably under the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, attributes to him a doctrine of fate: he attributes to Parmenides the claim that “everything happens according to necessity (πάντα κατ' ἀνάγκην); and fate (εἰμαρμένην), justice, providence, and the creator of the world are identical.”¹ It is easy to recognise in this statement a certain anachronism (Mansfeld 2015, §9), but, since the importance of “necessity” (ἀνάγκη) within Parmenides' thought cannot be dismissed, the existence of a very notion of “fate” in his poem has received particular attention from Mourelatos (2008, pp. 25–29

and 160–62) and Magris (2008, pp. 189–200), who goes so far as to affirm that “the Greek philosophical problematic of fate receives from Parmenides a fundamental contribution” (Magris 2008, p. 199).

In this paper, when I speak of “fate” (εἰμαρμένη or Μοῖρα), I mainly refer to the popular notion in Greek mythical thought (Greene 1944). Fate serves Homer to explain how events are determined by a kind of force that not even the gods can control. In tragedy, the heroes cannot escape their fate either, so this superhuman power prevents them from directing their lives with freedom. I do not intend to refer to a strong Stoic understanding of fate as a connection of causes. However, I propose that the notion of “necessity” held by Parmenides (which is not identical to the popular notion of ἀνάγκη) allows him to provide a kind of philosophical explanation of the popular notion of fate. Or perhaps, the reality is rather the opposite: the popular and mythical idea of fate and necessity permeate his philosophy and underlie his assertions about being. In any case, his philosophical construction prevails and, therefore, the notion of fate that I will attribute to Parmenides has not primarily an anthropological significance, as it seems to have in popular culture, but extends to all things (Robbiano 2006, p. 209) and is linked to his close association between the real, the being, and the recognition of reality by νόος.

In the following pages, I will first present the central elements of the “discovery” that Parmenides wants to communicate to us in his poem. Second, I will describe Parmenides’ conception of cosmic and metaphysical necessity understood as a theory of fate. Third, I will suggest that the thesis of fate allows Parmenides to grasp the unity of reality and to conceive his own philosophy as an exact interpretation of being.

2. The Discovery of Parmenides

The goddess in Parmenides’ poem exhorts us to “look” at the being through “persuasion” and discursive reasoning.² Although his insistence on argumentation is new, after all, our philosopher is still fully embedded in the cultural framework in which he was born, and it would not help us to consider him as such an innovative figure that we could not relate him to other ideas of his time. To understand his situation of continuity and discontinuity in the tradition of ancient Greek ideas, we can try to compare the relationship between Parmenides and Hesiod with that between Hesiod and Homer, from the philosophical point of view.³ Hesiod completes the Homeric narrative in order to be etiologically interested in the origins, not only of a particular city or people, but even of the cosmos and humanity as a whole, despite the fact that he does not yet abandon the form of the mythical tale. Parmenides, who neither ceases to make use of myth nor renounces the hexameter, also provides us with an overall explanation of reality.⁴ The main speech of the goddess in Parmenides’ poem is not, however, a myth, but a reasoning, which gives the listener the skill required to use his own natural means to attain a knowledge that is accessible to man, even though mortals are in fact ignorant of it. Moreover, Parmenides’ interests are not the same as Hesiod’s, because the problem of origins is postponed in order to give priority to the question of knowledge. His main motivation is to discover the right way to know the truth, discarding deceptive ways (O’Brien 2012, pp. 140–41). Finally, the method as such leads Parmenides to provide us also with a worldview to which I will refer in a moment.

Despite these differences between the thinker of Elea and mythological narrative, it would be a mistake to attach little importance to the fact that the poem is presented as a revelation, a manifestation of truth granted by a goddess to the mortal who speaks in the first person. In this respect, the tone of his work resembles that of other Presocratics, such as Heraclitus (Neuman Lorenzini and Torrijos Castrillejo 2023, p. 235). It is noteworthy that Parmenides conveys this revelation to us with the intention of communicating his own “discovery of a situation,” that is, a state of affairs, even though this “situation” encompasses the totality of reality.⁵ The philosopher reminds us of the epic heroes who, awakening from their previous deception, take charge of what is happening in a given situation. As is well known, on many occasions, this notice takes the form of a tragic “recognition” (ἀναγνώρισις) (MacFarlane 2000). Recovering from the dulling of the

senses suffered by most mortals, Parmenides has come to learn of a “state of things”, about which it is easy to be deceived, despite its crucial significance for the lives of mortals. He therefore communicates it to us with the solemnity that the matter deserves, worthy of a contemporary of Aeschylus, which makes him be described by Plato as “at once venerable and terrible.”⁶

The first readers of Parmenides among the so-called Presocratics interpreted the poem as a treatise on cosmology (Barnes 1982, pp. 180–230; Palmer 2009, pp. 189–224), understanding in a physical way our philosopher’s statements about τὸ ἔόν (“what is”). The clearest example of this early interpretation is Melissus and, in a certain way, the so-called “pluralists” (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2014, p. 38). This reading conditioned the subsequent reception. Among contemporary interpreters, especially following a well-known work by Calogero (1977), the thesis that Parmenides did not want to use for any definite subject the verb to be, but deliberately omitted the enunciation of a subject, has enjoyed great success. Thus, as Néstor-Luis Cordero explains, “Parmenides is interested in the content of the verb, in the fact of being, and affirms that this fact imposes itself as an unquestionable and unavoidable reality from the moment that... one is.”⁷

The affirmation of being cannot be denied. The negation of being cannot be affirmed. Their opposites are impossible. Therefore, being and non-being are necessary. Here, we have a kind of inevitability that we have to link with the traditional concept of Necessity (Ἀνάγκη). However, with Parmenides, a new understanding of necessity appears. It is not, strictly speaking, a mythical force that opposes the energies of mortals, but is just as invincible as traditional Moira is invincible. It is a necessity of a *logical* kind (Cordero 2004, p. 173), but Parmenides’ discovery is that such a necessity dominates reality with the same inflexibility as a force.⁸

The enumeration of the properties of ἔόν⁹ may lead us to hypostasise it, considering it as a certain reality distinct from some alleged appearances.¹⁰ However, it is not necessary that Parmenides intended to deny the information provided by the senses (Curd 2004, pp. 111–26). Rather, his message seeks to convince us of the factuality of being. According to him, there is no middle ground between a thing being and not being, whether we understand “being” in a predicative or existential sense. Thus, Parmenides would exclude movement not because he denies the successive stages through which—as the senses show us—reality “passes,” but because he affirms that during each of these stages, it can only be affirmed one statement (a “being”) about the thing in movement. For example, the apple does not stop its change from “being” green to “being” red, but the statement “the apple *is* green” is incompatible with “the apple *is* red” and, in fact, this is true both when the former is true and when the latter is true. Each of the two stages (for Parmenides, they would be “beings”) is in a way absolute, for both the dilemma between “being red” or “not being red” can be posed, and for both only one possibility coincides with the truth. It would be misleading to interpret this thesis in the light of later philosophies, for example, to think that the Eleatic thinker denies the distinction between “substance and accidents” or, if one prefers, “subject and attributes.” This distinction is not denied but simply ignored or neglected, as it will also be the case among other authors, even after him (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2014, pp. 60–61).

3. Fatal Necessity

From what we have seen, it is clear that the core of Parmenides’ conception of being is its necessity. However, we should not immediately see in it a strict technical term, and his philosophy as a rigorous modal thought. Rather, we must understand Parmenides within his archaic mentality and see in it primarily an aspect of his worldview. This is the only way to understand the prominence of the goddess Necessity (Ἀνάγκη), to whom he repeatedly refers; similarly, both the Moira (Μοῖρα) and the goddess Justice (Δίκη) are responsible for the “enchainment” of being.¹¹ When talking of these divinities, Parmenides even employs the same vocabulary used for Necessity. These divine figures are to be identified as if they were one and the same (Drozdek 2007, p. 50; Mourelatos 2008, pp. 25–26; Guthrie 1965,

p. 72).¹² This is an epic way of expressing the same thing that is said in perhaps a more formal way through other expressions of “necessity.”¹³ Underlying these personifications is a probable Orphic influence (Bernabé 2004, pp. 40 and 55–56; Guthrie 1965, p. 35).

Throughout the whole poem, there is always the same message: that all things are necessary, even those things that seem to us to have “come into being” or to be doomed to “perish.” The events that would seem to us to be “contingent” are also necessary: everything is determined in an unavoidable way. In other words, Parmenides’ main thesis concerning being is a fatalism and can only appear to be a denial of appearances if we accept the Aristotelian presuppositions of the distinction between substances and accidents, and between contingency and necessity. Parmenides, on the contrary, dispenses with these distinctions. If every event is inevitable, such a “necessity” cannot properly have the meaning that it would have in an Aristotelian paradigm. Parmenides’ necessity only coincides with the “necessity of the present” that Aristotle concedes in *De interpr.*, 19a23–24 (a text that I shall refer to shortly). However, the idea of necessity expressed in the poem does not seem to incorporate a notion of causality or mutability such as that involved in Aristotle’s different senses of necessity in *Metaph.* Δ, 5.

As can be seen, we are attributing to Parmenides a fatalism different from the Stoic one, because he does not sustain it by virtue of the intertwining of causes but by the facticity of being. The notion of cause also seems to be neglected by him in this respect. He states that “there are no two ways of being: either one is or one is not. There are no degrees of being. That is why Parmenides says that ‘what is’ is unique and complete (fragment 8.6).”¹⁴ A similar interpretation of the remaining properties of being according to Parmenides could be proposed. Being “is neither generated nor corrupted,” and it is neither born nor perishes¹⁵ because “what is” simply is, and all things are in the same way (DK 28 B 8, 29; LM 19 D 8, 34), i.e., in a necessary way.

It can be affirmed that everything is ‘one’ because of the complete homogeneity of being: each thing is comparable with any other thing since everything partakes a *similar necessity* (DK 28 B 8, 22; LM 19 D 8, 27). For this very reason, all multiplication of being is excluded, not because ‘being red’ and ‘being yellow’ are the same, but because, when both ‘beings’ are given, they are given in exactly the same way, namely, in such a way that they are endowed only with certain characteristics and lack others: the red is only red; it is not and cannot be yellow, and the yellow disposes of its yellowness in a similar way. Analogously, the reference to a ‘sphere’ (DK 28 B 8, 43; LM 19 D 8, 48) can be understood metaphorically;¹⁶ also, the ‘roundness of truth’ appealed to at the beginning of the poem could be so understood.¹⁷

After the foregoing reflection, it seems plausible to think that Aristotle was ‘correcting’ Parmenides’ main thesis when he wrote “it is necessary (ἀνάγκη) that what is, while it is, is, and that what is not, while it is not, is not.”¹⁸ Of course, Aristotle introduces a temporal clause (ἔτιαν), which does not appear in Parmenides’ text and which the Eleatic thinker would reject, since he denies the difference between past, present, and future.¹⁹ However, I believe that, in order to understand the meaning of Parmenides’ words, the discussion that Aristotle is holding there with the Megarics,²⁰ who considered themselves Parmenides’ disciples (Mársico 2013, vol. 1, §§ 83–84; Döring 1972, vol. 2, §§ 26A and 27–28), is relevant. While Aristotle is there attempting a modal articulation of being, Parmenides recognises only one modality for being—as we have seen—and that is necessity. This is not merely implicit in his words, but he restates it incessantly, also by recourse to the continuity, unity, homogeneity, and immutability of being. If we think of being by trying to reduce it to our mortal understanding, we shall see it as past, present, and future, but Parmenides’ discovery is the actuality of all being (οὐκ ἄτελε ὕπτητον²¹). He does not mean an actuality in *space* of all being, but the irrefragable actuality of all moments of *time*, all the events mistakenly conceived as successive by most mortals. This is how the following fragment could be understood:

See these things, which, remote though they are, are firmly present to thought.

For you will not cut off what is from cohering with what is,

Whether it is dispersed completely everywhere throughout the world
Or is collected together.²²

Thought makes it possible to discover the actuality of all being, both past, present and future. This aspect could be noticed in Gallop's (1984) version, since he avoids translating κόσμον as 'world' and instead writes, literally, 'order.' In this way, he eludes a merely local understanding of this fragment (which, however, I do not intend to exclude). Parmenides is also ruling out any temporal distension. Thus, whereas Aristotle would say that, once Socrates drank the hemlock, it was necessary to affirm that Socrates 'is' a hemlock-drinker, Parmenides' fatalistic thesis declares, on the contrary, that Socrates always 'was'—or, rather, 'is'—a hemlock-drinker. Hemlock-drinking and Socrates are bound together by the unshakable chains of Justice, and no one could or will ever separate them.

As a confirmation of this, we can mention the defence upheld by Marcinkowska-Rosół's volume in favour of the emendation of the above quoted text, proposed by Coxon (2009, p. 75). According to this reading, Parmenides would have even more expressly denied the existence of time in order to affirm the perennial actuality of eternity. With a couple of minor corrections, the author proposes the following translation:

[...] οὐδ' οἱ χρόνος ἐστίν, ἢ ἔσται/ἄλλο πάρεξ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐπεὶ τό γε Μοῖρ' ἐπέδησεν/οὔλον ἀκίνητόν τ' ἔμειναι· τῶι πάντ' ὀνόμασσι...

Und für dies gibt es keine Zeit, oder es wird/etwas anderes außer dem Seienden geben, da eben dies Moira gebunden hat, ganz und unbeweglich zu sein. Damit werden alle [Dinge] bezeichnet... (Marcinkowska-Rosół 2010, p. 141)

And for this there is no time, or there will be/anything other than 'what is,' since Moira has bound even this, so that it is a whole and something immovable. By this, all [things] are named...²³

Thus, Parmenides would have fixed, with the chains of the Moira, all past, present, and future events in a completely actualised eternity, considering all things necessary and inevitable, for, according to him, "there is no time."²⁴ Here, to deny motion means simply to declare that every event is fixed in advance. Though mortal minds perceive them little by little and successively, the gods and the well-instructed minds are able to see them in their perennial actuality.

4. Understanding the Unity of All Things

In short, to conclude our reflection, we could affirm that Parmenides is giving a noetic approach to his philosophy, putting in close proximity his doctrine on being and his theory of knowledge. Within this framework, he conceives νόος ("intellect") as the factor that enables man to discover the unity of reality. Shortly afterwards, his successors, such as Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia, saw intellect as a feature for establishing the distinction between one thing and another. In doing so, they were inspired by the 'critical' (κρίσις) function of the intellect recognised by Parmenides, who already gave it the task of discerning between "is" and "is not" (DK 28 B 8, 15–16; LM 19 D 8, 20–21). But, for him, the intellect can only take the side of being (DK 28 B 8, 34; LM 19 D 8, 39) and, therefore, it sees everything in unity, because it recognises that the interweaving between one thing and another is such that all of them, down to the last of the events that happen in time, are linked and constitute an inseparable unity. Hence, the extent of the intellect's sight enables it to embrace all things and prevents it from perceiving them as scattered, as they appear to the careless intellects of mortals (DK 28 B 4; LM 19 D 10). Just as an experienced physician, however thoroughly and separately he may have examined each member of an animate body, will never deny that they are all interwoven and sustain life, constituting a single organism; so neither will Parmenides dare to discriminate any of the events that happen in the world, because they are all actualised beforehand and constitute the homogeneous unity of being. One cannot rank some things above others: the interweaving of all things

makes each of them equally representative of being, for everything has the same degree of actuality.

Consequently, although Parmenides does not develop an essential differentiation between “intellective” objects and “sensible” objects, it is necessary to note a certain distinction.²⁵ The νόος grasps what the senses grasp but, unlike them, it is able to perceive everything together and at the same time,²⁶ not separately and successively, like they do.²⁷ In this way, he seems to point to a certain differentiation between the intelligible and the sensible: intellect does not know objects of a specific nature (“intelligible” objects), but it knows these things that are before the senses (“sensible” objects) do in a new way. The intellect recognises its unity.

Likewise, another important feature of the poem, emphasised by Marcinkowska-Rosół (2010, pp. 215–25), is its “protreptic” status. Parmenides notes that most men err in judging reality, but this error is not invincible but requires particular attention and an application of the human psychic faculties available to any subject. He exhorts us, therefore, to a careful analysis of things which will enable us to discover the situation which he himself declares. Intellectual knowledge is possible for every human being, but it requires effort and carefulness. Therefore, the author believes that his exhortation is necessary.

Finally, although the “tragic” recognition of the real situation of things may be understood as “bad news”—as happened in the case of Oedipus, who recognised himself as doubly contaminated by patricide and incest—we must emphasise that Parmenides insists that the discovery of truth is to be attributed to a “propitious Fate,” (Μοῖρα: DK 28 B 1, 26; LM 19 D 4, 26). In that sense, such a discovery carries with it a genuine fascination for the good, marked by a distinctly religious character (García-Lorente 2023). A fortiori, this intertwining of things need not be seen as a distressing fate (Oriol Salgado 2023, p. 521). Let us consider that the goddess Necessity, which we have understood as a facet of Moira and Justice, also seems to deserve the name of Eros-Aphrodite, the divinity that directs all things.²⁸ The discovery of truth is thus considered beneficial for Parmenides. This truth constitutes good news, since the fact that “[a]ll things are chained together, entwined,” means—to use Nietzsche’s words—that they are “in love” (Nietzsche 2005, p. 283).²⁹ In this sense, I agree with West (2013, p. 17) when he says that “for Parmenides it is love that makes the world go round.”

In speaking here of Eros-Aphrodite, I do not want to bring in any new notions that we have not seen so far. Eros, like Moira or Necessity, are divine names to designate the situation of reality as a whole. Things and events cannot be different from the way they are. In that sense, they are all united. They are all in the same situation. It is in this somewhat abstract sense that one can speak of unity. Such a unity could be recognised as the work of Eros. It is clear that it is a unitive force in the fragments of Parmenides; this will become even clearer in a philosophy as marked by him as that of Empedocles, who will refer to Aphrodite to speak of Love (Palmer 2009, pp. 324–27; Warren 2007, p. 138). The unity of Eros seems to be, for Parmenides, a “good Moira,” for it is good for things to be inextricably linked with being in the precise way they are.

5. Conclusions

This article intended to propose some suggestions to be developed in the study of Parmenides’ thought in future research. It seems that the great discovery of his poem is an idea of necessity of being and non-being, which provides a connection between all things. Everything, while it is, cannot be otherwise. This would mean a certain notion of fate insofar the beings cannot escape their very own existence, nature, and dispositions. They are “necessary,” since they cannot not be as they are. This can be interpreted as a view of reality intertwined by the bonds of fate, understood according to its traditional notion, as a certain impossibility for both gods and men to prevent things from being as they are. Now, this is not fate understood as a force, an efficient causality that subdues all things, or as the connection of efficient causes. It is simply the factual necessity of being what one is. Insofar this situation is the same for everything, there is a kind of unity in

the universe. Such a necessity entails the negation of time, so that all events, fixed from eternity, are part of an indestructible unity; in that sense, they are chained together. This situation of reality is expressed by Parmenides with theological names such as Moira or Necessity. The philosopher is able to grasp by his νόος the unity of all things as a fatal connection. However, these fatal bonds are perhaps called Eros and not just Moira, because this unity of things is good for them.

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Notes

- ¹ Παρμενίδης [...] πάντα κατ’ ἀνάγκην· τὴν αὐτὴν δ’ εἶναι εἰμαρμένην καὶ δίκην καὶ πρόνοιαν καὶ κοσμοποιόν (DK 28 A 32; LM 19 R 55a). In this paper I will use the abbreviation DK for Diels and Kranz (1951–1975) and LM for Laks and Most (2016); here I use LM’s translation. There are other testimonies not collected by DK which attributes a doctrine of fate to Parmenides, such as, for instance, Plutarchus, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, 1026b; Theodoretus, *Graecarum affectionum curatio*, VI, 13 (LM 19 R 55b).
- ² See DK 28 B 1, 29; 2, 4; LM 19 D 4, 29; 6, 4.
- ³ For an exploration of the composition of the Parmenides’ poem in relation to its precedents in epic literature, see Robbiano (2006, pp. 35–60) and Tulli (2016).
- ⁴ For the interaction among reason and myth in Parmenides’ thought see Morgan (2000, pp. 67–88).
- ⁵ My words are alluding to one of the meanings of νοεῖν in Homer: “[...] to realize or to understand a situation” (von Fritz 1943, p. 93). See also Lesher (1981, p. 15). It is obvious that the verb νοεῖν is very important in Parmenides’ discourse.
- ⁶ Παρμενίδης δέ μοι φαίνεται, τὸ τοῦ Ὀμήρου, “αἰδοῖός τέ μοι” εἶναι ἅμα “δαινός τε” (Plato, *Theaet.*, 183e; Burnet 1900). See *Ilias*, III, 172; XVIII, 394; *Odyssey*, VIII, 22.
- ⁷ “Parménides se interesa por el contenido del verbo, por el hecho de ser, y afirma que este hecho se impone como una realidad indudable e insoslayable desde el momento en que... se es” (Cordero 2007, p. 271). See also Cordero (2004, pp. 64–69).
- ⁸ In this respect, the following words of Vlastos (1970, pp. 83–84) are illuminating: “When Parmenides speaks of *Dike-Ananke* holding Being fast in the bonds of the limit, his words echo Hesiod and Semonides, who speak of fate as a ‘bond of unbreakable fetters’; but his thought is far from theirs. In Hesiod and Semonides the source of the compulsion is external to the thing compelled. In Parmenides the compulsion is immanent. The first is a non-rational concept of *ananke*: the determining agency remains hidden from human reason. The second is so thoroughly rational that *ananke* merges with *dike*, and *dike* with logicophysical necessity: the order of nature is deducible from the intelligible properties of nature itself.”
- ⁹ See above all DK 28 B 8, 8–11.26–30.43–45; LM 19 D 8, 13–16.31–35.48–50.
- ¹⁰ Doxography has pointed out such a denial of appearances: see DK 28 A 25; LM 19 R 47; Plutarchus, *Adversus Colotem*, 1114c–f, etc.
- ¹¹ Μοῖρα: DK 28 B 8, 37; LM 19 D 8, 42; Δίκη: DK 28 B 8, 14; LM 19 D 8, 19 (see also DK 28 B 1, 14.28; LM 19 D 14.28). Compare with Ἀνάγκη: DK 28 B 8, 30; B 10, 6; LM 19 D 8, 35; D 12, 6 (see also DK 28 B 8, 16; LM 19 D 8, 21).
- ¹² The author of the Derveni Papyrus also indicates that different proper names of various divinities are but appellatives belonging to a single god: cf. LM 30, col. 21, 7. Robinson (2008, p. 493) suggests that Parmenides’ Moira could be even identified with Zeus.
- ¹³ χρεώ (DK 28 B 1, 28; LM 19 D 4, 28), χρῆν (DK 28 B 1, 32; LM 19 D 4, 32), χρεών (DK 28 B 2, 5; B 8, 11.45; LM 19 D 6, 5; D 8, 16.50), χρή (DK 28 B 6, 1; LM 19 D 7, 1), χρέος (DK 28 B 8, 9; LM 19 D 8, 14).
- ¹⁴ “No hay dos maneras de ser: se es o no se es. No hay grados de ser. Por eso dice Parménides que lo que es es único y completo (fragmento 8.6)” (Cordero 2007, p. 283).
- ¹⁵ See DK 28 B 8, 5–6.21.27; LM 19 D 8, 10–11.26.32.
- ¹⁶ This interpretation was already proposed by Simplicius: see DK 28 A 20; LM 19 R 5b.
- ¹⁷ See DK 28 B 1, 29; LM 19 D 4, 29. In fact, LM discard DK’s reading of the “roundness” (ἐὺκυκλέος) of truth and prefer to understand truth as “well-convincing” (εὖπειθέος), as Mourelatos (2008, pp. 154–58) had already proposed.

- 18 Τὸ μὲν οὖν εἶναι τὸ ὄν ὅταν ᾗ, καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ὅταν μὴ ᾗ, ἀνάγκη (De interpr., 19a23–24; Minio-Paluello 1949). My translation.
- 19 See DK 28 B 8, 5; LM 19 D 8, 10. For this reason, Parmenides’ ἐόν has been characterized with eternity, αἰδιον (DK 28 A 22–23; LM 19 R 29–30), although he does not use that term: see DK 28 A 30 (a testimony which does not appear in LM).
- 20 That in this passage Aristotle argues with the Megarics has been repeatedly proposed by critics (Weidemann 2014, pp. 53–54). On the Eleatic background of Megaric philosophy, see Mársico (2012). The problems raised by Cambiano (1977) about the very existence of a Megaric school and its Eleatic filiation do not affect my argument, since what interests us here is the fact that the quoted passage of Aristotle (*De interpr.*, 19a23–24) reveals some reflection on the thought of Parmenides. In any case, the modal question raised in it is certainly linked to the one expressed in *Metaph.* Θ, 3, 1046b29–32 with an unclear mention of certain “Megarics.”
- 21 DK 28 B 8, 32; LM 19 D 8, 37.
- 22 λεῖψσε δ’ ὅμως ἀπεόντα νόον παρεόντα βεβαίως· οὐ γὰρ ἀποτμήξει τὸ ἐὼν τοῦ ἐόντος ἔχθεσθαι/οὔτε σκιδνάμενον πάντη πάντως κατὰ κόσμον/οὔτε συνιστάμενον (DK 28 B 4; LM 19 D 10). LM’s translation.
- 23 My English translation of Marcinkowska-Rosó’s version. For the Greek text, see DK 28 B 8, 36–38; LM 19 D 8, 40–43.
- 24 This interpretation of time as a timeless present is also favoured by Owen (1993), Rapp (2007, p. 119) and Conte (2024, pp. 31 and 43). For a noteworthy critique of this view, see O’Brien (1980).
- 25 Curd (2011) has argued more vehemently than I’m going to do here for the discontinuity between sensation and νόος, but she believes that the proper object of νόος, unlike sensation, is Being. However, if Parmenides did not think that the senses do grasp Being (albeit only partially), then he would have affirmed that they do not inform us of anything; indeed, there would be no sensibility at all.
- 26 νῦν ἔστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν (DK 28 B 8, 5; LM 19 D 8, 10).
- 27 See DK 28 B 4; LM 19 D 10.
- 28 See DK 28 B 12, 3; B 13; B 18, 1; LM 19 D 14b, 3; D 16; D 49, 1; R 56b.
- 29 “Alle Dinge sind verkettet, verfädelt, verliebt” (Nietzsche 1988, p. 402). Despite the characteristic ‘creativity’ of his understanding of the Presocratics in Nietzsche’s youthful lectures, published under the title *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*, the fatalistic interpretation of Parmenides that I am giving does not appear there, although it is undoubtedly quite close to the personal philosophy of the German philosopher.

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Article

An Exploration of Fate in Plato's Theology: Focusing on the Interpretation of the *Timaeus*' Cosmology

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Abstract: In the *Timaeus*, Plato explores the topic of cosmology. The demiurge creates a perfect cosmos by imitating the eternal being and using necessity as an auxiliary cause. The unique cosmos not only contains immortal gods, but also mortal living beings. Concerning the academic research on cosmology in Plato's *Timaeus*, scholars have explored it through reason, good, and necessity, and they have conducted in-depth analyses of multiple dimensions, such as human organs and diseases. Nonetheless, we should acknowledge the significance of fate, a hidden thread that runs through all of Plato's cosmology. Whether it is the immortal cosmos created by the demiurge or the mortal humans created by the lesser gods, both demonstrate the significance of fate. This article takes the horizon of divine providence and uses *eikos logos* as the argument pattern to explore characteristics of determinism contained in the hidden concept of fate in the *Timaeus*. We cannot ignore the crucial significance of freedom in the thought of fate. Without freedom, the demiurge cannot achieve the overall goodness of the cosmos.

Keywords: Plato; cosmology; divine providence; *eikos logos*; determinism; freedom

1. Introduction

The thought of fate is momentous in Plato's thoughts¹, especially in the *Timaeus*. Although humans are determined by fate, freedom cannot be ignored besides the perspective of determinism, for humans are free to choose their destiny. The dilemma concerning fate lies in how to demonstrate fate's dimensions in Plato's *Timaeus*², that is, determinism, and freedom within the horizon of divine providence and laws. Moreover, what are the causes of human morality having a significant impact on fate? The exploration of human fate should ultimately be categorized as cosmology from a theological dimension. If fate is bestowed solely on imitating *eidōs*, then the bestowal of human fate will lack efficient and final causes. Supposing that the reincarnation of the soul is not in the dimension of cosmology, then this principle will lack an essential theoretical foundation. Whether from the horizon of determinism or freedom, humans' fate cannot be separated from *Timaeus*' cosmotheology. Even if fate is only a hidden concept in the *Timaeus*, this concept runs through the demiurge's creation activities, so the analysis of the cosmological dimension of human fate cannot ignore the significance of the *Timaeus*. Even though we uncover the thought of fate in the *Timaeus*, we should acknowledge the speculative and uncertain nature of this argument and not consider it as a definitive conclusion.

Scholars have analyzed Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus* in-depth from multiple dimensions. There is controversy in academia concerning the authenticity of the demiurge's creation story. Scholars represented by Owen (1953, pp. 79–95), Morrow (1950, pp. 147–63), Griffin (2005, pp. 312–27), and Broadie (2008, pp. 1–17) hold a literalist interpretation,

maintaining that the demiurge's role as a creator cannot be denied. The demiurge creates the cosmos literally by imitating eternal beings. According to the literalist interpretation, the theological and religious role of the demiurge cannot be ignored; Plato describes the demiurge as good and without jealousy, which supports this interpretation. Scholars represented by Alexander (1918, pp. 1–24) and Charbit and Virmani (2002, pp. 207–35) further deepen the literalist interpretation, holding that Plato's *Timaeus* is not simply explained from literalist interpretation but should also be elucidated from religion or theology. However, scholars represented by Cornford (1935, pp. 170–76), Cherniss (1957, pp. 225–66), Tarán (1971, pp. 372–407), and Kahn (1987, pp. 77–103) hold a metaphorist interpretation. According to these scholars, there is no actual creator in Plato's *Timaeus* who engages in creation activities. The act of the demiurge creating the cosmic soul and cosmic body by imitating eternal forms is just a metaphorical expression by Plato, and there are no actual activities of the demiurge creating the cosmos. Accordingly, the role of the demiurge is only a metaphor. Some scholars explore principles of constructing the cosmic soul and cosmic body, the transformation of the four elements, and the role of proportion in the generation of the cosmos, such as Patterson (1981, pp. 105–19), Gill (1987, pp. 34–53), Robinson (1990, pp. 113–10), and Glenn (2011, pp. 11–27). In addition, scholars represented by Krell (1975, pp. 400–21), Mohr (1985, pp. 131–44), Ilievski (2013, pp. 31–54), and Pears (2015, pp. 93–113) explore the significance of necessity in Platonic cosmology, the sources of evil in the cosmos, the definition of *khôra*, and *khôra*'s metaphors of the female. Scholars represented by Steel (2001, pp. 105–28), Brisson (2021, pp. 70–91), Prince (2014, pp. 908–28), and Wolfsdorf (2014, pp. 120–35) explore how *logos* combines with *anankê* and the consequences resulting from this combination, such as sense-organs pleasure and bodily disease³.

Academia has conducted an in-depth analysis of Platonic *Timaeus*' cosmology from both macro and micro dimensions, and has keenly noted the essential relationship between these two dimensions. Nonetheless, scholars' research has to some extent overlooked the crucial clue of "fate". Firstly, concerning the debate between literalist interpretation and metaphorist interpretation⁴, the attitude we should harbor is that metaphorist interpretation is a misinterpretation of Plato's cosmology. Supposing that the creation of the demiurge is only a metaphor, it cannot expound the efficient and final causes of the generation of the cosmos. The *Timaeus*' entire dialogue becomes almost worthless, so Plato's cosmology will no longer be a theology. Scholars mistakenly hold metaphorist interpretations because they ignore the concept of *fatum*, as fate indicates the divinity of the demiurge. Even if we oppose metaphorism, it does not mean we should fully endorse literalist interpretation, as some literalist interpreters overlook the "rationality" of fate. The literalist interpretation does not imply that the demiurge's creation is purely mythological but rather based on the principle of *eikos logos*. *Eikos logos* is momentous for fate; only through this principle can we indicate that fate is not something that has already happened but a "possible" or "reasonable" event. Although the concept of fate is not explicitly mentioned in Plato's *Timaeus*, this hidden concept runs through the creation activities of the demiurge. Supposing there is a lack of clarification on fate, it is impossible to demonstrate determinism and freedom.

Secondly, imitating forms by the cosmos requires the demiurge's *techne*, and the demiurge's principle of creation should be regarded as fate, so it is impossible to interpret the demiurge's activities without fate. Furthermore, necessity does not mean complete detachment from reason but instead has the possibility of being persuaded by reason. Consequently, necessity is a pivotal standard of whether the demiurge can construct the cosmos. Finally, whether it is human perception or disease, they are the combinations of reason and necessity, and these combinations should be understood from fate. Even if some scholars have realized that Plato's cosmology should contain fate, such as Gregory (2008, p. xxvii),

Carone (2005, p. 21), and Rosen (1979, pp. 59–85), they lack a systematic sorting of fate. Therefore, the hidden thought of fate in the *Timaeus* provides a new perspective for researching the *Timaeus* and deepens the ideological implications of Plato's cosmology.

This article takes the perspective of divine providence. It uses *eikos logos* as the argumentation pattern to conduct an in-depth analysis of the hidden fate in the *Timaeus*. By clarifying the definition and essence of the concept of fate, scholars studying the *Timaeus* can pay attention to the hidden fate and unify all of the *Timaeus*' texts on this crucial concept. Moreover, this article takes the concept of fate as a clue, which clarifies misunderstandings in Plato's *Timaeus*. This article first starts from the essential relationship between *eikos logos* and *eikos muthos*, argues for Plato's proposal of the concept of hidden fate, as well as discusses fate's origins from a textual perspective. The fate of Plato's cosmology comes from divine providence, emphasizing the theistic characteristics of fate. Secondly, from the perspective of the demiurge's creation of a macroscopic cosmos, this paper explores how fate is applied to the demiurge's process of creating the cosmic soul and body, as well as the manifestation of fate in celestial bodies, emphasizing determinism. Finally, although human destiny contains the dimension of determinism, the crucial dimension of freedom in fate cannot be ignored. Without freedom, the demiurge cannot achieve "the overall goodness" of the cosmos. Consequently, in Plato's cosmology, fate possesses the dual essence of determinism and freedom.

2. The *Timaeus*' Literary Form and Character Analysis in Dialogue

2.1. The *Timaeus*' Literary Form: Dialogue and Monologue Forms

It is essential to clarify Plato's *Timaeus*' literary form. The structure of Plato's dialogues is very complex. According to McCoy's viewpoint, Plato's dialogues have four levels, namely the thoughts expressed by the characters in the dialogues, the known "dramatic information", the unknown "dramatic information", and the comparison between Plato's dialogues and those of other philosophers (McCoy 2017, pp. 51–2). The status of the characters in the dialogue is equal. In Plato's dialogues, truth is presented in the discussion of various characters in the dialogue. Because not all the ideas in Plato's dialogues refer to his theories, we cannot confuse the views of the characters in the dialogues with Plato's perspective, as there are fundamental differences between the two. Supposing that the viewpoints expressed by each character in Plato's dialogues are not distinguished will cause complete confusion in the theory we are arguing about. McCoy also points out that Plato's dialogues have a "multivocal" characteristic; that is, Socrates is only one of the characters in the dialogue, so other characters' opinions should be valued (McCoy 2017, pp. 51–52). This assertion is a profound insight into Plato's dialogue form. According to Matskiv's perspective, some scholars in the past have overlooked the crucial significance of the literary form of dialogues for Platonic philosophy, such as Cornford (Matskiv 2021, pp. 140–51). Based on the criticism of Cornford, Matskiv asserts that the form of dialogues is related to the essence of Plato's philosophical thought. Literary forms make Plato's role in his works not a narrator of truth but rather a seeker of truth (Matskiv 2021, pp. 140–51).

As for the *Timaeus*' literary form, Plato uses a combination of dialogue and monologue forms. The similarity between the *Timaeus* and other works of Plato lies in using dialogue forms, mainly reflected in the *Timaeus* 17a1–27d4's introductory conversation. Introductory conversation uses dialogue form for the following reasons: Firstly, it is because Plato in the *Timaeus* is committed to introducing three characters in the dialogue, namely Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates. In addition, the absent fourth person is Alcibiades. Secondly, the dialogue form in the *Timaeus* can better introduce the theme of cosmology as the *Timaeus* deepens the problem domain of the *Republic*, that is, exploring what an ideal city-state is. Since the *Republic* belongs to the dialogue form, the introductory conversation in the

Timaeus should also be a dialogue form to ensure consistency in argumentation between the two works.

Thirdly, in the *Timaeus*' introductory conversation, Timaeus is also one of the characters in the dialogue. Through dialogue, it is possible to effectively demonstrate how Timaeus proposes cosmology in debates with other interlocutors and the fundamental reasons behind Timaeus' construction of a cosmological framework. The *Timaeus* uses monologue form to describe the mode of cosmic generation for the following reasons: Firstly, the various stages of cosmic generation are coherent. From the demiurge imitating eternal beings to create the cosmos to the unity of the cosmic soul and the cosmic body to the celestial and sublunar worlds, they are all in a consistent causal chain. If dialogue form is used, it will disrupt the coherence of the cosmic generation process in the *Timaeus*. Secondly, for Plato, the creation of the cosmos is a scientific topic that involves rigorously proven mathematical, astronomical, and medical theories, and these sciences are systematic and complete. Consequently, Plato's description of the cosmos takes the monologue form to facilitate our understanding of science. From a scientific perspective, cosmology requires systematic argumentation, and if the dialogue form is adopted, it will not be easy to clarify which scientific system is Plato's true stance. Thirdly, in the *Timaeus*' introductory conversation, Socrates is not the leader of the dialogue but should be regarded as the guide. The other characters, including the present Critias and Hermocrates and the absent Alcibiades, possess the identities of politicians and philosophers. Among all the characters involved in the conversation, only Timaeus is a scientist. Timaeus discusses cosmology in a monologue way, while other characters can only serve as listeners. Accordingly, the *Timaeus*' scientific characteristics determine that its literary form must be a monologue.

2.2. Character Analysis in the *Timaeus*' Introductory Conversation

Based on the above discussion of the *Timaeus*' literary form, we further analyze the philosophical connotations of characters in the *Timaeus*' introductory conversation in order to avoid confusion about the opinions in the *Timaeus*. At the beginning of the conversation, Socrates, as the guide, discusses the previous day's speech and further explores the theme of the *Republic*, mainly about the organizational structure of the ideal city-state, but does not discuss other aspects of the *Republic*. Socrates is Plato's teacher, and the views of Socrates in the dialogue represent Plato's thoughts. Socrates analyzes the various classes in the ideal city-state in the introductory conversation, and he particularly values the importance of the guardians. The guardian is an independent class separated from other classes, characterized by kindness towards the citizen but extreme cruelty towards the enemy. Guardians possess unique skills that do not create products but result in good outcomes. The guardian class has passion and reason, and it can enhance human morality. Socrates also emphasizes the cultivation of women and offspring in the city-state. Compared to the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* emphasizes the dynamics of the city-state more. Socrates' most crucial role in the *Timaeus* is as a guide, helping other characters to engage in dialogue. Socrates mocks himself as incompetent and belittles the status of poets and sophists. The poet's capacity is limited to imitation, and the sophists think they are wise, but in reality, they are ignorant. What is truly needed in the *Timaeus* is someone who is proficient in philosophy and politics, so Socrates acts as a guide to have the three characters present in the introductory conversation (*Timaeus*, 17c–20c). Hermocrates only spoke once in the *Timaeus* 20c–d, the least spoken in introductory conversation. In accordance with Lampert and Planeaux, Hermocrates plays a transition role in the *Timaeus* (Lampert and Planeaux 1998, pp. 101–7). This transformation is crucial; Socrates' speech is a continuation of the theme of the *Republic*, while the story of the war between Athens and Atlantis follows the principle of the *eikos logo*. The purpose is to illustrate how justice can overcome injustice,

thus leading to cosmology in the *Timaeus*, as cosmology also conforms to the fundamental principles of *eikos logos*.

The main speaker in the introductory conversation is Critias, an Athenian whose story concerning Atlantis comes from Solon. There is doubt about the identity of Critias in the *Timaeus*' introductory conversation (Lampert and Planeaux 1998, pp. 87–125). Someone holds that Critias is one of the thirty tyrants of Athens. Some hold that “Critias” in the dialogue is not one of the Thirty Tyrants but rather Critias' grandfather, whom we can call the “old Critias.” According to Lampert and Planeaux's inference, the character in the conversation should be the old Critias. This is because the story of Athens defeating Atlantis is a great honor, and it is impossible to entrust such a glorious war to young Critias to tell, for he is one of the thirty tyrants. In contrast, Critias' grandfather is a respected elder, so it is most appropriate for him to tell this story (Lampert and Planeaux 1998, pp. 95–100). Nonetheless, we can find opposition to Lampert and Planeaux's assertion in the text. In the *Timaeus* 20e–21a, Plato explicitly maintains that young Critias tells the story of Atlantis rather than his grandfather because young Critias hears the story from his grandfather, old Critias. Furthermore, even if the story of Athens defeating Atlantis is told by one of the thirty tyrants, it will not destroy the glorious status of this story.

In the introductory conversation, Critias praises Solon because Solon has rationality and imitative ability. Critias tells the story of Solon's travels to various city-states and explores the catastrophe humanity has faced in history. Compared to the city-states Solon traveled, Critias emphasizes Athens' prestige, and Atlantis is a representative of ambitious city-states. The ultimate victory of Athens over Atlantis is a just triumph (*Timaeus*, 20c–27d). This story is not a historical fact, and its authenticity should be regarded as “rationality”, which is the essential definition of *eikos logos*. According to Lampert and Planeaux, Timaeus of Locri is rarely mentioned in any other dialogues of Plato. We only know that Timaeus is a scientist and politician. Timaeus lives in a city-state dominated by the Pythagorean school, so it can be inferred from Lampert and Planeaux's assertion that the Pythagorean school profoundly influences Plato and, therefore, focuses on mathematics in his cosmology (Lampert and Planeaux 1998, pp. 91–95). Unlike other dialogues, Plato in the *Timaeus* tells the story of the demiurge creating the cosmos by imitating eternal beings. The constituent parts of the cosmos include the upper lunar realm, composed of immortal celestial bodies, and the sublunar realm, composed of mortal living beings and lifeless natural entities. Therefore, the *Timaeus* theory is Plato's development of his theory of *eidos*. As for the fourth person absent from the conversation, it is generally believed to be Alcibiades.

The perspectives of Socrates and Timaeus belong to Plato's theory. Socrates' viewpoint in the *Timaeus*' introductory conversation is a continuation of the *Republic*, while *Timaeus*' cosmology conforms to Plato's later thought and the transformation and innovation of middle thought. Taking a step back, even though there is indeed a person named Timaeus who proposes cosmology, at least Plato agrees with this theory and integrates it into his theoretical system. For the story of Atlantis told by Critias, we need to emphasize that it is not a story told by Plato himself, as Plato has never heard of this story from Critias' grandfather. The *Timaeus*' story about Atlantis, told through Critias, draws on the methodology of *eikos logos* and uses *eikos logos* to explore Plato's mode of cosmic creation. Hermocrates' speech is not Plato's theory. A few speeches by Hermocrates only play a transition role in the introductory conversation. This role in the dialogue cannot be regarded as Plato's. The philosophical significance of the absent fourth person does not refer to Plato. Although, both Alcibiades and Plato are committed to achieving the glory of Athens. However, the absence of Alcibiades in the dialogue indicates that he abandons cosmology, and Plato accepts the cosmology principles described by Timaeus. The inspiration comes from Lampert and Planeaux (1998, pp. 87–125).

2.3. The Purpose of Plato's Writing of the *Timaeus* and the Establishment of Corresponding Theories

Compared to the descriptions of the cosmos in Homer's epic and Hesiod's *Theogony*, Plato's cosmology achieves a transition from mythology to science, which reflects the fundamental purpose of Plato's creation of the *Timaeus*. The essential difference between the two is that the cosmos in the mythological context cannot be proven, while Plato's cosmology belongs to a verifiable scientific theory. For the cosmos in the dimension of mythology, the appearances and behaviors of gods such as Zeus or Hera cannot be judged as true or false. Once we enter the mythology context, we must hold that these appearances and behaviors are reasonable. Otherwise, we are not in the same problem domain as mythology, and thus, cosmology from the perspective of mythology cannot be confirmed. On the contrary, the cosmology in the *Timaeus* is constructed based on mathematical patterns. It has a strict rational order, so Plato's cosmology should not be understood as myth but instead as science. Consequently, Plato's cosmology aims to construct a scientific cosmos model. Regarding corresponding theories, Plato's cosmology has scientific characteristics. It cannot be denied that there are theological characteristics in Plato's cosmology, as we must acknowledge the role of the demiurge in creating the cosmos.

Plato's cosmology is a change in the perspective of the "purposeless" or "natural purpose" of cosmology, thus creating a unique "divine teleology." For the "purposeless" interpretation, generating all things in the cosmos is occasional or random, without a clear purpose. For natural teleology, although this position maintains that the creation of all things in the cosmos has a purpose, this is based on its nature. In contrast, Plato's cosmology belongs to divine teleology. The divine teleology should be clarified from the following two aspects. The generation of all things in the cosmos is purposeful, that is, to achieve goodness. For example, for humans, the purpose of muscles is to protect bones, and the purpose of bones is to protect marrow (*Timaeus*, 74e–75d). Neither of these purposes is a natural purpose but a divine purpose because the purpose of protection comes from god's divine providence. Consequently, all human purposes have religious characteristics, reflecting the fate humanity cannot escape. Regarding the corresponding theory, Plato constructs cosmology based on divine teleology.

Plato's *Timaeus* is a further advancement of the theory of *eidos* in the *Republic* and other mid-term dialogues. Plato does not provide a clear explanation in the *Republic* regarding the efficient cause behind this imitation. In the *Timaeus*, Plato proposes the concept of the demiurge, who is good and without jealousy, and the demiurge creates the cosmos by imitating *eidos*. Another innovation of Plato's creation of the *Timaeus* is that, due to the limitations of the demiurge, the *Timaeus* proposes the necessity of the third kind in creating the cosmos. Therefore, in terms of the corresponding theory, Plato achieves a transition from a binary structure to a ternary structure. For Plato's purpose in writing the *Timaeus*, the most suitable literary form should be monologue rather than conversation. Plato uses dialogue form in the *Timaeus* 17a1–27d4 because it is suitable for telling the story of Atlantis. However, cosmology is a scientific system that has undergone rational argumentation, and dialogue forms undermine the unity and integrity of scientific argumentation. For teleology, the same applies. Divine teleology runs through the *Timaeus*, and if Plato talks about cosmology in dialogue form, it causes complete confusion. In addition, the arguments for the demiurge and "the third kind" are parts of scientific cosmology, so they are also suitable to argue in monologue form.

3. The Hidden Fate in Plato's Cosmological Theology and the Methodology of "Eikos Logos"

3.1. The Definition of Fate in Plato's Cosmology

Fate is momentous in Plato's cosmology. Without fate, it is impossible to understand the dimension of the divine teleology of cosmology. Indeed, some scholars maintain that there is no discussion of fate in Plato's cosmology, but this doubt is a misinterpretation of Plato. From the demiurge's creation of immortal celestial bodies and the fate of reincarnation for humanity, it can be seen that fate is crucial for elucidating Plato's cosmology. The entry point for the concept of fate is determinism, where both heavenly races of gods and mortal humans cannot do anything without limitations and are determined by fate. Even if humans can choose their fate, their choices are governed by divine providence and cannot be entirely determined by themselves. Fate is not based on natural teleology but on divine teleology. This is the fundamental criterion for establishing Plato's cosmology as divine rather than natural teleology. It is precisely because humans accept the fate bestowed upon them by the demiurge that they cannot change the rules of reincarnation. Only through divine providence can one return to the divine celestial bodies.

It is worth emphasizing that even though determinism is crucial to fate, the importance of freedom in Platonic cosmology cannot be ignored. Compared with other mortal living beings, humans are the noblest mortals in the cosmos because the lesser gods personally create them and receive the divine fate bestowed by the demiurge. Humans are different from animals, such as beasts, because they can choose freely. For example, humans can choose to return to divine stars or choose to fall into the beasts. Therefore, from the determinism perspective, humans still have limited freedom. Moreover, the demiurge's creation of the cosmos requires divine providence and extends it to the following aspects. The bestowal of divine providence on fate is mainly reflected in the divine laws by god, such as the laws that god establishes for human reincarnation, which humans must abide by. In addition, fate is also reflected in the *techne* of god's creation of the cosmos and humanity. So, the problem we are required to deal with now is why the concept of fate holds a crucial position in Plato's *Timaeus*. What dilemmas can clarifying the concept of fate solve for Plato's cosmology? Plato's cosmology can fully reflect the above provisions on fate.

The demiurge creates a cosmos that belongs to the generation category, and necessity should be regarded as an auxiliary cause. The cosmos is perfect because the demiurge who creates the cosmos is good and without jealousy (*Timaeus*, 29d7–30c1). Consequently, for the divine purpose, he must create a perfect cosmos and cannot intentionally create an imperfect one. Gkatzaras argues that goodness is an independent concept, meaning that the essence of the demiurge does not contain goodness (Gkatzaras 2018, pp. 71–83). This is a mistaken viewpoint; if a divine craftsman does not have goodness, he cannot be the demiurge, and thus, the definition of the demiurge should contain goodness. The importance of fate is not only reflected in the demiurge's process of creating the cosmic soul and cosmic body but also in the process of the lesser gods creating mortal humans. Plato mainly defines the hidden fate in the *Timaeus* through the demiurge's "divine providence" and "foreordained", he says,

He put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, and so he constructed the cosmos. He wanted to produce a piece of work that would be as excellent and supreme as its nature would allow. This, then, in keeping with our likely account, is how we must say divine providence brought our world into being as a truly living thing, endowed with soul and intelligence.

διὰ δὴ τὸν λογισμὸν τόνδε νοῦν μὲν ἐν ψυχῇ, ψυχὴν δ' ἐν σώματι συνιστάς τὸ πᾶν συνετεκταίνετο, ὅπως ὅτι κάλλιστον εἴη κατὰ φύσιν ἄριστόν τε ἔργον ἀπειργασμένος. οὕτως οὖν δὴ κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα δεῖ λέγειν τόνδε τὸν κόσμον ζῶον ἔμψυχον ἔννουν τε τῇ ἀληθείᾳ διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν (*Timaeus*, 30b3–c1)⁵.

Plato's divine providence here embodies the determinism of fate, and the fate of divine providence is not based on Aristotelian "natural teleology", but on "divine teleology". According to Plato's perspective in the *Timaeus*, models can be divided into eternal beings and generated beings. The demiurge can choose either eternal beings or generated beings as the model. If the former is chosen, a perfect cosmos will be generated; if the latter is chosen, the cosmos will be imperfect. From the perspective of the generated perfect cosmos, the demiurge must choose an eternal being as the model. Otherwise, it is impossible to create a perfect cosmos (Johansen 2014, pp. 297–320), which is the unchangeable fate of the cosmos. More importantly, a perfect cosmos is not created by chance, but by *logos*, because the demiurge is good and without jealousy, and his divine purpose gives his creation behaviors rational characteristics, enabling him to achieve the perfection of the cosmos. In terms of divine teleology, the generated cosmos is the demiurge's mixture of soul and body through divine providence, and the becoming of the mixture is the fate of the cosmos. Fate belongs to the principle that the demiurge declares to gods (*Timaeus*, 41b–c), which indicates that fate is based on the divine providence of the demiurge. Those who can issue commands must belong to a "deity" rather than a natural god. We should agree with Cornford's viewpoint that the demiurge is a god with religious connotations rather than a natural god (Cornford 1935, p. 138). The cosmos can be created because of the divine fate bestowed upon it by the demiurge. For the demiurge's creation in the *Timaeus*, fate has a duality, which not only indicates why the perfection of the generated cosmos is not as good as the eternal form, but also effectively clarifies the cosmological dimension of ethics. The hidden fate in the *Timaeus* is not only reflected in the demiurge's creation of the immortal cosmos but also in the lesser gods' creation of mortal humans and their souls:

He divided the mixture into a number of souls equal to the number of the stars and assigned each soul to a star. He mounted each soul in a carriage, as it were, and showed it the nature of the cosmos. He described to them the laws that had been foreordained: They would all be assigned one and the same initial birth, so that none would be less well treated by him than any other.

συστήσας δὲ τὸ πᾶν διεῖλεν ψυχὰς ἰσαρίθμους τοῖς ἄστροις, ἐννεμέν θ' ἐκάστην πρὸς ἑκάστον, καὶ ἐμβιβάσας ὡς ἐς ὄχημα τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἔδειξεν, νόμους τε τοὺς εἰμαρμένους εἶπεν αὐταῖς, ὅτι γένεσις πρώτη μὲν ἔσοιτο τεταγμένη μία πᾶσιν, ἵνα μήτις ἐλαττοῖτο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, δέοι δὲ σπαρείσας αὐτὰς εἰς τὰ προσήκοντα ἐκάσταις ἑκάστα ὄργανα χρόνων (*Timaeus*, 41d4–e3).

The perfect cosmos is created by the demiurge, and this is in terms of the fate of the "macroscopic cosmos". In addition, we cannot ignore the fate of mortal humans; this reflects fate's divine providence and laws. In terms of the dimension of divine teleology contained in fate, only humans among all living beings can attain the fate bestowed by gods, and other living beings cannot attain the divine fate. Human beings do not exist in isolation in the cosmos but are a part of it. The cosmos' fate actually includes humanity's fate, and the two kinds of fates maintain essential consistency. We should delve into the analysis of divine theology and explore the fate of humanity. Mortal humans are not omnipotent but should follow the cosmos' laws and accept the demiurge's divine providence, which is the fate of mortal humans. The demiurge is only responsible for creating the macroscopic cosmos and "heavenly race of gods" (*Timaeus*, 40a1–3), but does not create mortal humans

except the immortal soul. Provided that the demiurge was to create humans, it would contradict his divine nature, so the demiurge entrusts the task of creating humans and other mortal living beings to the lesser gods. The fate of humanity can be divided into the fate of the soul and the fate of humans, which is in line with the demiurge's divine providence. Consequently, divine providence represents fate in the dimension of determinism.

For the fate of the human soul, we cannot consider it as a unified and undifferentiated "whole" but rather as composed of immortal and mortal parts. The immortal part of the human soul is made by the demiurge, while the lesser gods make the mortal part. The immortality of the human soul differs from the immortality of forms. The latter is based on its own eternity, while the former can only be obtained through the guarantee of the demiurge (*Timaeus*, 41a3–b1), thus only in an analogical sense of immortality. As for the generation of the human soul, its method follows the principle of the cosmic soul, and its components are the remaining matter used to create the cosmic soul, namely, "being", "same", and "different", and follows the dual principles of "divisible" and "indivisible" (*Timaeus*, 34b–36d). The demiurge creates celestial bodies, which we can call the "heavenly race of gods" in a mythological sense. The demiurge assigns a unique celestial body to each human soul, indicating that the demiurge has set the possibility for mortal humans to return to the divine stars, which is a positive regulation of human fate. After configuring celestial bodies for the human soul, the demiurge sets two principles for the fate of the human soul: first, the demiurge's creation of the immortal part of the human soul is not constrained by time because time is created by the demiurge, and he cannot be limited by the time he has created himself. There is no chronological order for every immortal part of the human soul, and every human soul possesses an equally noble and prioritized fate. Secondly, the demiurge's goodness and lack of jealousy determine that he cannot create any individual human soul. Otherwise, it will contradict his nature. The demiurge entrusts this task to the lesser gods, who are immortal and good. Any human soul is the perfect soul among "possible human souls", and the becoming of the human soul contains the dimension of divine providence, which guarantees the perfection of the human soul.

After analyzing the fate of the human soul, we should further explore the fate of humanity itself. The exploration of the human soul is a preparatory step in analyzing the fate of humanity. Human beings are composed of soul and body, and the demiurge does not create humans, but entrusts this task to the lesser gods. The demiurge, out of his goodness and lack of jealousy, does not personally create mortals, but we cannot ignore the demiurge's divine providence on the fate of humanity. Because the demiurge is only responsible for formulating the laws of fate, he is not accountable for the evil in the cosmos. The demiurge sets the fate of human reincarnation, the lesser gods create sensations and emotions for humans, and these irrational activities disturb the human soul. Suppose humans can overcome the disturbance of sensation and emotion with reason and restore peace to their souls. In that case, humans will return to their exclusive celestial stars and obtain the fate of divine goodness. If a man cannot restrain his emotions and sensations by reason but succumbs to his desires, he will be reincarnated as a woman. If a woman cannot restrain her irrational capacities with reason, she will be reincarnated as a beast (*Timaeus*, 42a–d).

Concerning the fate of human reincarnation, we should not only pay attention to the possibility of human fate's fall but also distinguish *Timaeus'* divine teleology of cosmos' fate from Aristotle's natural teleology. For Aristotle, the motion of all things in the cosmos is caused by their nature, and no divine reason leads to the creation of a perfect cosmos. Although fate is determined by the final cause, this purpose is not based on natural teleology but on divine teleology with religious or theological features; therefore, human fate should be regarded as a divine destiny. Only when reincarnation is based on divine teleology can humans revere the demiurge and obey his divine providence, and thus Plato's

cosmology is a theology that cannot be simply understood from a scientific perspective. Fate is the cosmological law promulgated by the demiurge for humanity, we can clarify it from Johansen's distinction between *aitia* and *aitios* (Johansen 2014, pp. 297–320). On the one hand, the demiurge formulates the laws of human destiny, indicating that the demiurge is the efficient and final cause of human generation. On the other hand, the demiurge is not the cause (Johansen 2014, pp. 297–320), as he is only responsible for formulating the laws of fate and does not create humans. The evil of mortal living beings is caused by the lesser gods and mortal living beings, so the demiurge is not responsible for any evil in the cosmos. The demiurge regards goodness as its divine purpose in creating the cosmos. Evil should be regarded as imperfection. Even if imperfect beings exist in the cosmos, the lesser gods should still be responsible for them.

3.2. *Eikos Logos: The Divine Laws of Fate in Cosmology*

Concerning the key question about Plato and the *Timaeus'* cosmology, since the demiurge is good and without jealousy, why does he not make the cosmos as perfect as the eternal form but only create the cosmos that belongs to the category of "generation"? Why not make human beings like the cosmos but mortal beings? Does this mean that Plato's cosmology is contradictory? Or does it indicate that the *Timaeus* has a lower status in Plato's dialogues? This is because the *Timaeus* focuses on the cosmos that belongs to the generation category rather than eternal forms. Furthermore, the demiurge endows the immortal cosmos and the mortal humans with fate. Can this fate only be understood from a negative perspective? The principle of *eikos logos* can resolve this dilemma. For instance, human vision is not independent but necessarily has its astronomical purpose, which embodies the principle of *eikos logos*. Plato's description of vision follows the principle of "like knows like" of pre-Socratic philosophers. According to Plato, humans have vision because the internal fire of the eyes can maintain consistency with the external fire. External fire enters the eyes and transmits it to the human soul, thus enabling humans to possess vision. Since vision is generated by the consistency between the internal and external fire of the eye, once the external fire disappears, humans' vision will cease (*Timaeus*, 45b–46a).

Eikos logos is necessary for Plato's cosmology because Plato not only distinguishes between eternal and generated beings from an ontological perspective but also distinguishes between "account of eternal beings" and "account of generated beings." As mentioned in the introduction, there is a debate in academia between literalist and metaphorist interpretations concerning the demiurge's creation of the cosmos. Both schemes have key flaws to some extent, and the fundamental reason lies in the misinterpretation of the relationship between *eikos logos* and *eikos muthos* in the *Timaeus*. Metaphorist interpreters only focus on *eikos logos* but ignore *eikos muthos*, leading to their inability to insist on the essential *eikos logos*. Although the literalist interpretation scheme is correct, some literalists only focus on *eikos muthos* and ignore *eikos logos*, which also results in the inability of literalists to insist *eikos muthos* because it is neither a historical fact nor hearsay. Vlastos believes mythology should be regarded as a scientific hypothesis (Vlastos 1965, pp. 401–19). The revelation for us is that the essence of mythology lies in rationality and should be understood as "another kind of truth", that is, authenticity does not lie in the past but in the future. In Plato's cosmology, *eikos logos* is not purely inferential or argumentative but contains the meaning of *eikos muthos*. *Eikos muthos* is not commonly referred to as a myth but rather a reasonable story (Burnyeat 2005, pp. 143–65). If *eikos muthos* is separated from *eikos logos*, then Plato's cosmology cannot be regarded as a theology, which is a misinterpretation of Plato. The *eikos logos* in the *Timaeus* should be demonstrated from the following three aspects:

Firstly, the immortal cosmos is created by the demiurge, while the lesser gods create mortal humans. From the perspective of *eikos logos*, both the cosmos and humanity are

determined by a “similar” fate, which is the first meaning of *eikos logos*. In *Timaeus*’ cosmology, denying the similarity between the imitation and the model is impossible. The cosmos is created by the demiurge, imitating eternal beings, so there is a similarity between the cosmos and *eidōs*. Mortal humans are created by imitating the cosmos, so there are similarities between humans and the cosmos. Fronterotta points out that not only is the sensible world alive, but also the intelligible world is alive, whereas there are fundamental differences in the “alive” way (Fronterotta 2021, pp. 49–69). His insight is that similarity can only be defined in an analogical sense due to the fundamental rupture between eternal and generated things. For instance, the forms and the cosmos have uniqueness, but the forms are unique because they belong to the self-prediction structure (Patterson 1981, pp. 105–19). Although the cosmos has the characteristic of uniqueness, this is because it is vast and all-encompassing. Even if both forms and the cosmos have eternity, the eternity of forms is within the essential horizon, while the eternity of the cosmos is only relative. The cosmos belongs to the category of generated beings, and its eternity is guaranteed by the demiurge. For humans, the reason why the four elements can be interconnected is because they are combined with rivets (*Timaeus*, 43a1–5). Even though the definition of *eikos logos* is not simply the similarity, we cannot deny the significance of the similarity standard of *eikos logos*.

Secondly, according to the principle of *eikos logos*, the cosmos’ fate in Plato’s *Timaeus* cannot be clarified from similarity simply but should be regarded as rationality. In *Timaeus*, the principle of *eikos logos* regarding the fate of the cosmos comes from the war between Athens and Atlantis⁶ in the *Timaeus*’ introductory conversation. Athens is a typical glorious city-state, representing moderation; Atlantis is a typical ambitious city-state, representing greed. According to Critias’ description, the winner of this war is Athens, indicating that reason will triumph over irrationality and justice will ultimately triumph over injustice (*Timaeus*, 20c4–27d4). Lampert and Planeaux regard the absence of the fourth person at the beginning of the *Timaeus* as an expression of the role of cosmology, which indicates the *Timaeus*’ commitment to expressing truth rather than historical facts (Lampert and Planeaux 1998, pp. 87–125). Therefore, the war between Athens and Atlantis is not a true story but a “reasonable story.” The “reasonable” does not require occurring in actuality but only requires conforming to humans’ reason. The hidden fate in the *Timaeus* contains the principle of *eikos logos* from a rational perspective. On the one hand, whether it is for the macroscopic cosmos or the mortal human body, the conception of fate does not belong to pure rational reasoning, but contains *eikos muthos* in its definition. On the other hand, even if fate is endowed by divine demiurge, we cannot understand fate as a myth of hearsay but rather as another actuality. From the mythology perspective, fate already contains *eikos logos* in its definition. Whether it is the demiurge creating the cosmos or the lesser gods creating humanity, these activities should have rationality and cannot be regarded as actual historical events. Therefore, the *Timaeus* holds a significant position in Plato’s dialogues due to the unique “rationality” of cosmology. Fate is a concept with rationality, a positive stance on the definition of fate.

Thirdly, according to *eikos logos*, the fate in Platonic cosmology should be innovative. In Plato’s cosmology, although the demiurge endows the cosmos with an immortal fate and the lesser gods endow humanity with a mortal and reincarnated fate, this does not mean that the cosmos can only be considered a simple deficiency compared to eternal beings. Similarly, we cannot assume that humans belong to living beings with simple deficiencies compared to the cosmos. The fundamental reason we make such an assertion is that whether the creator is the demiurge or the lesser god, their imitation of the corresponding models is not simply for aesthetic purposes but more for the perspective of divine teleology that focuses on the imitation of the function of the model. The demiurge creates the cosmos without absolutely replicating forms; otherwise, not only would no cosmos belong to the

realm of generation, but it would also lead to the cosmos being imperfect and negative, as this pure imitation lacks the dimension of functionality. the demiurge imitates forms to create the cosmos, which is not a simple replication activity but an innovation based on forms. Similarly, in creating mortal humans by the lesser gods, the human head imitates the spherical shape of the cosmos because it is the most perfect of all shapes. Nonetheless, humans do not simply replicate the spherical shape of the cosmos but create limbs for the spherical head to support it (*Timaeus*, 44e–45a).

Consequently, fate is crucial in the *Timaeus*' cosmology. Although the *Timaeus* does not explicitly mention fate, the hidden thought of fate is a link between the demiurge and the cosmos and between the lesser gods and humanity in a dual dimension. The fate in Plato's cosmology cannot be attributed to Aristotelian natural teleology but divine teleology with religious characteristics. According to the relationship between *eikos logos* and *eikos muthos*, even if we should acknowledge that fate leads to a lack of completeness between the cosmos and humanity, we cannot ignore the positive dimension of fate, which still contains rationality and innovativeness.

4. The Divine Providence of Fate in the *Timaeus*: Based on the Macroscopic Dimension of the Cosmos

4.1. Divine Providence and Reason: The Laws of the Fate

Since humans' fate requires a necessary cosmological foundation, it is essential to analyze the cosmos' fate from a macro perspective, which is a prerequisite for exploring the fate of mortal humans. Concerning the crucial dilemma we require to resolve, why is perfection the fate of the cosmos? According to the demiurge's laws of fate bestowed upon the cosmos, this cosmos is generated by divine providence. The divine purpose of the demiurge creating the cosmos is to achieve the cosmos' perfection and strive to actualize goodness. The cosmos we live in is perfect, and the demiurge should choose eternal beings as models to create the cosmos rather than generating beings as models⁷. Multiple causes exist for creating the cosmos, and the demiurge may not be the only cause for its perfection (Johansen 2014, pp. 297–320). However, only the demiurge can guarantee the perfection of the cosmos. The demiurge can create the perfect cosmos because he is good and not jealous, so the cosmos he creates is also good. Otherwise, it will contradict the demiurge's nature of goodness. Secondly, the demiurge uses divine reason to ensure the necessity of the perfection of the cosmos. Unlike irrational factors, divine reason is the essential cause for specific characteristics to persist. Fate, from a rational perspective, endows the cosmos with the nature of goodness, and this nature is necessary; that is, the fate of the cosmos is not limited to any external conditions but can occur at any time.

According to Plato, the cosmos is created by the demiurge according to his divine providence, and this principle contains the demiurge's reason. Therefore, this reflects the demiurge's law of fate in creating the cosmos, where he uses rational *technē* to create a perfect cosmos. The fate of the cosmos is reflected in its perfection, so the status of the cosmos is not low because the demiurge's rationality endows the necessary occurrence of perfection in the cosmos and transforms it from disordered chaos to ordered state. Plato believes in the *Timaeus* that the creation of the cosmos is based on the demiurge's providence because this creation belongs to divine theology. Unlike natural teleology, the *Timaeus*' teleology embodies the divine fate. Plato believes in the *Timaeus* that in the demiurge's creation activity, the cosmos is similar to the perfect particular (*Timaeus*, 30c2–31a1). This assertion is a metaphor because the cosmos is the most perfect particular. Supposing that there exists a more perfect particular besides the cosmos, then it contradicts the uniqueness of the cosmos. There is a fundamental difference between the uniqueness of the cosmos and the uniqueness of forms because the uniqueness of the cosmos does not come from

self-prediction but from the “all-encompassing” of the cosmos. From this, the macro perspective of the cosmos reflects similarity, rationality, and innovativeness and embodies the cosmological dimension that human ethics should possess.

The proportional method conforms to the divine purpose of the demiurge; therefore, “conforming to proportion” should be regarded as the cosmos’ fate from a macro perspective. Why does Plato’s cosmology require proportion? Why is proportion the fate of the cosmos? The proportional method is important to Plato’s cosmology because it conforms to the divine purpose of the demiurge. According to Glenn, provided that the parts of the cosmos are even and identical, motion cannot occur because the cosmos lacks the efficient cause to move. If all parts of the cosmos are entirely different, then motion cannot occur because the different parts mutually destroy each other and thus cannot cause motion. The proportional method appropriately solves the problem of cosmic motion. If the various parts of the cosmos conform to proportion, then each part can maintain independence while keeping balance, thus not being entirely even and identical. If the various parts of the cosmos are in proportion and strictly located in their respective regions, they will not mutually destroy each other. Only by introducing proportions into the cosmos can the demiurge generate four complete elements (Glenn 2011, pp. 11–27). Therefore, the proportional method is the best solution to solve cosmic motion’s difficulties; thus, the proportion is also the fate bestowed upon the cosmos by the demiurge. The cosmic soul and body should follow the proportion method in creating the cosmos.

4.2. *The Demiurge’s Divine Laws and Techne of Creating the Cosmos: The Fate of the Cosmic Soul and the Cosmic Body*

If the cosmic body should be material, then the demiurge should rely on the elements of earth and fire to construct the cosmic body, because the earth ensures that the cosmic body is touchable. Fire ensures that the cosmic body is visible. Although earth and fire are necessary for forming the cosmic body, the cosmos cannot be formed solely by these two elements. Earth and fire are entirely different elements in nature and cannot be directly combined. Consequently, concerning the formation of the cosmic body, the elements of earth and fire must be mediated by water and air. Only through water and air can earth and fire essentially bond. The two “extreme terms”, earth and fire, require two “middle terms”, water and air. Only through two middle terms can the three-dimensional solid of the cosmic body be established (*Timaeus*, 31b–32c). The combination of the four elements belongs to the “generated beings” category, and these elements cannot be classified as the world of forms. Consequently, the combination of the four elements does not possess essential eternity. Nonetheless, this combination is still immortal because the demiurge’s goodness and lack of jealousy ensure that the four elements can never be decomposed. Although the demiurge has the “free will” to decompose the four elements, due to his rational goodness, the capacity of freedom can never be transformed into actuality, thus ensuring the fate of the four elements that cannot be decomposed. Furthermore, the fate bestowed upon the cosmic body is the uniqueness of “all-encompassing”, so the demiurge exhausts all components in creating the cosmic body. The cosmos is only perfect in an analogical sense; therefore, the cosmos is the only world that the demiurge can create; he cannot create another “perfect particular” besides the cosmos. In order to give the cosmic body the fate intertwined with the cosmic soul, the demiurge makes the cosmic body into the most perfect spherical. Though the human head is also spherical, the cosmic body is different from humans’ body. The cosmos is spherical, so it has no sense organs and does not possess limbs (*Timaeus*, 34a–b).

After the demiurge sets the fate for the cosmic body, he further sets the fate for the cosmic soul. The cosmic soul is important in Plato’s cosmology because it determines the essence of the cosmos, and it is the source of humans’ fate. Accordingly, exploring

the cosmic soul is necessary to clarify the clues of Plato's cosmology. The reason why the cosmic soul is discussed after the cosmic body cannot be attributed to the body being more honorable than the soul, which is a misinterpretation of the relationship between the soul and the body. The cosmic soul plays a dominant role, but only by first exploring the cosmic body can the prerequisites be provided for the combination of soul and body (*Timaeus*, 34b–35a). The combination of the cosmic soul and the cosmic body should be regarded as fate because the demiurge creates living bodies through divine providence. Consequently, concerning the construction of the cosmos, the cosmic body takes precedence over the cosmic soul in terms of discourse order. In contrast, the cosmic soul precedes the cosmic body in terms of ontology and ethics. Plato in the *Timaeus* states that according to the demiurge's divine providence, the ensouled entity is the first generated being. The demiurge's creation of the cosmic soul holds a crucial position in the fate of the cosmos from the perspective of divine teleology (*Timaeus*, 30e1–2). Components of the soul in the cosmos are "Being", "Same", and "Different." The demiurge combines these three components in a dual way of "separable" and "inseparable" to form a unified entity and divides this single mixture into multiple parts, each of which is a mixture of the three components of "Being", "Same", and "Different" in a "separable" and "inseparable" manner (*Timaeus*, 35b–c). The cosmic soul can generate movement because the demiurge creates the cosmic soul for a divine purpose, so Plato's cosmology is not purely scientific knowledge but should be regarded as cosmology. The cosmos comprises the cosmic soul and body, which is the fate the cosmos has accepted from the demiurge.

The fate of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*' macro perspective follows the *eikos logos* that begins with "introductory conversation", which is in line with the demiurge's divine providence of goodness and nonjealousy. The demiurge imitates eternity to create the cosmos, and this perfect cosmos also possesses eternity. Nevertheless, the cosmos cannot possess essential eternity, as it is a product of the demiurge's creation, and its eternity can only be understood in an analogical sense. According to the *Timaeus*' divine teleology, time is the eternal cosmos' motion in an analogical sense; scholars represented by McHugh have fully affirmed the role of time in cosmology (McHugh 2019, pp. 167–84). According to the fundamental principle of *eikos logos*, this is the "similar" fate the cosmos must accept. The eternity of cosmic time conforms to the fundamental principle of *eikos logos* because the eternity of *eidos* is defined as a "moving image of eternity." In contrast, the eternity of time is the image "moving according to number" (*Timaeus*, 37d–e). The demiurge sets days, nights, months, and years, providing a measurable scale for the cosmos and allowing for better time observation (*Timaeus*, 38e3–40d5). Time is created by imitating the eternal model, and the demiurge creates planets to make time measurable. Planets are in continuous motion, and each planet is placed in its designated orbits, with different directions of motion for different planets. Since the "same" circle is the origin of soul cognition, and the "different" circle is the origin of soul movement, the moving planets are placed in different orbits, and cognition is not the task of the demiurge-creating planets.

5. The Fate of Humanity in the Dimension of Determinism: The Combination of Reason and Necessity

5.1. Examining the Essential Relationship Between Humans and the Cosmos: Based on the Divine Laws of *Eikos Logos*

Broadie maintains that we cannot equate Plato's cosmology with Abrahamic theological tradition (Broadie 2012, p. 11). Broadie's viewpoint provides important inspiration for our understanding of the demiurge, which cannot be equated with the Christian God. The Christian God is "perfect" and "omnipotent." God can create from nothing without any auxiliary cause. Even though the demiurge is a rational god who is good and without

jealousy, he is not omnipotent because while the demiurge uses reason as the “main reason” for creating the cosmos, he also uses necessity as an “auxiliary reason” (*Timaeus*, 46c-e). Consequently, the creation of the cosmos cannot be accomplished solely by the demiurge but should be a combination of reason and necessity. Necessity should be regarded as the limitation under which reason can function. Although the demiurge imitates forms to create the cosmos, this creation activity relies on fundamental elements such as fire, earth, water, and air. The elements that belong to necessity are not complete bodies but only “traces”⁸ of the elements. These element traces do not have a stable nature, and we cannot call them “this” but rather “this such” (*Timaeus*, 49e1–4). The complete elements can be formed only through rational persuasion and setting the geometric structure for element traces. There is no similarity between element traces and elements regarding “appearance.” In addition, space is “the third kind” besides eternal beings and generated beings (*Timaeus*, 48e2–3). Necessity is closely related to space, as space is the “receptacle” of the movement of elements and their traces. If there is no space, then the generation of the cosmos will lack ontological premise. Space and element traces are inseparable; both are constantly in “mutual shaking”, and both belong to the category of necessity (*Timaeus*, 52e2–4). In terms of the fate of the cosmos, reason and necessity are in an essential tension. On the one hand, reason is committed to persuading necessity. On the other hand, necessity resists reason’s persuasion, so not all things with necessity can be persuaded by reason. Accordingly, necessity serves as an auxiliary cause in the creation of the demiurge and as a limitation on the cosmic creation process.

The clarification of the concept of fate should be placed within the horizon of *eikos logos*, which is not only reflected in the demiurge’s bestowal of the fate of the cosmos from a macro perspective but also in the demiurge and the lesser gods’ bestowal of humans’ fate, as humans are the most exemplary case of the combination of reason and necessity. Plato divides the living bodies in the cosmos into four kinds: the “heavenly race of gods”, “the kind that has wings and travels through the air”, “the kind that lives in water”, and “the kind that has feet and lives on land” (*Timaeus*, 40a1–3). The first type should be considered the lesser gods, while the latter three belong to mortal living beings. Although the heavenly race of gods is immortal, they are not immortal on their own but through the guarantee of the demiurge. The demiurge is good; he cannot allow the heavenly race of gods to be decayed. The difference between the two is that the immortality of *eidos* is obtained on its own, while the immortality of the heavenly race of gods is obtained through the demiurge. In the mortal living bodies, humans occupy the most prestigious position and belong to the highest level in the reincarnation of the mortal living beings. Plato only mentions a few words for other living beings and does not discuss them as a pivotal issue (*Timaeus*, 90e1–3). The fate of humanity is jointly bestowed by the demiurge and the lesser gods. The demiurge is responsible for creating the immortal parts of the human soul. The lesser gods are responsible for creating the mortal parts of the human soul and combining the soul with the body to create a mortal human being. The demiurge promulgates the laws of fate for humanity, especially in revealing the nature of the cosmos and humans (*Timaeus*, 41e1–2), showing that the ethical world of human life should be built in the cosmological dimension. Based on the principle of *eikos logos*, humans’ imitation of the cosmos’ fate is an active process that cannot be elucidated in a one-sided passive sense. Plato regards humanity as composed of soul and body and regards the soul as the master of humanity. Nonetheless, due to the standard of “similarity” of *eikos logos*, humans are not as perfect as the cosmos or the heavenly race of gods.

According to the demiurge’s divine providence, both the soul and humanity are endowed with fate, and the discussion of the soul is a prerequisite for interpreting the living body. The human soul is destined to be impure. According to the principle of

eikos logos, the human soul imitates the cosmic soul, thus endowing human fate with the necessary cosmological dimension. We still need to recognize that the perfection of the human soul is inferior to that of the cosmic soul, and the essential reason for this is that the cosmic soul is pure, while the human soul is impure. The human and cosmic souls are created using the same method; that is, they are the mixtures of “divisible” and “indivisible” beings, same and different. The difference between the two is that the cosmic soul is composed of pure components. The human soul is composed of the remaining impure components of the demiurge making cosmic soul, and therefore does not have absolute purity (*Timaeus*, 41d4–e5). Regarding the fate bestowed by the demiurge and the lesser gods, the human soul is composed of immortal and mortal parts, whereas the demiurge crafts the immortal part, and the mortal soul is created by the lesser gods. Even though the demiurge establishes the principles of the human soul, and creates the immortal parts of the human soul, the human soul in the overall⁹ perspective is immortal. The difference between the human and cosmic souls is not simply the standard of purity, but instead a difference in essence. Although the human soul is destined to be imperfect, the demiurge places it in a positive dimension and does not allow it to continue declining. The demiurge assigns an exclusive celestial star to each human soul so that any human soul can return to the divine star and fulfill human fate’s goodness. Due to the immortal part of the soul being created by the demiurge, the human soul can embody the demiurge’s goodness and lack of jealousy. It is precisely because of the existence of the immortal part in the soul that there is no distinction between different human souls, and this activity manifests the divine purpose of the demiurge.

5.2. The Fate of Human Reincarnation: The Dimension of Determinism

After endowing the cosmic souls with impurity and fate to return to celestial bodies, the demiurge does not create humans and other mortal beings but entrusts this task to the lesser gods. As the demiurge is only responsible for issuing divine laws and creating immortal parts of the human soul, he is not accountable for cosmic evil. The reason why the demiurge is not responsible for evil is not only due to his goodness and lack of jealousy but also because he provides humanity with “free will”, and, more importantly, because this is the essential way to achieve the “overall goodness” of the cosmos; this assertion of overall goodness originates from Johansen (2021, pp. 86–108). Even though the lesser gods accomplish the task of creating humans, the demiurge sets the fate of reincarnation for humanity. From the perspective of humans’ activity in the cosmos, the lesser gods create sensation and desire for humans. Plato explains these two activities from a negative perspective, as they would disrupt human reason. If a man can overcome the disturbance of sensation and desire with reason, he will return to the celestial body and live a life of happiness. If a man cannot overcome this disturbance, he will be reborn as a woman in the next life. If a woman cannot rationally restrain disturbance, she will be reborn as a beast in the next life (*Timaeus*, 42a1–d2). The demiurge not only sets the fate of corruption for humanity but also sets the fate of leading to divinity for humanity, and this dual dimension of fate is not static but in a dynamic transformation. From the fate of human reincarnation, cosmology and ethics are interdependent. On the one hand, the fate of human reincarnation is a part of cosmology, indicating that human ethics is based on cosmology. On the other hand, the creator of the cosmos is the demiurge, and the demiurge’s nature should be elucidated from an ethical perspective: goodness and nonjealousy. Plato’s cosmology is not a purely natural scientific theory but should be elucidated from ethics. The reason why humans are reincarnated and mortal humans do not possess the perfection is because the demiurge creates the cosmos with the divine purpose of “overall goodness”, which reflects the dual dimension of cosmology and ethics in Plato’s cosmology.

Similar to the macro perspective of the cosmos, the fate of humanity also follows the principle of *eikos logos*. As for the “similarity” standard of *eikos logos*, the cosmic and human bodies are constructed by the demiurge through four elements. From the perspective of the mutual influence between the soul and the body, the fate of humanity and the cosmos is similar. In terms of the “innovation” standard of *eikos logos*, the innovation of mortal humans compared to the cosmos is reflected in this aspect: the human body is different from the cosmic body, and the two are only similar in an analogical sense because the lesser gods make the human body, using rivets to combine the four elements (*Timaeus*, 43a2–5). Due to humans’ four limbs, the human body does not rotate like the cosmic body but moves in six irrational ways: forward and backward, up and down, and left and right (*Timaeus*, 43b1–3).

The demiurge is different from the Christian God because he cannot create the cosmos out of nothing. Although reason is the leading cause for the demiurge’s creation, the role of necessity as an auxiliary cause in creating the cosmos cannot be ignored. Humanity is a prime example of the combination of reason and necessity, and this is also the fate of mortal humans in the cosmos. Out of the divine purpose of the demiurge for the overall goodness of the cosmos, only when there are imperfect and mortal beings in the overall cosmos, is the cosmos essentially perfect. If humans and beasts are as perfect as the heavenly race of gods, then the cosmos cannot reflect hierarchical differences. A cosmos without hierarchical differences is imperfect, so there is an inherent contradiction between the perfection of parts and the whole. Due to the demiurge’s goodness and lack of jealousy, he cannot intentionally create evil in the cosmos, and evil cannot be equated with imperfection. According to the demiurge’s regulations on the fate of the cosmos, he allows imperfect things to exist in the cosmos, which does not violate his goodness. According to *eikos logos*, forms are eternal beings, while the cosmos is a generated being. According to the “similarity standard”, the cosmos is imperfect compared to forms. Similarly, humans are more imperfect than the cosmos, as the cosmos is immortal while humans are mortal. The imperfect elements in the cosmos are caused by the divine providence of “overall goodness”, and evil cannot be the result of divine providence.

Imperfection is a fate humans cannot escape in the cosmos; human reason is located in the brain, which is protected by the human skull. The skull is protected by muscles and tendons, forming a complete set of brain tissue. There is an irreconcilable contradiction regarding the human brain: the thicker the skull and muscles, the longer humans live, but they become more foolish. On the contrary, the thinner the skull and muscles, the shorter the lifespan of humans, but they become smarter (*Timaeus*, 75a–c). The contradiction between reason and the body demonstrates that human fate will never achieve absolute perfection. Longevity leads to stupidity, while intelligence or goodness leads to a short lifespan. Out of the divine purpose, the lesser gods choose short lifespans and more goodness and intelligence as the best choice for human soul. In order to maximize human goodness and intelligence, they make the human skull and muscles as thin as possible (*Timaeus*, 75c1–2). Due to the purpose of the overall goodness, the demiurge sets sensation and desire for humanity, which disrupts the human soul. According to Plato, Even though sensation and desire disrupt the human soul, they also allow the soul to restore reason, thus achieving the overall goodness. The diseases of the human soul and body reflect the imperfect fate of humanity, and this is a necessary way to achieve the overall goodness. The reason why humans suffer from diseases is due to the excess and lack of the four elements. Element traces belong to the category of necessity, and there is no reason in these traces that persuades necessity. Plato uses the proportional method from a mathematical perspective, and employs triangles to construct a complete set of elements from elemental traces, thus exhibiting rational characteristics within the four elements. By comparing

the elements and their traces, the imperfection of the human body is precisely due to the divine purpose of achieving overall goodness rather than being caused by the aimless cause.” Although humans may suffer from diseases, they possess the fate of returning to health. According to the principle of the combination of reason and necessity, the way for humans to achieve health is for the soul and body to achieve proportional harmony. In the relationship between the soul and the body, any substance that is too powerful can lead to human diseases.

6. The Freedom Dimension of Fate: Breaking Free from Determinism

6.1. The Demiurge’s Freedom: A Critical Dimension of Cosmic Fate

In Plato’s cosmology, there is no one-sided *eikos logos*; it should contain *eikos muthos* in its definition. Otherwise, Plato’s cosmology would lack a theological dimension, leading to a misunderstanding of metaphorist interpretation. According to the principle of *eikos logos*, determinism is a fundamental characteristic of Platonic fate, and neither the cosmos nor humanity can escape fate. The thought of fate in this perspective is manifested in the fact that both the immortal cosmos and the mortal humans are determined by fate, which can be demonstrated from both positive and negative dimensions. Even if acknowledging the importance of determinism in Platonic cosmology, we cannot ignore the role of freedom¹⁰. Consequently, the hidden concept of fate in Plato’s *Timaeus* contains dimensions of determinism and freedom. Some scholars assert that the necessity of human freedom should be acknowledged, such as Morrow (1950, p. 150), Pearson (1986, p. 354), and Pears (2015, p. 93). Freedom is indispensable in the cosmos and a crux of fate. If there is no freedom in the cosmos, then it is impossible to manifest the demiurge’s goodness and lack of jealousy, nor can it achieve the overall goodness. Provided that there exists a cosmos lacking freedom, it means that the demiurge intentionally commits evil, which is contradictory to his nature of goodness. Only through freedom can humans establish their noble status among mortal beings, actively believe in gods, and obey the divine providence. Otherwise, humans will be no different from other mortal living bodies. It is necessary to clarify the free will to explore whether humans can break away from determinism.

According to the principle of *eikos logos* and *eikos muthos*, humans are immortal beings formed by imitating the cosmos, which reflects the similarity standard of *eikos logos* and embodies the significance of divine fate. Since the human generation should be placed in the dimension of cosmology, human freedom is also derived through the demiurge’s imitation of the cosmos. Even though the lesser gods create humans, the origin of cosmology still requires to be sought for human freedom. The primary dilemma we should address is how the demiurge embodies the importance of freedom in creating the cosmos. The cosmos is created by the demiurge; there are two candidates for the model used to create the cosmos, the eternal being and the generated being (*Timaeus*, 27d5–28b2). Because the demiurge has divine providence for the cosmos, he can choose a model for creating the cosmos. The demiurge can use the eternal being or the generated being as a model, we can even consider this as the demiurge’s free will. Although not as omnipotent as the Christian God, the demiurge still has the ability to choose the model. The pivotal difference between the demiurge and God is whether necessity is required as an auxiliary cause. The cosmos is the demiurge’s product; whether it is perfect or imperfect, it is the result of the demiurge’s free choice, and hence, he is responsible for the result of his choice. Nonetheless, it is imperative to emphasize that even though the demiurge can choose which model to use in creating the cosmos, he cannot make an actual choice (Johansen 2005, p. 73). The demiurge has the capacity to choose which model to use, but this capacity is never indeed applied in actuality. Although the demiurge can choose eternal beings or generated beings as models, he must choose eternal beings and cannot choose generated beings. The demiurge has “free

will” but does not make real choices because the demiurge is good and without jealousy. His actions in creating the cosmos are all for a divine purpose, so he cannot deliberately create an imperfect cosmos based on the model of the generated beings; otherwise, it will contradict his goodness. Therefore, the demiurge must choose eternal beings as models and create the most perfect cosmos among all possible situations.

6.2. Potentiality and Actuality: The Free Dimension of Human Fate in the Cosmos

Although the mortal living bodies in the cosmos contain humans, beasts, and plants, Plato emphasizes that we should focus on humans, so he briefly mentions other mortal living bodies (*Timaeus*, 90e1–3). According to the principle of *eikos logos*, mortal humans imitate the structure of the cosmos and the free will¹¹ of the demiurge to create the cosmos. The active imitation of the demiurge’s process of creating the cosmos reflects the freedom in human fate, as humans can choose to imitate the demiurge’s creation behavior. The demiurge promulgates the laws of fate for humanity, the most crucial of which is to set the fate of reincarnation for humanity:

If a person lived a good life throughout his time, he would return to his dwelling place in his companion star to live a life of happiness that agreed with his character. However, if he failed, he would be born a second time as a woman. Moreover, even if he still could not refrain from wickedness, he would be changed again, this time into some wild animal resembling the wicked character he had acquired.

ὥν εἰ μὲν κρατήσοιεν, δίκη βιώσοιντο, κρατηθέντες δὲ ἀδικίᾳ. καὶ ὁ μὲν εὖ τὸν προσήκοντα χρόνον βιούσας, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου, βίον εὐδαίμονα καὶ συνήθη ἔξει, σφαλὲς δὲ τούτων εἰς γυναικὸς φύσιν ἐν τῇ. δευτέρᾳ γενέσει μεταβαλοῖ: μὴ παυόμενός τε ἐν τούτοις ἔτι κακίας, τρόπον ὃν κακύνοιτο, κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῆς τοῦ τρόπου γενέσεως εἷς τινα τοιαύτην αἰ μεταβαλοῖ θήρειον φύσιν, ἀλλάττων τε οὐ πρότερον πόνων λήξει (*Timaeus*, 42b2–c3).

According to the demiurge’s arrangement for human reincarnation, if a man cannot overcome the disturbance of sensation and emotion through reason, he will be reincarnated as a woman in the next life. If a woman cannot overcome her physical desires with reason, she will be reborn as a beast in the next life. For this process of human reincarnation, it exhibits the characteristic of determinism endowed to humans by the demiurge because the hierarchical structures from man to woman, from woman to beast, have been determined, so we cannot change the order of reincarnation. This reincarnation process is only a law of fate bestowed by the demiurge and does not necessarily mean the fall of humanity in actuality. The demiurge and the lesser gods only offer the possibility of corruption in human reincarnation. This indicates that in Plato’s cosmology, human freedom is possible and necessary. According to the demiurge’s arrangement of human reincarnation fate, we should acknowledge that besides determinism, there is a possibility for human freedom. Humans can choose to use reason to restrain the disturbance of sensation and emotion, and thus return to the divine celestial body to live a life of happiness. Human beings can also choose to let their sensation and emotion disturb their souls, becoming the slaves of desire, leading to an endless outcome of depraved reincarnation. Plato’s exposition on human learning also proves the necessary fate (*Timaeus*, 90b–d). If humans are always addicted to their desires and competitiveness, it will be a great disaster for humanity. Humans have the freedom to do so, but it will lead to their tragic fate. For Plato, if humans choose to learn wisdom, they will obtain divine providence bestowed by the demiurge, which is the proper realization of free choice. Therefore, whether humans are driven by their desires or actively learn wisdom depends on their freedom.

Although we recognize that humans can make free choices in their fate bestowed by the cosmos, human freedom can only be determined within the scope of potential capacities, while in actuality, human beings never make real choices. Otherwise, it would be a departure from the cosmological premise. In creating the cosmos, the demiurge can choose eternal or generated beings as models. The demiurge's freedom, however, does not contain actual choice because the demiurge's goodness and lack of jealousy indicate that he will choose eternal beings as models; otherwise, it will contradict his goodness. Supposing that we use the generated being as a model, we cannot obtain the divine providence, let alone create a perfect cosmos. Following the fundamental principles of *eikos logos*, although human destiny contains freedom, humans have no real choice. Plato follows the fundamental position of Socratic ethics, believing that no one would intentionally do evil. Humans do not take the initiative to do evil, because they imitate the laws of the cosmos' motion. Thus, humans regard goodness as their essential purpose. There is no such thing as actively doing evil for humans, for any evil behavior stems from ignorance (*Timaeus*, 86d1–3). For example, if choosing option A leads to good outcomes and option B leads to evil outcomes, then even if a person has the freedom to choose, they will choose the first option because human nature is good. If humans intentionally do evil, human ethics will be disconnected from Plato's cosmology. Although humans can choose in the cosmos, knowledgeable individuals do not make real choices. Freedom is an essential human capacity, but it is never genuinely actualized.

7. Conclusions

In the *Timaeus*' cosmology, Plato outlines a pattern of creation of the cosmos. Plato's cosmology is crucial in ancient Greek astronomy and has a profound impact on the Stoic school (Boys-Stones 2017, pp. 141–61). The demiurge creates a perfect cosmos by using *eidos* as a model and necessity as an auxiliary cause. From a macro perspective, the cosmos is composed of a cosmic soul and a cosmic body, and in order to imitate the eternity of forms, the demiurge creates time for the cosmos. The demiurge does not create mortal humans but entrusts this task to the lesser gods. Humanity is a perfect example of the combination of reason and necessity. Although sensation and emotion can disturb the soul, reason will ultimately restrain these irrational capacities and ultimately achieve true happiness. Regarding Plato's cosmology, we cannot ignore the hidden concept of fate, which embodies the crucial significance of fate in both the demiurge's creation of the cosmos and the lesser gods' creation of mortal humans. According to the principle of *eikos logos* in the *Timaeus*, fate is also an important link between cosmology and human ethics. Hence, the *Timaeus*' hidden fate runs through the entire Platonic cosmology. However, even if we uncover the thought of fate in the *Timaeus*, we must acknowledge this argument's speculative and uncertain nature and not consider it a definitive conclusion. The fate in the *Timaeus* is not based on Aristotelian natural teleology but on the divine teleology of deity, so fate has theological and religious characteristics. Concerning the essence of Plato's cosmology of fate, we should recognize not only its characteristic of determinism but also that free will is the crucial essence of fate.

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Notes

- ¹ Plato discusses the concept of fate in multiple works, such as *Crito*, 43c1–2, 45c–e, and 46b3–5, *Phaedo*, 84e2–5, 95b1–5, 113e2–5, and 115a2–4, *Cratylus*, 398a–b, *Theaetetus*, 188c–d, *Philebus*, 23a1–5, *Symposium*, 193b1–2 and 208a1–3, *Phaedrus*, 248e3–5 and

255b1–2, *Alcibiades*, 132a–b, *Gorgias*, 512e3–4 and 525a4–5, *Republic*, 365a1–2, 379d–e, 387d3–5, 388d1–2, 399b1–2, 574b1–5, 617b–c, and 620e1–2, and *Laws*, 799b2–3, 807a–b, 870e2–4, 870e1–5, 873c2–3, 903e1, 918e2–3, 958a1–2, 960c–d, and 982c–d.

2 There is controversy in academia regarding the *Timaeus*' position in Plato's dialogues, whether it belongs to the middle or later dialogues. Owen analyzes from the perspectives of rhythm, form, and vocabulary and maintains that the *Timaeus* should not belong to Plato's later dialogues but to his middle dialogues (Owen 1953, pp. 79–95). Similarly, scholars represented by Hartmann analyze the *Timaeus* from a rhetorical perspective (Hartmann 2021, pp. 22–48). Owen also supports his assertion through an ideological analysis of the text. Firstly, the *Parmenides* criticizes Plato's concept of "participation" because it leads to infinite regression, so the *Timaeus*' creation should be before the *Parmenides*. The *Timaeus* still uses the distinction between "eternal being" and "generated being", but the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophists* reject this "two worlds" division, so the *Timaeus* should be before the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophists*. Accordingly, the *Timaeus* belongs to Plato's mid-term work, not his later work (Owen 1953, pp. 79–95). Cherniss opposes Owen's classification method and asserts that the *Timaeus* cannot be Plato's mid-term dialogue but must be the later dialogue. Cherniss points out that Owen uses prosody to analyze the *Timaeus*, which contradicts Plato's methodology. The concepts of "participation" and "two worlds" cannot serve as criteria for determining the order of Plato's writings. Therefore, in Cherniss' perspective, The *Parmenides*, the *Cratylus*, and the *Theaetetus* should be before the *Timaeus*, and there is no difference in the *Timaeus*' later dialogues with Plato (Cherniss 1957, pp. 225–66).

3 With Alexander, Scholars represented by Boodin and Hersbell conduct an in-depth analysis of the philosophical origins of cosmology in the *Timaeus*. In Alexander's viewpoint, the mathematical methods in the *Timaeus* are directly derived from Pythagoras, as Plato created the cosmos based on the pattern of mathematics. In addition, the proportion method used in the *Timaeus* is the method of the demiurge, creating an immortal cosmos and the lesser gods creating mortal humans, which originated from Heraclitus. Plato's cosmology should also be elucidated in the ethical dimension, and his concern for morality stems from Socrates (Alexander 1918, pp. 1–24). Boodin acknowledges that Anaxagoras influences the *Timaeus*' cosmology. Anaxagoras holds that *nous* is the origin of the cosmos, which profoundly influences the theoretical construction of Plato's cosmology, as Plato believes that *nous* is the crucial link in generating the cosmos. Boodin reminds us, however, that Anaxagoras' *nous* cannot be wholly equated with the forms the *Timaeus* hopes to express, as Anaxagoras reduces *nous* to purely material elements (Boodin 1929, pp. 489–505). Hersbell analyzes explicitly the relationship between Empedocles and Plato. Although Empedocles' four elements match the components that make up the cosmos in the *Timaeus*, there are differences in understanding the essence of the four primary bodies. Moreover, Heraclitus' viewpoint on love and struggle does not directly influence Plato's cosmology (Hersbell 1974, pp. 145–66).

4 The debate between literalist and metaphorist interpretations in academia is a key issue in studying Plato's cosmology. Scholars such as Finkelberg, Dillon, and Carone assert the crucial significance of resolving this controversy to understand Plato's cosmology. Finkelberg harbors the attitude that the debate between two interpretations has a long history in academia, with Aristotle representing the literalist interpretation and the *Academy* representing the metaphorical interpretation. Specifically, Finkelberg analyzes Plato's cosmology using mathematical methods and the differences between temporality and non-temporality (Finkelberg 1996, pp. 391–409). Dillon maintains that there are numerous misinterpretations in the *Timaeus*' commentaries, both intentionally and unintentionally, by ancient scholars. Starting from the debate between literalist and metaphorist interpretations, Dillon conducts a detailed textual revision of the *Timaeus* (Dillon 1989, pp. 50–72). Carone holds that both literalist and metaphorist interpretations are reasonable. Therefore, he proposes a compromise assertion, which explains the process of the demiurge's creation from a literalist perspective and regards the demiurge's creation as an ongoing process (Carone 2004, pp. 211–26).

5 The citations of the *Timaeus* in this article are from Zeyl's English translation (Plato 2000).

6 Johansen explains the essence of truth from the myth of Atlantis. On the one hand, Johansen agrees that Atlantis is indeed a fabricated story, as it is impossible to verify whether the story of Atlantis has ever occurred in history. On the other hand, the so-called "real story" cannot be demonstrated as simple fiction. It should be understood as "another kind of truth." The so-called truth aims to demonstrate how the demiurge acts, so it is important for us to clarify the significance of the demiurge's actions (Johansen 2005, pp. 28, 67).

7 Plato makes two distinctions in the *Timaeus*, the first between eternal and generated beings. Eternal beings are invisible and intangible, belonging to things that can be attained through reason. Generated beings are visible and tangible and belong to beings that the sense-organs can perceive. The second is the distinction between the different ways of account, that is, the difference between the account of eternal beings and the account of generated beings. The description of eternal beings remains unchanged, while the account of generated beings follows the *method of eikos logos* (*Timaeus*, 28b–29b).

8 There is a conflict in the texts of the *Timaeus* and *Theaetetus* regarding the complete four elements and the flux of element traces: According to *Theaetetus*, all things are in the process of flux and, therefore, cannot be spoken of. Although the *Timaeus* acknowledges the flux state of element traces, Plato believes that element traces can be spoken of through "this such." Gill criticizes Owen's viewpoint; Owen holds that on the condition that the *Timaeus*' creation time comes first, the contradiction

between different texts regarding the conception of flux can be resolved. However, Gill thinks that this is not an appropriate solution (Gill 1987, pp. 34–53).

- ⁹ In Plato's perspective, the standard of cosmos' perfection requires that there must be mortal living bodies in the cosmos, such as humans, beasts, and plants. However, imperfect mortal beings in the cosmos cannot be created by the demiurge. Otherwise, it will destroy the demiurge's goodness and lack of jealousy and lead to the equality of mortal humans and immortal gods in the hierarchy. This is unacceptable, as it would undermine the overall goodness of the cosmos, so the lesser gods accept the task given to them by the demiurge to create mortal beings. Once the demiurge entrusts the task of creating mortal beings to the lesser gods, he is not responsible for any evil in the cosmos.
- ¹⁰ Johansen provides a subtle explanation of the demiurge's free will. According to Johansen's opinion, in Plato's cosmology, the demiurge can choose to use either the perfect or imperfect model; the latter belongs to the category of generated beings. From the generated cosmos, it can be inferred that the demiurge should choose the perfect model to create the cosmos, the eternal *eidos*. The eternal model has the characteristic of beauty, while the generated model lacks beauty compared to the former, so the generated being is created by imitating *eidos* (Johansen 2014, pp. 297–20).
- ¹¹ Plato focuses on the discussion of fate and freedom in the *Politicus*. Although the *Politicus* and the *Timaeus* have different contexts, the *Politicus* still have important reference value for the *Timaeus*. Please refer to the *Politicus* 272e: τοῦ παντὸς ὁ μὲν κυβερνήτης, οἷον πηδαλίων οἶακος ἀφέμενος, εἰς τὴν αὐτοῦ περιωπὴν ἀπέστη, τὸν δὲ δὴ κόσμον πάλιν ἀνέστρεφεν εἰμαρμένη τε καὶ σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία; 273b: τὸν εἰωθότα δρόμον τὸν ἑαυτοῦ κατακοσμούμενος ἦει, ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ κράτος ἔχων αὐτὸς τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ τε καὶ ἑαυτοῦ, τὴν τοῦ δημιουργοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἀπονημονεύων διδασχὴν εἰς δύναμιν; 273d: προϊόντος δὲ τοῦ χρόνου καὶ λήθης ἐγγιγνομένης ἐν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον καὶ δυναστεύει τὸ τῆς παλαιᾶς ἀναρμοστίας πάθος; 273e: ἵνα μὴ χεῖμασθῇς ὑπὸ ταραχῆς διαλυθεῖς εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀνομοιότητος ἄπειρον ὄντα πόντον δύῃ; 273e: κοσμεῖ τε καὶ ἐπανορθῶν ἀθάνατον αὐτὸν καὶ ἀγήρων ἀπεργάζεται.

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Article

Did God Cause the World by an Act of Free Will, According to Aristotle? A Reading Based on Thomistic Insights

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Abstract: As a contribution to the reflection on whether classic Greek philosophy gave priority either to *Necessity* and the *Fatum* or to freedom, this paper endeavors to prove three theses: (1) according to Aristotle, God caused the being of the world by an act of His will; (2) such an act of divine will was free and not necessary; (3) however, such causation is subject to the necessity of supposition. In order to do this, the paper delves into the interpretation of many passages contained in the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, *De anima*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics* as well as *Politics*, *Topika*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *De coelo* and *De partibus animalium*. This interpretation benefits from Aquinas' acute analysis. In such passages, Aristotle holds that (1) God's causal power must be exercised not in proportion to the magnitude of divine power, but to the requirements of the effect; (2) such a way of acting is similar to human power; (3) nature is subject to teleology because it is caused by an intellectual power; (4) God is the highest intelligible and the highest good, totally autarchic; and (5) just as the highest intelligible is simultaneously also intellect, so too is the highest good simultaneously also will.

Keywords: God's will; freedom of God; necessity of supposition; highest good; natural teleology

1. Introduction

In *La philosophie au Moyen Age*, Etienne Gilson claimed that "Greek philosophies are philosophies of necessity, while philosophies influenced by the Christian religion will be philosophies of freedom" (Gilson 1944, pp. 9–10). I hold that this position is not accurate. Both, Plato and Aristotle underlined that (1) each man decides his own fate through choices that determine his character, and that (2) God acts freely.¹ However, Aristotle in particular did not see a true opposition between some kind of necessity, on the one hand, and freedom, on the other.² I do not wish to explore the interrelations between these concepts in the Aristotelian *corpus*. My purpose here is just to demonstrate that, according to Aristotle, God acted with free will when He caused the being of the world, although the divine will was of course subject to some necessity.

In previous research I have demonstrated that Aristotle holds that God is the origin of the being of the world by efficient³ and final causality, though not by creation. I have also shown that in Aristotle's work one finds all the principles by which creation (understood as a total production of the world without a preexistent matter) can come to be known, but that he did not connect those principles to actually conclude that God created the world out of nothing (see Casanova 2007, pp. 95–155; Casanova 2013).

I am well aware that there are alternative readings to mine. Since the 19th century Eduard Zeller and other 19th and early 20th century Aristotelians imposed the view that, according to Aristotle, God is just final cause (not efficient) and of the movement of the cosmos (not of its being). Although this thesis in its inception encountered opposition of

great intellectual power in Franz Brentano (see Brentano 1978, especially pp. 61–95), it was established in academic circles in such a way that it became almost impossible to even question it except in marginal publications by authors such as Thomas de Koninck or Ralph McInerney. Actually, Brentano's interpretation was rejected on strange intellectual grounds, which can be perceived in David Ross's review of the impressive book *Aristoteles Lehre vom Ursprung des menschliche Geistes*: "Time after time he [Brentano] is able to show that Zeller has missed some more or less important distinction which should be drawn in interpreting the text. Where Brentano is somewhat lacking is in power of judgment. He is often in danger of not seeing the wood for the trees; Zeller's greater common sense has enabled him to see better than Brentano the significance of many passages which he has evidently studied with much less care". And the reason for these assertions is that while Brentano, on the one hand, endeavors to prove that God is the origin of being for the human intellect and for the celestial spheres and secondary separate substances, and that this is the cause of the unity of the whole cosmos, Zeller, on the other, with "common sense", holds that, according to Aristotle, the human intellect is eternal, not caused. Zeller is right, according to Ross, even though Aristotle says nothing about the human intellect's "life before birth". With the same "common sense", Zeller also holds both that the eternal secondary substances are uncaused and that the universe has unity not because it has one origin, but because it is *pròs hén*, which Ross takes to mean that it has one final end. (However, we have no experience of a common final end of a variety of things without a common efficient cause serving as the origin of such things or of their order (see David Ross 1914, pp. 289–91).)

It was with reviews like this that Brentano's interpretation and any other similar to it were rejected afterward. At the same time, that is how Zeller's interpretation (and similar ones) became the standard.

However, in the 1990s, a timid movement of revision of the central view started, although it had become a robust centennial tradition of interpretation. David Bradshaw, Sarah Broadie and Enrico Berti brought some aspects of it into question (see Alberto Ross Hernández 2007).

Bradshaw decided to go back to the Aristotelian text. With a careful reading of the book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*, and especially of its chapter 6, he was able to establish that God is not only final cause of the movement of the cosmos, but also efficient cause of the said movement (see David Bradshaw 2001). Lindsay Judson also apparently deviated from the already traditional core interpretation in 1994. He stated then that there is a kind of final cause that can also be considered efficient because it originates the desire for which it is an end, but not because it actually transmits any "energy" or movement. And this is how he explains that *Metaphysics Lambda* 7 speaks of the First Substance (which Judson systematically calls "the Prime Mover") as *kinetikón kai poietikón*.⁴ Enrico Berti implicitly disagreed with Judson's reading, arguing that if God were not an efficient cause in the proper sense, then Aristotle could not call Him *kinetikón kai poietikón* and, moreover, he would have been unable to object to the Platonic thesis of conceiving a Form as the origin of movement. A final cause might be *kinetikón*, but not really *poietikón* (see Berti 2000, pp. 181–206). Sarah Broadie just formulates doubts by pointing out that in the *Physics*, the entirely separate substance seems to be an efficient cause, but then in the *Metaphysics*, one could perhaps understand that the unmoved mover is the soul itself of the sphere (see Broadie 2009, pp. 230–41).

All these authors, by breaking the consensus of the until then standard interpretation of Aristotle, opened the opportunity to re-introduce views closer to Brentano's, even using Aquinas' insights, and that is what I did some years ago when I argued that, according to Aristotle, God is efficient cause not only of the movement but also of the being of the cosmos. My guiding hermeneutic principle is drawn from Plato (1900b), *Phaedrus* (275a–

277a): written works cannot defend themselves, he stated, which is why he and his disciples often wrote works that served as mere signposts pointing at (mostly metaphysical) realities: γεγραμμένους τοῦ τὸν εἰδότες ὑπομνησάσαι περὶ ὧν ἂν ᾗ τὰ γεγραμμένα.⁵ So, squeezing the text is not the best procedure to understand its meaning. Although, of course, one has to mind the text, one has mainly to grasp the experiences that gave rise to the text. One must try to look at the realities towards which the sign posts aim.

I am keenly aware of the alternative readings standing today in the field, but I wish to explore the line that I opened some years ago and push forward one aspect connected with my interpretation. Concretely, I wish to investigate an aspect of divine causality implicit in my previous research, but which is worth making explicit: supposed that God as efficient cause gave rise to the forms of the world, which is the problem with which I dealt with in previous research, then He must have done that by an act of His free will. This aspect of Aristotle's teaching drastically separates him from neo-Platonic emanationist doctrines.

I know that to many current Aristotelian scholars, this problem might sound almost like science fiction, unless they agree with me in the solution to the previous problem: whether God is the ultimate origin as an efficient cause of the being of the other substances of the cosmos. However, if they just take my conclusion concerning God's efficient causation of the being of the cosmos by hypothesis, they may wonder how Aristotle thought that the being of the world was caused by God?

2. A Preliminary Point: The Concept of "Will" in Aristotle

In the following pages, I am going to assume that Aristotle had a concept of the will, and I am going to explore the basic ontological structure of divine will, parallel to that of divine *noûs*. As is well known, however, there is an ongoing discussion among scholars about the question of whether or not Aristotle admits the existence of free will at all.⁶ Thus, I need to state as a sort of prologue to my investigation that on this point I am in almost complete agreement with Terence Irwin's paper, "Who Discovered the Will?" (see Irwin 1992). I will briefly trace the main lines of my position, although I cannot now enter to defend each step.⁷ After presenting the main lines, I will defend Irwin from some recent critiques.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, after establishing in book 2 that virtue is an "elective habit" [*héxis proairetiké*: 2.6, 1106b36], Aristotle in book 3.1-5 endeavors to study the elements of choice and their implications for ethical action and character. In chapter 1, he studies *tò hekoúision*. This is translated into modern languages as "the voluntary", and it is the source of many of the difficulties that Aristotle's understanding poses for contemporary philosophers. In Latin, *voluntarium* is much closer to the Greek *hekoúision* than the English *voluntary*. The Greek concept is analogical. In each kind of being gifted with knowledge and some degree of self-determination, *tò hekoúision* exists when the being in question acts by using the full degree of that knowledge and self-determination. Therefore, human adults, children, and irrational animals, all have *tò hekoúision*. But only in human adults can it provide the proper context in which choice or election (which I regard as synonyms) takes place. In human adults, *tò hekoúision* is destroyed if an action is done due to ignorance or coercion, and it is diminished if an action is done due to serious threats or similar circumstances. All of this implies (a) that *tò hekoúision* is destroyed neither by *akrasía* nor by the mere absence of choice and (b) that the kind of "ignorance" that excludes *tò hekoúision* varies according to the kind of being in question: a sleepwalker or a drunk adult might have the same awareness as a dog or a child, yet his actions are considered *akoúsia* because, in such a state, the individual lacks the full knowledge and self-determination that normally belong to an adult man.

In chapters 2 and 4 of book 3 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle studies choice or election and *boúlesis*. The study of choice is most interesting because it takes over Plato's arguments in *Republic* 4,⁸ but instead of distinguishing between *epithymía*, *thymós* and *lógos* (or *logistikón*), Aristotle distinguishes between *epithymía*, *thymós* and *proaíresis*. Why is this? This is because Aristotle distinguishes between the cognitive and appetitive [*orektiké*]⁹ powers of the soul. So, Plato's division is flawed because *lógos* is a cognitive power and Plato connumerates it with the appetitive powers *epithymía* and *thymós*. Explicitly, Aristotle distinguishes *proaíresis* from an act of *lógos*, the one most similar, which is *dóxa* (see 1111b-1112a13). Still, Plato is not entirely wrong, because *órexis* and *lógos* intervene in *proaíresis* [choice]. Actually, the essential description of *proaíresis* is *órexis* based on *lógos* or, as Aristotle states, *bouleutiké órexis* (1113a11).

In chapter 2, Aristotle distinguishes *proaíresis* from *boúlesis* (1111b19-30), and in chapter 4, he studies *boúlesis*. But this latter word is again used in many senses by Aristotle, as *voluntas* is used in Latin in many senses as well. In *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.4, it is a volitive desire, very close to the Latin *intentio*.

Since *Nicomachean Ethics* is not a treatise on the soul, Aristotle does not say more here. But in *De anima* 3.9-10, he adds plenty. There, in contrast to Plato, he distinguishes between cognitive and appetitive powers of the soul. But he clarifies that to each level of knowledge (sensitive and rational) belongs one respective level of appetitive powers. Therefore, *epithymía* and *thymós* are common to animals and humans. Instead, *boúlesis*, the will, is a power pertaining to the rational soul and, therefore, absent from irrational animals (see *De anima* 3.9, 432b5-6; and 10, 432a31-b4). At this point, we can understand that the *órexis* present in *proaíresis* belongs to this power of the soul, so much as the actual volitive desire that Aristotle called *boúlesis* in *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.4. And these operations are not the only ones of the rational appetitive power of the soul: besides desiring, man loves with the will¹⁰ and, therefore, enjoys, fears, hopes, etc. This power (*boúlesis*), its object (*bouletón*) and its actions or states, including *eudaimonia* (Aristotle 1962, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8, 1178b24-32) and joy (or the most pleasant stable state (Aristotle 1895, *Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072b15-18)), are what Aristotle will attribute to God in the line of the appetitive perfections, as we shall see. He will explicitly attribute free will to God in (Aristotle 1960), *Topica* 4.5, 34–39.

Christof Rapp's paper, "Tackling Aristotle's Notion of the Will", summarizes several lines of critique to the kind of understanding of the will that I have presented here. I will briefly outline my response to such critiques so as to make the remaining parts of this paper more plausible to the modern reader.

First of all, Rapp cites Charles Kahn: "To say that Aristotle lacks a concept of will is to say, first of all, that these four notions (or at least the last three [an action that is up to us, *hekoúision*, *proaíresis*, *boúlesis*] are conceptually independent of one another: there is not one concept that ties together the voluntary, *boulêsis* or desire for the end, and *prohairesis*, deliberate desire for the means" (Rapp 2017, p. 71).

To this argument, I reply: *proaíresis*, on the one hand, and *boúlesis* as volitive desire, on the other, are operations of *boúlesis* as an appetitive power of the soul. The presence of this power, if unimpeded, is what ultimately explains that our actions are up to us and also that the adults have a kind of *hekoúision* that is different from that of irrational animals or of children, who cannot use their reason to judge properly yet.¹¹

Second, Rapp objects to Irwin this: "voluntary is condition for being susceptible to praise and blame". But if it is a sufficient condition, then animals should be susceptible to blame, since they also possess *tò hekoúision*. To this, Irwin replies, with Aquinas, that animal voluntariness is not voluntariness in the fullest sense. Against this, Rapp brings to our consideration the *De motu animalium*, in the last chapter of which Aristotle states

that he has dealt with the voluntary movement of animals. Rapp argues that such a statement means that Irwin's reply to the problem is contrary to Aristotle's mind, since the voluntary encompasses the movement of irrational animals (Rapp 2017, pp. 77–78). But this objection is based on a simple homonymy: as was already pointed out, "voluntary" is a bad translation for *tò hekousion*, and *tò hekousion* is a concept that admits a greater variety of degrees and forms than "voluntary".

3. A Fundamental Text of *Physics* VIII

It is memorable that in the eighth book of *Physics*, when Aristotle proves that there is a First Immobile Mover, one of his arguments addresses the fact that since motion has an infinite duration, it must depend on an infinite power. But that power cannot reside in magnitude (or be corporeal) because magnitude cannot be infinite, and a finite magnitude cannot have an infinite power for several reasons. One of them is that if it did, the effect would be proportionate to it and the velocity of the motion would have to be infinite, which is impossible. Therefore, there cannot be a corporeal infinite motive power. The power of the First Mover must be the power of a being without magnitude, that is, intellectual and spiritual (and therefore immobile),¹² which adapts the effect to the conceived form, and not to its own natural form, as Aquinas explains.¹³ Aristotle does not elaborate on this point because it is clear. It is clear indeed that for an infinite duration of the motion, an infinite power is necessary. But this infinite power cannot be corporeal, because if it were, the motion would be proportionate to the magnitude of the power and, therefore, infinite in its velocity, instantaneous, which is impossible (see 266a31).¹⁴ That the motion must be proportionate to the magnitude of the power in this case is due to the fact that corporeal agents cannot regulate the use of their power, but this use emanates from them naturally. Therefore, the reason why the potency must be incorporeal is that, in this case, the effect conforms not to the "magnitude" of the power, but to the form apprehended by it, to which form the power conforms in its action.¹⁵

Specifically, the intellectual agent acts by means of an appetitive [*orektiké*] potency that conforms to the conception of the intellect (i.e., the will, *boúlesis*).¹⁶ This means that God acts by will and not by a natural emanation of His power.¹⁷ The problem boils down to determining whether that act of will is natural or chosen. But if it is natural, how would it be different from emanation? The terms of the problem are clear if we consider the way in which Aristotle explains (starting in the book *Alpha* of his *Metaphysics*) the passage through which Greek philosophers came to know spiritual, invisible realities departing from the knowledge of visible realities. The hierarchy of beings goes from the inert material beings, which can only move if they are moved by another, up to the highest intellectual substance in which the intelligible and the intellect are the same; in the middle of his *scala naturae*, there are the mortal living bodies, which move themselves because they possess an immobile mover, which is the vegetative or sensitive soul¹⁸; above them, there is the intellectual soul which has dominion over its acts; above them, the immortal living bodies; and, further, the second intellectual substances, which, because they contemplate other higher substances, are not completely simple, since in them essence and operation are distinguished.¹⁹ On this scale, the First Cause and First Motor can only be an intellectual agent, which also has appetite (*órexis*), as we shall see. But that appetite can only be called *boúlesis*, for our intellectual appetite is what most resembles it among all the things of our experience. To imagine that such a being could be subject to "necessary emanations" or to cause in a manner not willed is either to cling to Platonism, in which the highest intelligible is different from the highest intellect (or divine intellectual soul) (see Plato 1900e, *Laws* 10, 897b-899d; Plato 1900d, *Timaeus*, 51d-53c), or to introduce a sort of processual pantheism to which we have become accustomed by some strands of the Cabala (see Gershon Scholem

1995, Sixth Lecture, in particular n. 4), Spinoza (see Baruch Spinoza 2006, pp. 13–24, part 1, propositions 16–36), and German idealism and other deistic or similar thinkers, such as Herbert Spencer (see Taylor 2007, pp. 141–43). That is to say, that image is either the fruit of [neo]Platonism, or it is a relapse into a Presocratic view in which the spiritual and the corporeal are understood as mixed and confused, just as Herbert Spencer or, before him, Baruch Spinoza understood them.²⁰

I could now start an investigation of the Aristotelian doctrine of the will and of friendship, which would lead us to demonstrate the thesis by deductive arguments. However, I prefer first to show that there are Aristotelian texts that explicitly speak of a free act of will or of a choice at the origin of God's causation of the world. Let us proceed, then, to examine them.

4. Texts Clearly Speaking of an Act of Divine Will as the Origin of the Order of the Cosmos

Let us begin with an instructive text from Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* (2.10, 336b27–34):

For in everything we say that nature desires what is better, but it is better to be than not to be, [...] but this [sc. to be always] cannot happen in all, because they are removed far from the principle. God, then, filled the whole in the remaining manner, making generation uninterrupted; thus they are kept in being as much as possible, because this is the main way in which being is continued, by becoming and generation closest to substance [*tês ousías*].²¹

In his commentary, Aquinas writes:

To be always is a property of divine being: this [sc. to be always] cannot be the case in all, because some are too far from the first principle, such as material things which are susceptible of generation and corruption. These things share little in divine being. For this reason, God fulfilled the desire of matter in a different way, by making everlasting their being [sc. of material things] through continuous generation. In this way their being continues, i.e., [in generation] it always happens that what is generated is a substance of the same species of the one generating it.²²

These two passages explicitly unfold what Aquinas states in the commentary on *Physics* and in the fifth way to prove the existence of God: the fact that there is a final cause in nature, which therefore resembles art and departs from chance,²³ is a testimony that there is divine providence.²⁴ Both passages also corroborate that the way God causes the world is by intellectual agent causality, which is the kind of causality that can be compared to art, *téchne* (see Aristotle 1895, *Metaphysics Lambda* 6, 1071b28–30). But if God causes the world by intellectual causality, imprinting an order intrinsic in nature, this means that He acts based on form understood and, therefore, through an act of His will. In *Metaphysics Lambda* 10, 1075b8–10, Aristotle explicitly teaches that the good is a cause and that the intellect is also a cause. However, in the case of God, the good and the intellect are one and the same thing,²⁵ which occurs analogously in human art, where medicine, which causes health, is identified with health itself, for what is understood and the one who understands are one. Now, if God is a cause like the craftsman, then He operates by the apprehended form, as is supposed in *Physics* VIII. But a subject who operates by an apprehended form operates by the appetite that follows the intellect, that is, by volition. The act of causing the world is therefore a volitional act.

This conclusion can be corroborated by numerous passages taken from various works by Aristotle. Let us look at a handful of them before proceeding further.

In the first place, in *Metaphysics Lambda*, once Aristotle has established that act must be prior to potency in general and that, therefore, the origin of motion and of the cosmos must be pure act, he praises Anaxagoras and Empedocles for having pointed in the same direction: one stating that the intellect is principle, and the other that appetite (*órexis*) is (see Aristotle 1895, *Metaphysics Lambda* 6, 1072a4–6). The principle cannot be material, nor can it be soul; it must be a pure intellectual substance, which is not first act, but pure act. Therefore, such a substance is endowed with intellect and will.

Secondly, we can bring up all the passages in which he praises Anaxagoras and Empedocles, and then criticizes them for not making use of the intellect, the intellective appetite and the good to explain the causes but falling back on the explanations of other Presocratics. Among such texts, we quote here these three: *Metaphysics Alpha* 3, 984b8–22, 4, 985a18–b4 and *Lambda* 10, 1075a37–b12.

Third, we can cite the passages in which he simply praises Anaxagoras for having affirmed that the intellect moves everything because it is separate and unmixed from anything material. Let us mention here, for example, *Physics* 7.5, 256b24–27 or *De anima* 3.4, 429a18–20.²⁶

5. Is the Divine Volitional Act That Gives Origin to the Cosmos Necessary?

That God originates the cosmos by means of a volitional act is clear. But is this volitional act necessary? This question can be answered in several ways. Let us begin to answer it by turning to an explicit Aristotelian passage. In *Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072b8 ff., it is argued that there is an unmoved motor that moves the first heaven and that the first circular motion of the heaven *necessarily* exists. Immediately after this, it is made clear that “necessary” has several possible meanings: (a) that which is violently produced by being contrary to inclination, which is not the case for the motion of the first heaven; (b) that without which a good is not achieved, which is a necessity of art (*téchne*), such as that mentioned in *De generatione et corruptione* 2.10, 336b27–34; and (c) that which cannot be otherwise, but absolutely must be the way it is. We can state with certainty that the necessity according to which God acts is not that of violence. And now, having seen that God causes through a volitional act, we must state that the second sense of necessity certainly applies to divine causation. As for the third sense, in order to rule it out of the divine action of causing the cosmos, it is necessary to advance in our investigation. According to the commentary of Aquinas, the movement of the heaven is not necessary in the third sense because it has a certain potentiality and, therefore, is not absolutely necessary. This observation contains an important key. This movement, due to its potentiality, could have not been. However, in order to understand well the said key, we need to delve deeper into Aristotle’s mind because the necessity could be in God as cause, instead of being in the movement of the heaven, which is an effect of God’s moving power. If we consider the nature of God and of His volitional act, it would seem that such an act cannot be necessary because, again, if it were, how would it be different from a necessary emanation?

Let us answer the present main question not in a merely formal way, but by trying to understand the content, the substance, of what is said. We know that God, as the cause of perpetual motion, must be pure act without any potency, because, otherwise, motion (and the universe) could have ceased to be and, in fact, would have already ceased to be. That which has potency may not cause, and that which may not cause would, in an infinite time, cease to cause (see Aristotle 1895, *Metaphysics Lambda* 6, 1071b16–26). God is pure act; therefore, He cannot be a soul; that is, He cannot be just a *first act* like the soul is (see Aristotle 1896, *De anima* 2.1, 412a27). He has to be pure intellect in act, without distinction between first act and second act. The operation of that intellect must be identified with the intellect itself. But this presupposes that the object of that intellect, that which actualizes it,

cannot be different from the intellect itself, because if it were, the operation would not be identified with the intellect's being. This is why, in order to erase all reference to the first act, Aristotle states that God is intellection of intellection.²⁷

But that intellection or intellectual operation has a more stable being than any intellectual substance that performs operations different from its substance. Its being is also more stable than the being of other separate intelligences, for these are actualized in contemplating God. They have potency at the heart of their being, although they have no potency for non-being or for physical motion, because they have no matter. Since their *télos* is outside of them, their being, therefore, depends on another, too.²⁸ The whole universe (heavens and nature) depends on God (see Aristotle 1895, *Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072b14).

But let us reflect a little on the point we have reached. If God has no end outside Himself, if He needs nothing and the end exists in Him only as the good always possessed, how could His volitional act of causing the world have been an act necessitated in any way? God is self-sufficient, much more completely than the mature and wise man. The wise man is still a man and needs others even for contemplation, and much more for ethical action.²⁹ Not so God, who has no practical life (see Aristotle 1962, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8, 1178b6–25) and who contemplates Himself and is thus most happy.

6. Answer to a Difficulty: God Cannot Move from Not Causing to Causing; Therefore, Aristotle Concludes That the Cosmos Has an Infinite Past Duration: Does This Not Imply Necessity?

An objection may be raised against my interpretation because Aristotle states that the world must have been caused from all time, and the motion must have infinite duration, for God cannot move from not causing to causing (see Aristotle 1879, *Physics* 8.8, 251a5–251b10; Aristotle 1895, *Metaphysics Lambda* 6, 1071b3–22; 1072a7–18; 7, 1073a3–12; 8, 1073a26–1073b6). Here, we find a difficult knot to untie. The problem is solved by making the proper distinctions. God had no need to bring the world into being. The perfection of love is realized in Him, and this perfection is exemplified by motherly love.³⁰ Like mothers, God loves without expecting to be loved; He loves with pure love of friendship, and for this reason, He may cause the world to exist, although He does not need it. However, since the world exists, He did cause it to exist and He can no longer not have caused it. And, since He is immutable, He cannot have passed from not causing to causing. There is, then, a conditioned necessity in divine causation, according to Aristotle.

Herein lies an important difference and an important similarity (conditioned necessity) between Aristotelian and Thomistic theology. The difference consists in the fact that Aquinas knows, both from revelation and from the principles that Aristotle managed to recognize, that the world was created out of nothing. This implies that God transcends the world and time and that, therefore, by an act of divine will, the world and time may have come into existence in such a way that past time is finite, without this implying a change in God, since He is outside of time (see Aquinas 2000b, *In octos libros Physicorum*, lib. 8, l. 2, nn. 18–20). St. Thomas considers and deeply understands the reasons why Aristotle postulates the infinite duration of time and motion. Aristotle thinks that if God moved from not causing to causing, there would be a change in Him prior to the beginning of the world's being. Aquinas shows that this is true of the natural agent, but not necessarily of the agent who works by will, for the latter can be outside of motion.³¹ However, since our will, being incorporeal, is immersed in time and passes from not causing to causing by virtue of a prior change (see Aristotle 1879, *Physics* 8.6, 259b1–22), Aquinas masterfully points out that “God produced at once both time and things *after* they did not exist. Accordingly, we must not consider in the divine will that it willed to make things not then but later, as though time were already existing; rather, we must solely consider the fact that he willed

that things and the time of their duration should begin to be *after* they had no existed at all" (Aquinas 1958–1962, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, book 8, l. 2, n. 989; my italics). Here, of course, "before" and "after" have metaphorical or ontological meaning, but not chronological, for there was no time before creation. There was only eternity, the eternity of God.

This crucial difference between Aquinas' and Aristotle's theology implies a deep difference in the understanding of divine will. Aristotle was unable to conceive of a radically transcendent God and, therefore, a divine will able to produce a world that has finite duration. He still comprehends divine will as somehow connected to the matter on which it acts so as to think that God either does not cause the world or, if He does, He does it from eternity or from an infinite past time.³² Moreover, for this reason precisely, divine will as Aristotle conceives it is not really as omnipotent as Aquinas in turn conceives it to be—that is to say, as able to produce even matter.³³

Aristotle's point of departure here is his experience within the world that exists, seen initially with Platonic eyes. In his analysis of this world within which he finds himself, he determines that the universal principles are only two, God and matter (celestial and terrestrial).³⁴ In this, he corrected his mentor, Plato, who postulated three principles: the *chóra*, the ideas and the soul. The highest principle, God, is the origin, the fountainhead of all formality, including that of heaven. However, God does not "generate" heaven because it is non-generable and, according to Aristotle, it cannot come to be from a contrary formal state of matter. Rather, from an infinite past time, God infuses form into the matter proportionate to heaven's forms and thus structures it. "There is good reason to think that, if the heaven was generated, it was generated by such a cause [i.e., by nature, which is always directed towards an end, even better than art³⁵]"³⁶ And we know this because heaven participates more in divine order than mortal living beings.³⁷ However, Aristotle failed to realize that, on the one hand, since matter is related to form and God is the origin of all formality, (a) the very being of matter depends on God and, therefore, had to be created, and, on the other hand, (b) God had to be so transcendent to this whole universe that we see, that He was not affected in any way by creating or not creating. If I am wrong and Aristotle had come to know that the origin of the world was an act of creation out of nothing,³⁸ in any case he did not come to draw all the consequences that follow from that truth, namely, that the transcendent God's providence encompasses even chance, that matter is also totally subject to the divine order,³⁹ and that God has the power to originate the world in such a way that its duration toward the past can be a finite duration because the fact that creation has a temporal beginning does not affect in any way the totally transcendent God, who is utterly outside time. In any case, Aristotle did come to realize that God had the power to cause or not cause the particular world that he caused (and perhaps even to cause or not cause the world at all), since God acts by will and is self-sufficient.⁴⁰ (He also realized, as a good Platonist, that God takes care of human affairs.)⁴¹ Aristotle correctly understood that since God does not change, His decision must have been made from eternity, but he confused this with the [conditional] necessity that the world has an infinite past duration.

There is, however, a similarity with the conception of Aquinas. He also thinks that God, although omnipotent, is subject to a conditional necessity, for He cannot contradict Himself. To have the power to do "everything" means the power to produce all being, but no being can receive in itself any contradiction; being is repulsed by contradiction. Thus, not being able to do something that entails a contradiction is not a limit to omnipotence.⁴² This is the reason why Aquinas teaches, in the *Summa contra gentiles*, that God wills what is distinct from Himself with the necessity of supposition. This means, in the first place, that once He wills something, He can no longer not will it. Moreover, if He wills a thing,

He also wills all that the thing presupposes or implies. This necessity of supposition is expressed in a masterly way in chapter 86 of *Summa contra gentiles*, book 1:

From what has been said we can infer that a reason can be assigned to the divine will. (1) The end is the reason for willing the things that are for the sake of the end. But God wills his own goodness as the end, and other things He wills as things that are for the sake of the end. His goodness, therefore, is the reason why He wills the other things which are different from Himself. (2) Again, a particular good is ordered to the good of the whole as to its end, as the imperfect to the perfect. Now, some things fall under the divine will according to their disposition in the order of the good. It remains, then, that the good of the universe is the reason why God wills each particular good in the universe. (3) Again, as was shown above, on the supposition that God wills something, it follows necessarily that He wills the things required for it. But that which imposes necessity on another is the reason why that other exists. Therefore, the reason why God wills the things that are required for each thing is that that thing be for which they are required.

Thus, therefore, can we proceed in assigning the reason of the divine will. God wills man to have a reason in order that man be; He wills man to be so that the universe may be complete;⁴³ and He wills that the good of the universe be because it befits his goodness. However, this threefold reason does not proceed according to the same relationship. For the divine goodness neither depends on the perfection of the universe nor is anything added to it from this perfection. For, although the perfection of the universe necessarily depends on certain particular goods that are its essential parts, yet on some of them it does not depend of necessity, but nevertheless a certain goodness or adornment accrues to the universe from them, as from those things that exist only for the support or adornment of the other parts of the universe. A particular good depends necessarily on the things that are absolutely required for it, even though this too has certain things that are for its embellishment. Hence, at times the reason of the divine will contains only a befittingness; at other times, usefulness; at still other times, a necessity of supposition; but a necessity that is absolute only when it wills itself.⁴⁴

7. Conclusions and Corollary

From the previous considerations follows our conclusion. Since divine causality is causality of the intellect and of the will, just as the pure act is *Nóesis nóeseos*, it must also be *Boulesis bouléseos*. That is to say, the volitional good (*bouletón*) must be identified in Him with the will that loves it, for otherwise, the will would be actualized by the good. But this means that in Him there is no desire but, as Aristotle points out, love and joy of Himself and in Himself.⁴⁵ In God, and only in God, good and joy are identified, just as the intellect and the intelligible are identified. That is why Aristotle says that the activity of God is pleasure (*Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072b 15-18). But if this is so, how can God necessarily will to cause the world, as if He needed it? His causation of the world is an act of pure free love, not a necessary completion of His being.

Let us go one step further, which already takes us beyond the original purpose of this work. If the will and the good in God are the same, then He is good in a very different sense from the sense in which the good caused by Him is said to be good, just as He is intelligible in a very different sense as well (because in Him, the intellect and the intelligible are totally identical). As the truest [more intelligible] realities originate the less true realities (*Metaphysics alpha élatton* 1, 993b19–31), so also the first good, the best, causes all other good because the common denomination “good” is not transmitted by Platonic participation,

but by efficient causation. We have seen that God, the first intelligible being, causes as a craftsman when bringing about the cosmos. This means that things caused by Him receive their intelligibility by conforming to the idea of the craftsman. The first in the series of intelligible realities is the same as the first in the series of desirable realities (*Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072a26–27), and in the series of the good and the eligible by itself, the first is always the best or something analogous (1072a35–36)—analogous because He is not desirable for Himself, but for the things He causes, and because He causes things not because He desires them, but so that they may desire Him. That is, He causes things not because they are good, but they are good because He causes them. And we can say, “He makes them”, because Aristotle also calls God the demiurge and also compares divine causality to that of the craftsman, as we have seen. He is desirable for us and for all other finite beings, but He is not desirable in Himself and for Himself. In Himself, He is only love [*boúlesís*] and lovable [*bouletón*] in a single act.

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Notes

- ¹ On Plato see his works *Republic* 10, 616c–421a (Plato 1900c); and *Timaeus* 30a–31a (Plato 1900d). On Aristotle’s works, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.5.1113b3–114b25 (Aristotle 1962) and all the texts analyzed in this present paper.
- ² See, for example, *Metaphysics Lambda* 10, 1175a16–24 (Aristotle 1895). The more the different levels of being share in intelligence, the more they share in order and are connected to the good of the whole through the tendencies of their respective natures, and the less their doings and sufferings are left to chance. According to Alberto Ross Hernández (2016), Alexander of Aphrodisias identified nature as a cause with *fatum* and as being opposed to chance, in the sublunary world.
- ³ At the time in which the 20th-century “traditional” interpretation of Aristotle was starting, Franz Brentano identified the influence of Hume’s conception of causality as the main factor in bringing about the belief that there is an incompatibility between the infinite past duration of the cosmos held by Aristotle, on the one hand, and God’s efficient causality of the being of the cosmos, on the other. Brentano clarified that the Humean conception of causality is entirely alien to the Aristotelian conception. See Brentano (1978, p. 62).
- ⁴ See (Judson 1994). See also Judson (2019, pp. 179, 202, 205–8). One presupposition of Judson’s views is that any efficient cause that transmits movement must “expend power” (see Judson 2019, pp. 206, 235). But, actually, this is not the case of an efficient cause that is completely spiritual or dispossessed of magnitude. Judson acknowledges that it might be the case that an efficient cause without magnitude does not “expend power” (see Judson 2019, p. 235), but then he returns to his belief that the Prime Mover moves only as final cause and is perplexed about why, then, according to *Physics* 8.10, a magnitude could not move eternally as final cause since in that way it does not need to “expend power”. A serious omission in Judson’s understanding is that he thinks that the natural movement of the heavens does not need an efficient or moving cause, precisely because it is natural. Consequently, he is perplexed about why a Prime Mover or *kinetikón* would be at all needed in *Physics* and conjectures that Aristotle must have suffered an important change of mind in between *De Coelo* and *Physics* (see Judson 2019, p. 178). But Aristotle is very clear that all that is moved is moved by another: the living being by an intrinsic unmoved mover (which cannot be the Prime Mover) and what is light or heavy is moved (even in its natural movements) by the cause that brings them into being and by the cause that removes the obstacle to their movement. See Aristotle (1879, *Physics* 8.4, 256a1–3).
- ⁵ Of course, here, “to remember” is alluding to the theory of anamnesis, which is an explanation about how we first acquired the experience of those realities that we contemplate in philosophy and other sciences.

- 6 See, for instance, the works by Jedan (2000), Mesch (2013) or Rapp (2017). Of course, I believe that Aristotle holds a sufficient notion of freedom, but I can only outline my position. However, the reasons I give below will prove the existence of freedom in God and a fortiori of freedom in Aristotle's thought.
- 7 The reader should see the said paper by Irwin, where he succeeds in defending a very similar view.
- 8 Compare 1111b10-19 with *Republic* 4, 439a-441 d.
- 9 It is not appropriate to translate *orektiké* with the word "desire" because this English word does not cover all the wealth of meaning of that Greek word. It would be better to translate it as "inclination" or "tendency", but really the Latin translation is best: *appetitus*, which in English can be expressed as "appetitive power", as I have chosen to do.
- 10 Only among beings with intellect can there be *philia*. See *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.2, 1155b26-32; 11, 1161b1-8; 1162a4-5; 1163b15-19.
- 11 This is the reason why "justice" exists only among beings that have *noûs* (*Nicomachean Ethics* 5.9, 1137a26-30). Slaves can have friendship (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.11, 1161b1-8) and virtue because they have *lógos* (Aristotle 1894, *Politics* 1.13, 1259b22-28 and 1260a14-24), and virtue can exist only among those who can choose (*Nicomachean Ethics* 2). The appetitive power of *boulesis* is in the rational part of the soul.
- 12 See Aristotle (1879), *Physics* 8.10, 266a10-267b26. Sarah Broadie cites the passage of *Physics* and the conclusion, but not the reasons why a finite magnitude cannot have infinite power. See Broadie (2009), p. 237.
- 13 "[...] actio agentis per intellectum, non proportionatur naturae ipsius, sed formae apprehensae; non enim aedificator tantum aedificat quantum potest, sed quantum exigit ratio formae conceptae" (Aquinas 2000b, *In octos libros Physicorum*, lib. 8, l. 21, n. 10).
- 14 Lindsay Judson points out another reason why a finite magnitude cannot have infinite power in Aristotle. *Metaphysics Book A* (1919), pp. 193-94, namely: "his idea seems to be that, if the cause had magnitude, determinate amounts of power would be located in distinct spacial parts of the cause, and used up successively, like a series of batteries used one at a time". This is not incompatible with what I hold in the text, but I am focusing on a particular argument of *Physics* 8.10.
- 15 Aristotle gives other reasons for postulating an incorporeal power: "that which exists without magnitude cannot be in motion" (267a22-3), and this is how the first mover can be motionless and the beginning of the chain of movers and moved. Moreover, "we have a mover that has no need to change along with that which it moves but will be able to always cause motion (because causing motion under these conditions requires no effort)" (267b22-3; see also Aristotle 1879, *Physics* 8.10, 266a10-267b26). What the first mover does is not to transmit physical energy, which cannot be done without undergoing change; what the first mover is doing is "touching without being touched", as Aristotle (*Physics* 8.5, 258a18-22) states. And that is precisely what the intellectual substance, entirely incorporeal, does, and (analogously) so does the human will, in moving the body.
- 16 See Aristotle (1896), *De anima* 3.9 432b3-7; 10, 433a22-30; 11, 433b3-13; and Aristotle (1895), *Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072a26-30 and 1072a34-b5. Regarding the action that conforms to the conception of the intellect, see the general description of *téchne* by Aristotle (1962), *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.4, 1140a6-14, and its application to theology here, *Metaphysics Lambda* 10, 1075b8-10.
- 17 As I will show below, there are texts that allow us to attribute "will" to Aristotle's God. This interpretation has been defended by Brentano (1977, pp. 175-77), Berti (1977, pp. 435-36; 2005, p. 747), De Koninck (2008, p. 130), George (2010, pp. 4-5) and Torrijos-Castrillejo (2013).
- 18 That the vegetative soul is the source of nourishment, growth and reproduction can be seen in *De anima* 2.4, 416a6-9. That the sensitive soul is the origin of the animals' movements can be seen in *De anima* 3.9-10. That the soul is an unmoved mover can be seen in *Physics* 8.5, 258a1-4.
- 19 On the way in which these substances know, see Aristotle (1896), *De anima* 3.6, 430b20ff. It is presupposed here that there cannot be causes separate from matter, and moreover, there cannot be intelligibles that are not intelligences (or acts of intelligences). On the fact that their contemplating another substance implies that they are not the highest substance and that their substance is not their operation, see *Metaphysics Lambda* 9, 1074b18-21. Lindsay Judson interprets this passage differently in 2019, pp. 306-307. Instead, Aryeh Kosman interprets it in the same way as I do. See Kosman (2000), p. 314.
- 20 See Aristotle (1895), *Metaphysics Lambda* 10, 1075b13-16. Aristotle describes the opinions of some Presocratics, which are considerably similar to those of some modern philosophers and even some of his modern interpreters.
- 21 Aristotle (1922), my translation. Note how Plato (1900a, *Symposium* 206c) resonates here. A similar idea is repeated in *De anima* 2.4, 415a26-b7: living beings participate as much as they can in eternity and divinity through the generation of other beings similar to them. In Aristotle (1962), *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7, 1177b31-34, this subject is dealt with once more, and again closely following Plato's *Symposium* (212a): man may imitate God not only through generation but also through contemplation, and in this latter way, he "immortalizes" himself as much as possible.
- 22 Aquinas (2000a), *In De generatione et corruptione*, lib. 2, l. 10, n. 7. My translation. Actually, in inanimate things, the substance generated by other non-living substance might be of a different species, but it belongs always to the same genus. According to Aristotle (1922), there is a cycle in the generation and corruption of inanimate things (*De generatione et corruptione* 2.11, 338a2-11).
- 23 See this clear text: Aristotle (1879), *Physics* 2.8, 199a20-b32. See also *Physics* 7.1, 252a11-14: *ubi natura, ibi ordo* because "nature is cause of order for all beings".

- 24 See Aquinas (2000b), *In octos libros Physicorum*, lib. 2, l. 12, n. 1; and Aquinas (2000d), *Summa theologiae* I q. 2, a. 3, c. St. Thomas states in his commentary on *Physics*: “Ea enim quae non cognoscunt finem, non tendunt in finem nisi ut directa ab aliquo cognoscente, sicut sagitta a sagittante: unde si natura operetur propter finem, necesse est quod ab aliquo intelligente ordinetur; quod est providentiae opus”. Aristotle explicitly states that there is divine providence: see Aristotle (1962), *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8, 1179a22–32. I have proved that, actually, this is Aristotle’s mature thesis, that there is providence: see Casanova (2016). Brentano (1978, pp. 58–60) and contemporary interpreters such as George (2010), Torrijos-Castrillejo (2012, p. 13) and Pelletier (2020) agree with my interpretation.
- 25 In Aristotle (1895), *Metaphysics Lambda* 10, 1075a11–15 Aristotle has stated that God is the highest good. Lindsay Judson comments on this passage (Judson 2019, pp. 356–57), but he seems to overlook that it poses a problem for his general interpretation of Lambda. Indeed, if the highest Intellect as an efficient cause acts for the sake of the highest good, then it seems that the Intellect would not be the highest cause. Anaxagoras, when stating that the Intellect alone was the highest cause, touched on this problem but did not understand it in all its depth. Aristotle solves the problem because he knows how to reduce the good for which the craftsman acts to the craft that is the principle of action in the craftsman. Thus, the *poietikón* (not mere *kinetikón*) conceives precisely the good that He wants to produce, and in His act of understanding, the form understood and that good are one. Judson (2019) seems to criticize Aristotle because he does not mention Plato’s *Timaeus*, where “the Demiurge is portrayed as a divine and rational moving cause”. But the reason for that is simple: Plato’s demiurge acts for the sake of the highest good, which in Plato’s understanding is a different entity.
- 26 A post-Jaegerian reader may ask whether Aristotle’s mind did not change during his long philosophical career. To this concern, I reply that it did, and considerably. In his youth, as a Platonist, he believed in separate forms. When he realized that they could not exist, his theology went through a crisis. One can feel that in some passages of *Posterior Analytics* where he talks about the science that he later will call “wisdom”, “first philosophy”, or “theology” as if that science were a hypothesis (see Aristotle 1964, *Posterior Analytics* 1.11, 77a25–35, for example). Moreover, in some passages of the *Metaphysics*, he uses the expression “the sought for science” (see Aristotle 1895, *Metaphysics Alpha* 1–2, 981b27–982a6; 982b5–10). The reason is that he needed to discover that there were formalities that, being metacategorical (*being, good, one, intelligible*), can be predicated of both suprasensible and sensible realities in order to establish the new science of first philosophy in place of Plato’s dialectics. Once he made this discovery, he established his theology, which did not suffer drastic changes or revisions afterwards.
- 27 See Aristotle (1895), *Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072b17–30; and 9, 1074b18–1075a11. I have already pointed out that Lindsay Judson reads these passages in a different way. See Judson 2019, pp. 306–7.
- 28 The statement in the text depends on the following reasoning: if one thing is directed to an end by a natural desire, such desire does not depend on the knowledge that such a thing might have, since it is previous to such knowledge. But the direction of all desires depends on knowledge. For this reason, natural desires must depend on the knowledge of the Author of nature. Aristotle does not state this, but he comes very close in *Physics* 2.8, 199b26–32. Regarding the dependence of secondary separate substance from the first, see Aristotle (1895), *Metaphysics Lambda* 8, 1073a23–24 (God is called here “the principle and the first of beings”), 1073a30 (here God is called “the first substance”) and 1073b1–3 (here Aristotle states that among the separate substances there is one that is first, another one is second, and so on. He states, moreover, that the order of the substances may be known through the order of the moving spheres); and 9, 1074b29–30. Note that in *Lambda* 8, 1074a31–37, after stating that there are many separate substances, Aristotle adds that the first is only one, both in species and in number. In *Metaphysics alfa élatton* 1, 993b19–31, Aristotle argues explicitly that the community of the name “truth” [intelligibility], which is not mere equivocation, must come from what is *Truest*. He concludes the passage thus: “as each thing is in respect of being, so it is in respect of truth”. But it is clear that the First Substance is the Highest Being. Therefore, it must be the *Truest* reality. Actually, without the community of name coming *through efficient causality* from the *Truest*, the Aristotelian cosmos would be much more episodic than the Platonic. In the Platonic, there was at least an explanation (through Ideas and participation) of the community of name. But I cannot in this context go further in this direction. For further development on this point, I suggest that the reader look at my previous work. See Casanova 2007, pp. 95–155.
- 29 See Aristotle (1962), *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7, especially 1177a27–1178a8, where Aristotle deals both with the self-sufficiency that is proper for the highest happiness and with how it assimilates us to God. God is the happiest and most self-sufficient being because He needs nothing outside of Himself. He just contemplates Himself and in Himself he knows everything else.
- 30 See Aristotle (1962), *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.8, 1059a27–b1; 9.4, 1166a2–6. For instance, Flannery (1999, pp. 134–35) acknowledges that Aristotle’s God loves men with a love of friendship, although He does not need them.
- 31 Lindsay Judson states that a mover without magnitude could be unmoved. However, he seems to suppose that as long as it transfers power, it cannot be really unmoved like the object of desire (see Judson 2019, pp. 206, 235). He is taking “movement” in *De anima* 3.10 in the strict sense that has an intermediate state between the initial one and the final one (see Judson 2019, p. 179), which Aristotle denies of sense perception and of intellectual grasping (see *De anima* 3.7, 433a27–b10). But Aristotle states as well that intellectual grasping has a greater degree of immobility (see *De anima* 4, 429a29–b5 and 429b22–430a9). Thus, perceiving is a “movement” of a species different from the physical movement because in the former there is no intermediate state as there is in

the latter: perceiving is act of the being in act not of the being in potency. The same thing is said of “desiring” in *De anima* 3.7, 17-18: it is a “movement” of that which is in act. This is why even animals’ souls, *qua* agents, are unmoved movers. But a greater degree of immobility belongs to the appetite belonging to reason, *boulesis*. What Aristotle is arguing in *Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072b14 is precisely that the First Substance (not just “Prime Mover”) moves as an agent with the same immobility as the object of love. That is, among the agents, the first one has the greatest degree of immobility.

32 The necessity is probably stronger: if matter is a necessary being by itself, not created, then God must have caused necessarily, although He did not cause necessarily this concrete cosmos. Here Brentano’s view (explained in the next note) can come into place, since he thought that God created the separate substances, the human intellects and matter and in that way he presents the Aristotelian as a complete, coherent view of the cosmos in which God’s *autarchia* would really be totally independent from matter. However, it seems to me that Aristotle had the true insight that matter is a necessary [principle of] being and could not come to conceive that its necessity could be dependent on an original divine act of creation out of nothing.

33 Even in the foundational discussion between David Ross and Franz Brentano, we see this subject emerge. Indeed, against Brentano, who held that according to Aristotle God created the world from eternity, Ross argues that “the spheres in so far as they have *hylē* cannot have been thought of as created by God, for *hylē* is what making presupposes and what therefore cannot be made” (1914, p. 291). The truth is that Brentano’s position is very strong. It is clear that human intellects come to be (as he argued and Ross and Zeller contested) and that, since they are incorporeal, they do not come to be through natural change and generation. Moreover, if, as Brentano plausibly holds, the being of the secondary separate substances depends on the first substance (since their operations do depend on the first substance, as most interpreters accept, including Lindsay Judson: see Judson 2019, pp. 330–31, 341), this dependence seems to suggest an eternal creation. Certainly, since the being of the spiritual substances, including the human intellect, is much more solid than the being of material realities, and if it is plausible to hold that incorporeal substances were caused by God, according to Aristotle, then it seems plausible to argue, as Brentano did, that matter was also produced by God, although not through natural change. But this is what I deny in the body of the article because I do not see that Aristotle draws the necessary consequences that would follow from holding this position.

34 On the two kinds of matter, see Aristotle (1895), *Metaphysics Lambda* 2, 1069b23–26. It presupposes Aristotle (1881), *De coelo* 1.3, 269b18–270b31.

35 See Aristotle (1961), *De partibus animalium* 1.1, 639b19–21. Here, Aristotle calls this final cause the *lógos* (the *reason*, *ratio*) of things, and he states that art or craft is a *lógos* without matter (see 640a33–34). In all this, it is easy to perceive the connection between divine Art of Craft, on the one hand, and nature, on the other. How could there be *lógos* in nature without an intellectual cause? In *De partibus animalium* 1.5, 644b23–645b, Aristotle states that when contemplating the works of the art of painting or of sculpture, which are mere imitations of nature, we experience a great pleasure because in them we co-contemplate the art itself that devised them. He adds that a similar pleasure exists when we contemplate the works of nature, since in them, we can contemplate [*kathorân*] the causes. This passage of *De partibus animalium* is relevant for an additional reason. Werner Jaeger took it to belong to the last intellectual period of Aristotle which is the less Platonic period. See Jaeger (1934, pp. 337–41). Despite this, the doctrine of the passage is extremely close to that of Plato (1900c, *Republic* 3, 401a–2a).

36 Aristotle (1961), *De partibus animalium* 1.1, 641b16–18. See up to line 642a2. Aquinas corrects Aristotle regarding the explanation of the non-generability of heaven. He argues that it is not due to being composed of a matter different from the sub-lunar sphere, but to a disposition of the celestial matter to a different kind of form (a heavenly one), a kind of form that can entirely actualize the potentiality of matter (Aquinas 2000e, *In libros de coelo et mundo*, lib. 1, l. 6, n. 6). This is interesting because, contrary to what many Thomists hold, Aquinas teaches that “potencies are diversified according to their order to a diversity of acts”. Besides this, he follows Aristotle in holding that heaven is non-generable, and thinks that Aristotle and other philosophers came to know the creation of heaven itself (an emanation [*effluvium*] from the first principle), although they understood it to be coeternal with God, while “we state that the heaven was caused by God according to the whole of its substance [*sc.* the heaven’s] from a particular initial instant in time” (n. 7).

37 See Aristotle (1961), *De partibus animalium* 1.1, 641b18–24. Here Aristotle points out an idea that echoes Aristotle’s (1895) *Metaphysics Lambda* 10, 1075a16–22. In the biological work, Aristotle calls “*lógos*” this formal aspect of nature.

38 Brentano (1977, p. 134) sustained this opinion.

39 In *Metaphysics Lambda* 10, Aristotle points out that the cosmos has been ordered by God, but the lowest parts in it were left more to chance than the upper parts. I agree that there is chance in the universe, but if Aristotle had known that God created matter, he would know, as Aquinas did, that even chance is subject to God’s providence. In *Physics* 2.6, 198a1 ff. Aristotle divides, like Plato, the most general (efficient) causes into three: nature, art and chance. In the commentary on this passage, St. Thomas makes an observation beyond what the text states (introduced by the typical expression “*considerandum est autem*”) to point out that chance is subject to a superior cause that orders it. In comparison with it, it is not “chance”, even if it is chance in comparison with its effects. Aristotle, as far as my knowledge goes, never made such a remark, but, on the contrary, he seems to speak of chance as something that originates at one of the two poles of the cosmos and is not subject to the other pole.

- ⁴⁰ Aquinas (2000c, *Summa contra gentiles* I, chapters 81 and 82) offers arguments—that are purely Aristotelian—in order to prove that God does not necessarily will anything different from Himself.
- ⁴¹ See George (2010) and Pelletier (2020). In Plato (1900e, *Laws* 10), it has been proved that God exists, takes care of human affairs and cannot be placated with sacrifices.
- ⁴² See Aquinas (2000c), *Summa contra gentiles* 1, chapter 84: “Secundum hoc [. . .] quod aliquid repugnat rationi entis in quantum huiusmodi, non potest in eo salvari similitudo primi esse, scilicet divini, quod est fons essendi. Non potest igitur Deus velle aliquid quod repugnat rationi entis in quantum huiusmodi”. For more on this question, see Brock (1993).
- ⁴³ Note the closeness of Aquinas’ choice of words here to that of Aristotle in *De generatione et corruptione* 2.10.
- ⁴⁴ Aquinas (1975). I follow the division of the text in Aquinas (2000c).
- ⁴⁵ See Aristotle (1895), *Metaphysics Lambda* 7, 1072b18–30. Joy or pleasure presupposes love. Aristotle explicitly attributes to God the activity of loving in other passages, as when he states that there are men who are loved by the gods: see, for example, Aristotle (1962), *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8, 1179a22–32 and Aristotle (1935), *Eudemian Ethics* 7.14, 1247a27–1248b6. But, besides this, although Aristotle rejects the Delphian separation of the most beautiful, the best and the most pleasant, he agrees that “the most pleasant is that somebody achieves what he loves” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8, 1099a28). His agreement is clear in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.4, 1175a10–16, where he holds that pleasure makes perfect the activities or operations and, in that context, states: “each one exercises the faculties [that he most loves] and concerning the things that he most loves”.

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Article

The *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus and the Critique of Fatalism

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Abstract: This study examines a specific section of the *Symposium* by Methodius of Olympus, a Church Father of the late 3rd and early 4th centuries, focusing on the critique of astrological fatalism. In Methodius's *Symposium*, the virgin Thecla offers a series of rational arguments against the notion of an inescapable fate governing human events, emphasizing the primacy of human free will and responsibility. Notably, Thecla's refutation of fatalism relies almost entirely on classical philosophical reasoning—citing Homer and echoing Platonic thought—rather than on Scripture, thereby engaging pagan cultural ideas on common ground. The paper highlights how Thecla's excursus on fate, unique within the dialogue, underscores the centrality of human freedom in Methodius's theology. Furthermore, a comparison with Methodius's dialogue *On Free Will* suggests that the *Symposium*'s anti-fatalistic arguments are consistent with his broader defence of free will as God's greatest gift to humanity, which requires the synergistic participation of human freedom alongside divine grace.

Keywords: Methodius of Olympus; *Symposium*; virginity; Thecla; fatalism; astrology; freedom; free will

1. Introduction

The present study focuses on a rather limited section of the *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus, a Church Father who lived at the turn of the third and fourth centuries. Little information has come down to us about Methodius. The main source, which in any case is not without contradictions and problematic aspects, is Jerome¹. Which information can we consider reliable about the life of the author this article deals with? Most scholars agree that Methodius was a writer and bishop from Olympus in Lycia, Asia Minor, who lived in the second half of the 3rd century and the first decade of the 4th. He probably died a martyr's death in the persecution of 311–312, which took place under Maximinus Daza.

Of his works, only the *Symposium* has come down to us in its entirety in its original language, Greek. With respect to the subject of the present study, I believe it is worth mentioning at least two other Methodian writings, the dialogues *On Free Will* and *On the Resurrection*, which have been preserved only in part in the original language and in full in an early Slavonic translation². The first is a dialogue in which two proponents of dualistic theories on God and matter clash with a spokesman of Christian doctrine. The theme on which the three characters confront each other is that of evil, matter and human freedom. As will be seen later, there are passages within this writing that are quite close in theme to the section of the *Symposium* that is the subject of the present study. *On the Resurrection*, on the other hand, is a dialogue in which Aglaophon and Proclus speak from the heterodox

perspective, while Methodius–Eubulius and Memianus represent the orthodox position. The former radically reject the resurrection of the flesh, whereas the latter defend this dogma—understood as the reconstitution of the same body, both in its material substance and external form—using arguments of various kinds.

Scholars seem to agree in considering *On the Resurrection* one of the Methodian works belonging to the writer's last phase, a phase in which he comes to a direct and explicit confrontation with Origen. The *Symposium*, on the other hand, would belong to an earlier phase, in which the author still tends to conceive of himself as a disciple of the great Alexandrian³, although the evolution of the Methodian attitude cannot be traced too clearly⁴. The *Symposium* could, therefore, have been composed between 260 and 280. I will not deal with the problem of the location of *On Free Will* in relation to the *Symposium* at this point, as I will have to return to this later.

With the *Symposium*, the Methodian work on which this article focuses, the author from the very title places himself in dialogue with Plato's work of the same name. If, however, the narrative frame of Plato's dialogue is constituted by a banquet in Agathon's house, at which the diners—including Socrates himself—decide to sing the praises of *eros* in turn, in the Methodian work, the narrative frame is represented by the meeting of ten virgins who gather at the garden of Virtue, the daughter of Philosophy: each of the ten virgins—the reference to the Gospel parable is evident—is invited by the hostess to present a speech in praise of chastity⁵.

As is evident from this brief presentation of the work, Methodius constructs his dialogue according to a structure similar to that of Plato's writing: a double prologue (the first in which one person questions another about an event, the second in which the event in question is evoked), a central part with the speeches concerning a single theme and, finally, an epilogue. The bishop of Olympus also scatters the prologue and, in general, the entire work with numerous allusions to the *Symposium* and other writings of the philosopher of Athens⁶.

The ten Methodian virgins, in describing the value of the Christian ἀγνεία, almost always take their cue from the exegesis of Scripture. Such is also the case with the virgin Thecla⁷, the eighth virgin to take the floor, the one who proposes the critique of fatalism with which this article is concerned. It is a common theme within early Christian literature. It is with the Stoic Chrysippus (c. 280–206 BC) that a first systematization of certain fatalistic conceptions is achieved, a systematization that represents the first polemical objective of a series of writings defending free will from Academic, Peripatetic, Epicurean, Skeptical, Neoplatonic, and Christian perspectives. To the objective represented by the Stoic current is added astrological fatalism of Chaldean origin. As will be seen in the course of the study, the anti-astrological polemic of Christian authors is expressed through a series of τόποι, some of which date back to Carneades (c. 219–129 BC), scholarch of an Academy dominated by skeptical tendencies⁸.

The virgin Thecla begins her speech by stating that virginity makes one like God. The soul of those who practice it flies up to the meadows of immortality, where it can contemplate the selfsame realities of righteousness, continence, truth, etc. A long exegesis of *Apoc* 12:1–6 is thus proposed, an exegesis that constitutes the central and most extensive part of Thecla's discourse. The woman in childbirth is the Church, which gives birth to the baptized; the dragon is the devil, who lays snares for those who have been born in Christ; the desert in which the woman takes refuge is the land of virtue. The virgins are called to defeat the Beast, whose heads represent the various vices. The explanation of the New Testament passage aims to present the Christian virgins with the example of the Mother, the Church, who was able to resist the devil's threats. That of the virgins is a struggle that

requires a proper use of freedom. Linking the theme of freedom, indispensable in the fight against evil, with that of criticism of the fatalist view, Thecla states:

Now it is possible for us to determine beforehand and to prefer what is better instead of what is earthly, since we have received minds that are independent of all compulsion (αὐτοκράτορα καὶ αὐτεξούσιον τὸν λογισμὸν εἰληφότας καὶ πάσης ἀνάγκης ἐκτὸς) in the choice of whatever we, as our own masters (αὐτοδεσπότης), think best: we are not slaves to Fate or to the whims of Fortune (οὐ δουλεύοντες εἰμαρμένῃ καὶ τύχαις). *** So that each one of us might not be merely human, but might become good and blessed by following the human examen of Christ and by modelling oneself on Him and living in imitation of Him. (Methodius, *symp.* VIII,13,30–36)⁹

The virgin, in fact, considers that the greatest evil is to refer the causes of sins to the movements of the stars (τὸ τὰς αἰτίας τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων εἰς τὰς τῶν ἀστέρων κινήσεις ἀναφέρειν, *ibid.* VIII,13,37–39)¹⁰ and to say that our life is governed by the necessity of fate (τὸν βίον ἡμῶν οἰακίζεσθαι τῆς εἰμαρμένης ταῖς ἀνάγκαις, *ibid.* VIII,13,39–40)¹¹. This is the position of one who relied more on conjecture than on reasoning (Ὑπονοίᾳ γὰρ μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ φρονεῖν, *ibid.* VIII,13,41)¹². Thecla therefore asks Virtue, the hostess, for permission to extraordinarily prolong the discourse with an additional part in which she claims to refute fatalism and, specifically, that view that binds the fate of men to the movement of the stars. As is evident from the words above, with the section in question, the virgin seeks to convey the idea that there is nothing external that can influence the free and voluntary choice to live a chaste life and, more generally, to choose what is best, disowning what does not live up to it¹³.

Virtue grants her this and even states that the speech can only be considered perfect with this further addition. This is the only instance in the entire work in which one of the speakers makes such a request, which, moreover, is followed by Virtue's concession¹⁴. This section (*ibid.* VIII,14–17), which is added to the eulogy of chastity and which thematically retains a certain independence from it, makes Thecla's speech by far the most extensive¹⁵. I wonder whether this *excursus* might constitute one of the elements that could explain Thecla's victory in the oratorical competition, given its exceptional nature. As will become clear throughout this article, this exceptionality lies not so much in the content of her arguments as in the way they are integrated into the *Symposium*, a Christian dialogue on virginity.

In presenting the theme she wishes to explore, that of human freedom and the falsity of the fatalist position that limits its value, Thecla quotes Homer, *Od.* I,34: "By their own wickedness they suffer misery beyond what is fated" (σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὑπέρμορον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν, in Methodius, *symp.* VIII,13,49)¹⁶, a passage quoted by Thecla also in *ibid.* VIII,16,63. In the *incipit* of the Homeric poem, Zeus, when speaking in the council of gods, alludes to the human habit of attributing to a god every misfortune whose cause is not obvious. I believe that this quotation from Thecla already offers the horizon within which the virgin wishes to place her reflection on fatalism: Thecla wishes to place the question on common ground with pagan culture and for this she will resort above all to rational arguments that can be accepted by believers and non-believers alike. It is striking, in this sense, the almost total absence of references to the Holy Scriptures throughout the *excursus* in question, which is quite exceptional in a writing like the *Symposium*, always interwoven with references to the Bible¹⁷.

I believe that this feature of Thecla's arguments in this part of her discourse is not necessarily in contradiction with what some scholars have observed, according to which the primary audience of the anti-astrological section would be the followers of Christ. Indeed, the *Symposium*, due to the characteristics it presents, can only have as its addressees

Christians, who, very often, do not hesitate to reconcile their faith in Christ with practices proper to astral fatalism¹⁸. And yet, while addressing Christians *first* and *foremost*, Thecla decides to employ arguments proper to a polemic that, as we have said, did not originate in the Christian sphere and that, on the contrary, by the time Christianity began to spread, had already developed over several centuries. The virgin therefore gives priority to those arguments that do not derive their value from Revelation, but from their intrinsic logical coherence.

It is now time to analyze, at least in its main arguments, the section of Thecla's speech against fatalism.

2. The Virgin Thecla and Her Argument Against Fatalism

It seems to me that the argument developed by Thecla against fatalism is organized around five groups of arguments, followed by a conclusion. All the arguments are punctuated by a refrain that is repeated throughout the section: "Therefore destiny does not exist" (Οὐκ ἔρχα γένεσις/Οὐκ ἔρχα εἰμαρμένη)¹⁹.

1. (§§ 210–217) The nature of the signs of the zodiac, the constituent elements of astrology, is based on myths and legends with no rational foundation. The cosmological model that those who practice astrology defend is presented. Furthermore, if the signs of the zodiac are only present in the sky from a certain point in time, did our ancestors live without a destiny?
2. (§§ 218–219) If the stars are endowed with a divine nature, how can they determine the most negative actions of human beings? If they are alien to passions and pain, how can they determine in human life that to which they themselves are alien?
3. (§§ 220–224) If man is governed by the movement of the heavenly bodies, which, in turn, is caused by God, the latter is the cause of evil. However, if justice is distinct from injustice, God cannot be the cause of injustice. The same is said with respect to temperance and intemperance and, more generally, with respect to good and evil. In conclusion, God cannot be the cause of evil, because He is good.
4. (§§ 224–227) Laws and fatalism cannot be reconciled: if a violent act is determined by the necessity of fate, laws seek to prevent what has been determined by fate. They, therefore, eliminate fatalism, as they show that virtue, being directed towards the freedom of the human being, can be taught.
5. (§§ 227–229) If the wicked are wicked because of the necessity of fate and the good are good for the same reason, then the former are not deserving of punishment and the latter are not deserving of praise. However, wickedness is blameworthy, while virtue is pleasing to God.

In the conclusion of her *excursus* (§§ 229–231), Thecla states that, ultimately, virtue and vice depend on two tendencies that have their origin *within* the human being and not *outside*, as those who advocate astrology and fatalism believe. The end of Thecla's speech is followed by a brief exchange between Eubulion and Gregorion (§§ 231–232), the two women who converse in the play's prologue and epilogue. Both emphasize Thecla's great oratorical ability, an ability, moreover, accompanied by great candour and an irrepressible love for Christ²⁰.

As will be seen below, the arguments developed by Thecla are quite common in antifatalist and anti-astrological polemics in pagan and Christian circles. According to Macías and González (2005, pp. 322–27), an exception is Thecla's attack on the cosmic model defended by those who practice astrology, an attack that is found at the beginning of the section (§§ 210–217) and which, in the opinion of the two scholars, is surprising for its originality. The model the virgin mocks is the traditional one in classical times, based on a spherical world with the earth at its centre. The Church Fathers are faced with two basic

cosmic models: the traditional Greek model and the biblically derived Jewish model, with a flat earth, a heavenly vault resting on the earth, and a firmament located below the sky. The defence of the biblical model over the traditional Greek one arose within Syriac Christianity in the mid-4th century. Thus, although Methodius does not make an explicit statement in favour of the biblical cosmological model, by ridiculing the traditional Greek model, he is anticipating a polemic that would later erupt in the second half of the 4th century²¹.

On this point, having carefully read Thecla's reasoning, I find no significant evidence to sufficiently justify Macías and González's interpretation. In my opinion, what Thecla is primarily criticizing is the existence of the zodiacal constellations and their purported influence on human affairs. I find no critique of the Greek model itself, which is based on a spherical world with the Earth at its centre. Even less so do I find any indication of a defence of the biblical model, as the two mentioned scholars claim. Consequently, I believe the assessment of the argument's novelty—according to the scholars, a precursor to a controversy that would arise about a century later—should also be reconsidered. Overall, I find it rather speculative to draw all these elements from the text.

Not new, however, is the argument employed by Thecla that there can be no destiny if the constellations that determine it were born at a specific time, leaving the previous period somewhat 'uncovered' (cf. *symp.* VIII,14,59–15,25). What about those who were born before the zodiacal signs were placed among the stars? In fact, they survived perfectly well, even though they were not influenced by zodiacal constellations, which did not yet exist. A similar argument is found, for example, in Tatian, *orat.* 9²².

Let us now turn to Thecla's argument that the stars, being endowed with a divine nature and being strangers to passions and pain, cannot determine the more negative actions of human beings (§§ 218–219). Origen, like Methodius, also believes that the stars are beings that enjoy a more blissful life than humans²³. The great Alexandrian, in fact, cannot accept the idea widespread in certain Gnostic groups that some celestial bodies are malignant and others benign²⁴. Yet Origen considers the stars to be endowed with a soul, rationality and free will and, consequently, believes that they are not exempt from the experience of sin and evil²⁵. Thecla, on the other hand, explains that there is no action that does not start from a desire, nor a desire that does not arise from a need. Consequently, divinity, devoid of need, is unable to conceive of anything evil. Similarly, the stars, close to the divine nature and, therefore, devoid of deficiencies, cannot conceive evil (cf. *symp.* VIII,16,1–5). In the opinion of Burns (2017, pp. 215–17), Methodius, opposed to the theory of the sin of the stars, may have considered the Origenian notion of the possibility of sin of celestial bodies as a concession to the supporters of astrology²⁶.

Something similar can perhaps also be said with respect to another possible source of Methodius, namely the *Liber legum regionum* or *Against Fate* by Bardaisan of Edessa, a Syriac author who lived between the 2nd and 3rd centuries and who, with this dialogue-like writing, claimed to address the issue of human freedom, refuting astral determinism²⁷. With regard to the argument of laws instituted by human beings in an anti-fatalist function, an argument used by both Bardaisan and Methodius, this will be discussed later. Here, however, I would like to highlight a point of discontinuity between the dialogue of the Syriac writer and that of the bishop of Olympus. According to Bardaisan, the stars exercise some power over human nature, although they are not entirely responsible for the sin of human beings²⁸. Thecla, on the other hand, bluntly rejects the possibility that the stars exert any causal force within human affairs. Burns (2017, pp. 214–15) considers that, in Thecla's eyes, Bardaisan's position, as well as that of Origen, previously mentioned, is an unnecessary surrender in favor of the proponents of astrology.

The Methodian virgin, at this point, develops what we might call a 'theological' argument, closely related to the previous one. Whoever claims that man is governed by the

movement of the heavenly bodies is also asserting that God is the cause of evil, since it is He who directs all astral movement. However, God cannot be the cause of evil, because He is good (§§ 220–224). With these words Thecla begins to present the argument in question:

Those who lay down the definition that man has no free will (μὴ εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀυτεξούσιον) but is governed by the ineluctable necessities and the unwritten decrees of Fate, commit impiety against God Himself, since they declare that He is the source and cause of man's sins (τὸν θεὸν παρεκτικὸν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων αὐτὸν κακῶν καὶ ποιητὴν). For if He harmoniously directs the entire circular motion of the stars with ineffable and inscrutable wisdom, and if, on the other hand, the stars produce the qualities of vice and virtue in life, dragging men to these things by the chains of necessity, then they declare that God is the cause and source of all evil (αἴτιον τῶν κακῶν τὸν θεὸν ἀποφαίνονται καὶ δότην). But God is not the cause of harm to anyone. Hence there are no horoscopes. (Methodius, *symp.* VIII,16,12–23)²⁹

Is the 'theological' argument an exception to the purely rational and philosophical style that the virgin is adopting in this section, as noted above? Actually, it is not an exception at all, for it is not difficult to see how, in this part of the anti-astrological section, Thecla echoes Platonic ideas and expressions. For instance, when Thecla, immediately after the passage quoted above, states that "the divine is just, good, wise, true, beneficent, not responsible for evil, free from passion, and so forth" (τὸ θεῖον δίκαιον, ἀγαθόν, σοφόν, ἀληθές, ὠφέλιμον, ἀναίτιον κακῶν, ἀσύμπλοκον πάθους καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι τοιοῦτον, *ibid.* VIII,16,24–26)³⁰, she is in all probability taking up the list of divine virtues found in Plato, *Phdr.* 246e³¹. Moreover, when the eighth orator later states that "whichever of these is the cause, God is not responsible" (Ὅποτέρον δ' ἂν τούτων ᾗ τὸ αἴτιον, ὁ θεὸς ἀναίτιος, Methodius, *symp.* VIII,16,100–101)³², seems to paraphrase the famous passage from the myth of Er in which the priest declares that "The blame is his who chooses: God is blameless" (αἰτία ἐλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος, Plato, *R.* X,617e)³³.

The theme Thecla is developing is in fact a central aspect of Platonic thought, an aspect that emerges with great force in the second and tenth books of the *Republic*. It is clear that, in Plato's eyes, Homer is among those who propagated the idea that some evils derive from the gods. Indeed, in the *Iliad*, the idea of a divinity responsible as much for the goods as for the evils that befall man is dominant³⁴. For Plato, on the other hand, the god is good, is only the cause of goods and has no responsibility for evils. It will therefore be necessary to look for another cause of evils, other than the godhead. Even in the myth of Er, to which Thecla may be alluding, the irresponsibility of the divine is reconfirmed and, at the same time, the value of the individual's responsibility is emphasized when he assumes a certain pattern of life.

The philosopher of Athens, therefore, seeks to remove all forms of negative causality from the intelligible and divine sphere. On the other hand, he makes the cause of evil coincide with the heart of the phenomenal world, to which man also belongs. It is as if he distinguishes between two forms of evil: a 'passive' evil, which belongs to the sensible sphere as such, and an 'active' evil, which can be traced back to man's behavior³⁵. If the Christian Methodius takes up Platonic expressions concerning the goodness of God, his irresponsibility for evil and the responsibility of man, he cannot at all take up—and indeed distances himself from—the idea that the cause of negativity resides, on a cosmic level, in corporeality. Suffice it to recall that a large part of the discourse of Theophila, the second speaker, is dedicated to defending the positivity of matter and, therefore, to affirming man's responsibility in the event of its misuse³⁶.

In the concluding part of her discourse, Thecla introduces the anti-astrological argument based on laws: if crimes of various kinds are determined by fate, then laws that aim to

prevent or punish them are contrary to fate. Consequently, laws and fate are irreconcilable (§§ 224–227). I quote some of the virgin's words: "For the law forbids the things which destiny determines; and destiny compels men to do the things which the law forbids. Thus the law is at war with destiny" (Πολέμιον ἄρα γενέσει νόμος) (Methodius, *symp.* VIII,16,68–70)³⁷. And further on: "But the law destroys destiny, teaching that virtue can be learned and is acquired by effort, and that vice is to be avoided and arises from lack of discipline. Hence destiny does not exist" (ibid. VIII,16,90–92)³⁸.

Here again, we are faced with a reworking of an actual τόπος, already employed by Carneades, a scholarch of the Academy who lived at the turn of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. He, critical towards the arts of divination in general, elaborated a number of arguments based on logic and common sense, which had a certain amount of success. Among the various objections advanced against genethliac astrology, a technique that predicts the entire destiny of men on the basis of the configuration of the sky at the moment of birth, the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά stands out. The life of each people is governed by specific laws, customs and habits. It follows that men are not so much conditioned by the stars as by the institutions they have given themselves³⁹.

Between the 2nd and 3rd centuries of our era, the Christian Bardaisan took up the argument of the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά in the dialogue already mentioned, the *Liber legum regionum* (also known as *Against Fate*)⁴⁰. The version elaborated by Bardaisan became the most widespread, especially in Christian circles. According to some scholars, Thecla also took up this argument in the form taken by authors shortly before or almost contemporary with Methodius, such as Bardaisan rather than in the original version formulated by Carneades⁴¹. In any case, given the wide circulation of the argument, it is difficult to establish exact intertextual dependency relations between the different testimonies.

We have thus come to the last argument of the anti-astrological section of Thecla's discourse. If the wicked are wicked by necessity of fate, they cannot be blamed; similarly, if the good act well for the same cause, they cannot be praised (§§ 227–229).

This argument is closely related to the previous one and, like the latter, is not distinguished by any originality⁴². Here again, Carneades can be regarded as the father of the moral objection: if human affairs are predetermined by fate, then reward, praise and blame lose their meaning. Denying human freedom amounts to dissolving all forms of moral responsibility, ultimately justifying even the most immoral actions; no social order would be possible⁴³.

In the opinion of Amand (1973, p. 340), the scholar who most thoroughly analyzed the survival of Carneades' arguments in Greek philosophy and early Christian theology during the first four centuries, a direct use of Carneades' ethical arguments must be excluded. However, it is possible to attribute a neo-academic origin to "ces syllogismes arides, raccourcis et dépourvus de toute forme oratoire". According to the scholar, it cannot be ruled out that Methodius drew them from a scholastic manual, a hypothesis that gains consistency if one considers the diffusion of the ὑπομνήματα in the philosophical teaching of the imperial era.

When the virgin Thecla feels that astrological fatalism has been satisfactorily refuted, she concludes with these words:

so that even a child could by now see clearly and perceive their error; for good and evil are within our power and are not determined by the stars (ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἔστι τὸ διαπράξασθαι τὸ καλὸν ἢ τὸ κακὸν καὶ οὐκ ἐν τοῖς ἀστροῖσι). For we have two motions within us, the desire of the body and that of the soul (Δύο γὰρ κινήσεε ἐν ἡμῖν ἔστων· ἐπιθυμία πεφυκότε σαρκὸς καὶ ψυχῆς), and they are distinct from each other. Hence too they have received two different names, virtue and vice (ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀρετῆς, ἡ δὲ κακίας). And we of course, should be led

on by the most glorious and golden persuasion of virtue, choosing what is best rather than what is base. (Methodius, *symp.* VIII,17,5–11)⁴⁴

The virgin Thecla seems to conclude her discourse by introducing a certain dichotomy between flesh and soul, ἐπιθυμία of the flesh as wickedness and ἐπιθυμία of the soul as virtue. It is hardly surprising that the *Symposium* contains traces of a certain dualism of Platonic and Alexandrian origin, considering the plurality of influences exerted by various authors on the virgins and, in particular, the affinity with Origenian thought, which is especially evident in Methodius' early writings⁴⁵. In any case, I think it is useful to read this passage in the light of other Methodian places in which the author, trying to avoid misunderstandings in the interpretation of certain Pauline passages, specifies that sometimes the term σάϛξ indicates not so much the bodily dimension, as a dissolute way of living this dimension⁴⁶.

It is time to question the reasons that may have led the virgin Thecla to develop a reflection in an anti-fatalist key. This will lead us to assess the importance of the theme of freedom in the *Symposium* and, more generally, in Methodian work.

3. The Importance of the Theme of Freedom in the *Symposium* and a Comparison with *On Free Will*

The exceptionality of this section has already been mentioned in relation to the overall development of the work: Thecla's request to prolong the discourse with an anti-astrological *excursus* is extraordinary; the length of the virgin's discourse with this 'unexpected' addition is extraordinary; and so too, in a certain sense, is its content, given that in this section Thecla neither directly addresses the theme of chastity nor interprets Scripture, as she did in the first part of her speech and as all her companions do. It seems to me, therefore, appropriate to try to understand the reasons that may have led Thecla and, therefore, Methodius to propose this reflection.

As is evident from the analysis just conducted on the anti-fatalist section, the great theme raised by Thecla is that of the freedom of the human being. In Thecla's eyes and, in all likelihood, in the eyes of any Christian, the greatest danger inherent in astrological fatalism consists in the denial of human freedom and responsibility: to subtract God, the creator of the entire universe, including the celestial bodies, from any responsibility for the existence of evil is to affirm the dizzying value of human freedom.

It seems to me that this theme is central throughout Methodius' dialogue. Consider, for example, the speech of the virgin Theophila, the second speaker. In my doctoral thesis, I asked myself why a virgin, in a dialogue entirely devoted to the theme of chastity, focuses her entire speech on the goodness of the conjugal act and procreation. Evidently, the virgin intends to demonstrate that the proposed chastity cannot be confused with Encratitic continence. Here, in summary, is the significance of Theophila's contribution and its value within the work as a whole: Methodian virgins are free in the face of conjugal union, as they are in the face of all the reality of the world, just as Jesus was. The choice of the virginal state is not an obligatory choice in a context in which other states of life, such as the corporal and sexual element, would be rejected. This very freedom accentuates even more the radicality of a total consecration to God. For this reason, Theophila's contribution should not be understood as a parenthesis on the margins of the subject of virginity. On the contrary, in-depth exploration of the relationship between man and woman allows us to understand the virginal condition from the correct perspective⁴⁷.

Moreover, as already mentioned, when the virgin Theophila responds to Marcella's objection regarding the existence of illegitimate children, she is able to insist even more explicitly on the centrality of the freedom of the human being. After evoking the image of the house and the clay, Theophila defends the goodness of every being who has come into

the world, however much the parents may have conceived him through an adulterous act (Methodius, *symp.* II,4–5). There are no realities that are bad in themselves, but there are actions that misuse a reality conceived for a good end⁴⁸.

The final dialogue between Eubulion and Gregorion (*ibid.* epil.) also repropose the theme of human freedom. At the end of the work, in fact, we return to that external setting in which the two women dialogue that readers had encountered in the prologue. Through a rapid exchange, Eubulion manages to convince the second woman that a soul subject to passions is preferable to one untouched by them, since one who is tested by passions and resists demonstrates a higher moral form than one who remains untroubled.

In this way, Eubulion is presenting the desires, disturbances and trials of life as exercises of freedom, that is, as occasions in which freedom is brought into play in a more substantial way. Just as the sexual act is not bad in itself, but ends up being so when man decides to perform it under certain circumstances, so the trials that life presents are not bad in themselves, but become so when man succumbs to them. The relative positivity of the trials that life holds in store, a stimulus to act with greater commitment and assume greater responsibility, is a theme that runs through all of Method's production⁴⁹. It is not surprising, then, that the *Symposium*, a work entirely dedicated to the virginal state, closes on this question: the human being could not embrace virginity in an authentic and integral manner, were it not through the assent of his own freedom.

In general, it seems to me that Methodius does not want to give up two poles, both coessential. On the one hand, virginity is a μύθημα revealed by God, a gift bestowed by God on man by his free initiative. It is a gift of the Spirit that *happens* in the course of salvation history. This implies that, at the time of the prophets, it was not yet possible to live in chastity. On the other hand, God's initiative 'needs' the free participation of the human being⁵⁰. As an author that Methodius most likely knows states, "God wants to save us by counting on our own participation" (ἡμᾶς δὲ ἐξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν βούλεται σῶζεσθαι, Clement of Alexandria, *str.* VI,12,96)⁵¹. Without one of these two poles, man is not offered a true Christian experience, nor is a genuinely lived virginity realized. If one forgets God's initiative, one ends up thinking that virginity is the product of human decision, whereas it does not exist without a proposal that comes from God. At the same time, without the free adhesion of the human being, every proposal would be useless, since it is imposed from the outside and not accepted inwardly. Here, in short, are the two poles highlighted by Methodius: the freedom of God and the freedom of man.

It is precisely the latter, an exclusive gift that God wished to reserve for human beings, that constitutes the central theme of a dialogue of Methodius that, moreover, we have already mentioned several times in this article: *On Free Will*. At the end of this section, I intend to briefly consider a passage from this dialogue, which bears remarkable similarities to some passages in Thecla's anti-astrological section. After demonstrating that by nature nothing is evil, the orthodox character answers the question of one of the two interlocutors, who asked him where the impulse to evil comes from in man. The Orthodox states that the first man was created master of himself, i.e., free (αὐτεξούσιον [. . .], τουτέστιν ἐλεύθερον, Methodius, *arbitr.* 16,2)⁵². This is the greatest gift received from God, because all other beings, including the heavens, the sun and the earth, are subject necessarily to the divine order (ἀνάγκη δουλεύει τῷ θεῷ προστάγματι, *ibid.* 16,3)⁵³. None of them can do anything other than that for which he was created. Man, on the other hand, having been created free, has the faculty to do what he wants (τὴν ἐξουσίαν [. . .] τοῦ δύνασθαι ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται, *ibid.* 16,7)⁵⁴ and thus finds himself choosing between two possibilities: to obey what God has ordered, deserving a reward, or to disobey, deserving on the contrary a punishment.

The argument of the orthodox character is not entirely alien to us. If man's life were determined by fate and the movements of heavenly bodies, he could neither be rewarded

nor punished, since he would not be responsible for his own actions. This is, in fact, the properly moral argument that the virgin Thecla develops at the end of the anti-astrological section of her discourse.

Patterson (1997, pp. 103–4) is convinced that Thecla's *excursus* is a compendium rather than an anticipation of the argument of *On Free Will*. In his view, it is difficult to believe that the concise statement on free will in the concluding section of Thecla's discourse is anything other than a compendium of what had been previously written. The most convincing hypothesis, however, seems to me—for several reasons—to be that of those who argue the anteriority of the *Symposium* to *On Free Will*⁵⁵.

Firstly, I believe that *On Free Will*, as an attack on certain forms of dualism not distant from the Origenian position, is better explained as a composition following a rupture that had not yet fully taken place at the time of the *Symposium*. Secondly, the great formal distance between the *Symposium* and two works such as *On Free Will* and *On the Resurrection* is striking. The first one, in fact, is a dialogue that—as has been said—gives voice to figures whose personalities, from a human and theological point of view, do not coincide and, indeed, sometimes convey viewpoints that do not fully converge, although none of the virgins are presented as heterodox; the other two dialogues, on the other hand, although of the same literary genre as the *Symposium*, make a very clear distinction between heterodox and orthodox interlocutors, who, therefore, represent Methodius' point of view in a coherent and unified manner.

As for the specific case of the similarity between Thecla's *excursus* and the orthodox discourse *On Free Will*, and differing from Patterson's claims, I do not consider that an analysis of the two texts should necessarily lead to the conclusion that Thecla's version is a summary of the discourse of *On Free Will*. Is it not possible that Thecla's anti-astrological polemic, aimed at stimulating a sense of responsibility in virgins and Christians in general, was followed by the writing *On Free Will*, which makes the question of freedom and theodicy the pivot around which the entire work revolves? In my opinion, in this specific case, Patterson's judgement is not sufficiently justified and, in general, it seems more natural to consider *On Free Will* as being posterior to the *Symposium*.

4. Conclusions

It is now time to look back at the path we have travelled and draw some brief conclusions on the anti-fatalist section of the speech of Thecla, the eighth speaker to take the floor in the *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus. This is a particular section within the text, whose content manifests a certain independence from the general structure of the work: the theme of chastity, already developed by the virgin in the first part of her speech, is not directly addressed. In fact, the 'improvised' addition makes Thecla's speech far more extended.

Precisely because of this characteristic, we wondered how the virgin comes to perceive this *excursus* as indispensable. Immediately before asking permission to add a reflection against fatalism, Thecla evokes the struggle of virgins against evil. That of the virgins is a real battle, which requires a righteous exercise of freedom. In this fight, there is nothing external that can influence the free and voluntary choice to lead a chaste life.

This is how his argument begins. In a work dense with references to Holy Scripture, the almost total absence of biblical references throughout the *excursus* in question is surprising. On the contrary, she twice quotes a passage from the *Odyssey* and supports her reflection with Platonic echoes. To combat fatalism and astrology, Thecla moves on a terrain that is not exclusively that of dogma and Revelation, but coincides with the space shared by pagan culture. The arguments she employs, in fact, are rational in nature and can be accepted by believers and non-believers alike. I wondered about the possible reasons behind this

choice. It is certainly worth considering that the anti-fatalist controversy already had a history of its own in philosophy, well before the advent of the *nova religio*. There may also be a pedagogical motive: Thecla accuses those who believe in astrology of having clouded reasoning and of hiding the truth “in myth and fiction rather than treating it in a systematic way” (μύθοις μᾶλλον καὶ πλάσμασιν ἢ τέχνῃ τῶν λόγων, Methodius, *symp.* VIII,14,22–23)⁵⁶. Thus, Thecla’s choice is precisely to challenge astrology through the τέχνη τῶν λόγων, a method that might prove effective with pagans, Christians, and those whose faith had taken on a syncretistic form not devoid of astrological elements.

We have identified five groups of arguments, followed by a conclusion. None of them is surprising in its originality. Even where some scholars have gone as far as to emphasize the originality of the virgin’s alleged criticism of the Greek cosmological model and her defence of the biblical one—elements that would seem to anticipate a controversy that would actually erupt about a century later—I have taken the liberty of expressing my doubts. It is not obvious to me that Thecla is criticizing the Greek model as such, and even less so does she present any explicit defence of the biblical one.

As for the rest, they are, to a large extent, arguments common to anti-fatalist and anti-astrological polemics in both pagan and Christian circles. Possible sources include Carneades, a representative of the skeptical academy, who, in the midst of the Hellenistic era, developed a series of anti-fatalist arguments that were destined to enjoy wide acclaim. Probably some of his arguments reached Methodius through the mediation of authors chronologically closer to him, such as the Christian Bardaisan of Edessa.

Even when the virgin expounds what I have called the theological argument, the reference is not biblical. In order to affirm that God is good and not responsible for evils, Thecla takes up Platonic ideas and expressions. However, she cannot accept from the philosopher of Athens the notion of corporeality as the cause of negativity. In fact, part of Theophila’s discourse is explicitly aimed at refuting such Platonic dualism.

We then questioned the value of the theme of freedom throughout the *Symposium*. Adherence to virginity cannot be imposed from outside, but can only arise from the leading role of personal freedom. God’s initiative cannot force the human being’s yes. The comparison with a passage from the Methodian dialogue *On Free Will*, finally, confirms how central this theme—freedom, the greatest gift that God has granted to mankind—is in the theological reflection of the bishop of Olympus.

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Notes

- ¹ See Jerome, *vir. ill.* 83. Jerome attributes to Methodius the episcopal see of Olympus of Lycia and that of Tyre. In fact, the reference to Phoenicia appears only in Jerome’s testimony and is not found in later sources, which, in any case, take what Stridonense says about Methodius as source material. The date of his martyrdom is also certainly problematic. In fact, Jerome himself proposes two possible circumstances that would have caused this event, namely “the last persecution” (“Ad extremum novissimae persecutionis”, see the edition by Ceresa-Gastaldo 1988, p. 190) or that of Decius and Valerian. The former would most probably be that of Diocletian, which took place under Maximinus Daza. The latter, in turn, would refer to two separate persecutions, that of Decius in 249–250 and that of Valerian in 258–259. However, Jerome, among the various works of Methodius, also mentions the writing *Against Porphyry*: if Porphyry composed his *Against the Christians* around 270, the author of *Against Porphyry* cannot have been martyred under either Decius or Valerian. Evidently, the most plausible hypothesis is that Methodius was sentenced to death under Maximinus Daza between 311 and 312. For a concise presentation of the issues surrounding

Methodius' life, see Franchi (2015, pp. 25–42), and Mejzner and Zorzi (2010, pp. 5–33). Further bibliographic indications can be found in the introductory parts of the two cited volumes.

² In the 10th century, a translation into Old Slavonic was made in Bulgaria of the following writings of Methodius: *On Free Will*, *On the Resurrection*, *On Leprosy*, *On the Food*, *On the Leech* and *On Life*. Of the latter three, there are no fragments left in Greek, nor were we aware of their existence from ancient testimonies. Questions have been raised about the reasons that might explain the making of this translation. I endorse Bracht's thesis (Bracht 1999, p. 12), which, in turn, reconsiders the thesis formulated by Dujčev (1977): the themes addressed in the dialogue *On Free Will* would have served to counter some doctrinal errors committed by the Bogomils, proponents of a cosmological dualism in tenth-century Bulgaria.

³ Vaillant (1930, pp. 649–53), in introducing the critical edition of *On Free Will*, states that Methodius, a disciple of Origen, turns against him in the name of orthodoxy. According to the scholar, the *Symposium* seems to belong to the first phase in which Methodius sympathises with Origen's thought; *On Free Will* heralds the break with Origenism; in *The Resurrection*, he attacks it violently and explicitly. Patterson (1997, pp. 26–34), who devoted his doctoral thesis to the reconstruction of the chronology of the works, takes up and develops the argument of the evolution of the Methodian attitude towards the Origenian heritage. Contrary to Vaillant, Patterson believes that the *Symposium*, a work in which Methodius is said to be nothing more than a follower of Origen as far as the interpretation of Scripture is concerned, is later than *On Free Will*, from which the writer is said to have taken up themes and summarized them in writing the dialogue on chastity. According to Patterson (1997, pp. 31–33), when Methodius wrote *On Free Will*, he was not yet aware that the Alexandrian had made his own those positions that he was criticizing in his writing. It is only during the writing of *On the Resurrection* that he would become aware of it and, in fact, only in the last part of the work is Origen explicitly named as the polemical target of the writing.

⁴ Prinzivalli (1985, pp. 10–11, n. 6), in fact, blurs the terms of the question, affirming that it is not correct to consider *On the Resurrection* as a fierce attack against Origen, devoid of admiration for the Alexandrian, just as it is not correct to make the *Symposium* a writing completely in line with Origenian thought. Indeed, in all of Method's writings, it is possible to notice a never disavowed Origenian *forma mentis*, at least from an exegetical point of view (see Prinzivalli 1985, p. 13). As Prinzivalli (1985, p. 127) notes in conclusion, the expertise of the bishop of Olympus in the exegetical sphere depends to a great extent on the acquisition of the hermeneutical advances made by Origen. His doubts about the Alexandrian are exclusively on the level of certain doctrinal contents. This judgement is valid for all the works written by Methodius during his lifetime.

⁵ It is good to specify that with ἀγνεία, a term that appears in the original title of the dialogue (ΣΥΜΠΙΟΣΙΟΝ Η ΠΕΡΙ ΑΓΝΕΙΑΣ), Methodius is pointing to a broader reality than παρθενία: it is not just abstention from sexual relations, but an ideal that embraces all the virtues of the Christian spiritual life, a total consecration in body and spirit to the Lord. On the main terms of the *Symposium*, see Zorzi (2009).

⁶ With regard to the relationship between the Methodian *Symposium* and Plato's dialogues, see Tomaselli (2020), an article in which I attempted to highlight some points of contact between the image of the house and the clay in Methodius' second discourse of the *Symposium* and some passages from Plato's *Republic*, including the famous myth of the cave. From the article, it is possible to derive further bibliographical indications regarding the relationship between Methodius' *Symposium* and Plato's writings.

⁷ It seems that the virgin must indeed be identified with the saint instructed by Paul according to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. This writing originated as a simple section of the *Acts of Paul*; however, it soon began to circulate as an independent work and in this version it achieved great success among many Church Fathers and communities of believers. That the Methodian Thecla is precisely the character from the *Acts of Paul*, i.e., the woman from Iconium (Asia Minor) who, on hearing Paul's preaching, converted to Christianity and decided to remain a virgin, is shown by the fact that in the *Symposium* Virtue, in giving the word to the virgin, alludes to the training she received from Paul (see Methodius, *symp.* VIII, intro., 8–10), not to mention the allusions to the Saint's martyrdom (see *ibid.* VIII,2,14–19; VIII,17,30–34; himn 4–5). Thecla is the only one of the ten Methodian virgins that, with the knowledge we have, we can associate with a real personage. The figure of Thecla in the *Symposium*, moreover, is one of the clues in Methodius' writings that demonstrate the author's belonging to a micro-Asiatic context, where in fact, the cult and traditions relating to Thecla were of great importance and experienced great development. On the cult of St Thecla, see Davis (2001).

⁸ Regarding the debate on fate in early Christian literature, see: Bandini (2003, pp. 15–28); Motta (2008, pp. 13–29); Ramelli (2009, pp. 61–75, 104–6); Franchi (2015, pp. 367–71).

⁹ In this study I use the translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 120) and the critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 236).
¹⁰ Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 236).

¹¹ See the previous note.

¹² Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 238).

¹³ See Macías and González (2005, p. 319). The study presents the arguments Thecla develops in the section of her discourse against astrology; it also offers a Spanish translation of the passage in question, accompanied by an apparatus of notes. I refer to this article above all for the numerous astrological and astronomical pieces of information it offers, information that allows us to understand the final section of Thecla's discourse even in its most concrete details.

- 14 According to Patterson (1997, pp. 102–3) this exchange of lines between Thecla and Virtue may be nothing more than a literary device to break up a very long presentation. However, it could also be a device that, in its exceptionality, seeks to emphasize the theme of the following section.
- 15 If we consider the paragraph division of the critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963), we see that Thecla’s speech consists of 61 paragraphs (§§ 169–230), while the second longest speech is that of the virgin Thalia, the third speaker, whose speech consists of 40 paragraphs (§§ 51–91).
- 16 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 120) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 238).
- 17 This is what Bandini (2003, pp. 26–27) says about the writing *Against Fate* by Gregory of Nyssa. The scholar affirms that this perspective is not at all obvious, if one juxtaposes the philosophical framework of the Nissenian’s writing with Origen’s arguments on the subject of free will, all of which are founded on the exegesis of passages of Holy Scripture. Bandini also quotes Philo of Alexandria, who, at the beginning of his *On Providence* (I,1), stated that his arguments were based on “argumentis a ratione petitis” (edition by Hadas-Lebel 1973, p. 126).
- 18 See, in this regard, Macías and González (2005, p. 322).
- 19 On the difference between the meaning of γένεσις and that of εἰμαρμένη, see Macías and González (2005, p. 336, n. 73). The interpretation offered in this study of the term γένεσις is the same as that found in Amand (1973, p. 335), who understands γένεσις as “destin de naissance ou fatalité congénitale”. Genethliac astronomy is a technique based on the representation of the celestial positions as seen at the time and place of an individual’s birth.
- 20 Patterson (1997, p. 82) observes that the *Symposium* of Methodius contains two interludes consisting of short exchanges between Eubulion and Gregorion, the first positioned after Thalia’s speech and the second after Thecla’s speech. In his view, these two interludes indicate two changes in direction within the dialogue.
- 21 The study by Macías and González (2005) uses Inglebert’s (2001) monograph as a source. However, with respect to the question of the cosmic model advocated by Methodius, the two studies disagree: according to Inglebert (2001, pp. 40, 52) Methodius is a defender of the Greek cosmic model, whereas, according to Macías and González (2005, p. 326), what Thecla does is to summarize and not accept what the defenders of astrology advocated.
- 22 In *orat.* 9 Tatian, after mentioning figures from myth transformed into constellations, asks: “then how was it that heaven was in disorder until these bodies were placed in their pre-arranged stations?” (translation by Whittaker 1982, p. 19).
- 23 According to Scott (1991, p. 131), “Though believing that the heavenly bodies are spiritually comparable to humanity, Origen never doubts that the stars have a much happier life. Following a long philosophical tradition, Origen thinks that the life of the rational bodies in heaven must be one of great peace and order, in contrast to the troubles which plague the life below”.
- 24 See Scott (1991, pp. 143–44).
- 25 Origen, *princ.* I,7,2: “For Job appears to show that not only may the stars be subject to sins, but even that they are not clean from the contagion of sin. For it is written thus: ‘The stars also are not clean in his sight’ (*Iob* 25:5)”. The translation is by Behr (2017, p. 123). On this passage from Origen, see Scott (1991, pp. 137–38).
- 26 The aforementioned article, in its conclusion (Burns 2017, pp. 217–20), establishes a parallelism between the notion of a demon proposed by Plato in the *Symposium* and the presentation of the stars offered by Thecla in Methodius’ work of the same name. According to Socrates, in fact, who in turn relates what he learnt from the priestess Diotima of Mantinea, ἔρως is a demon and not a god: his nature is, in fact, marked by lack, from which desire arises, i.e., the impulse to obtain what one does not possess. This conception seems to be alluded to by the eighth Methodian virgin, who derives the impulse to sin from the sense of deprivation, absence and emptiness. Heavenly bodies are incapable of evil, as they know no lack and, consequently, no desire. According to the scholar, the parallelism with Plato’s masterpiece is intended to show Methodius’ attempt to exempt the stars not only from sin, but also from their identification with demons.
- 27 Concerning the *Liber legum regionum* or *Against Fate* of Bardaisan of Edessa, in addition to the edition by Ramelli (2009), which offers an extensive introduction, the original text, a translation into Italian and an extensive set of notes, see also Drijvers (2014, pp. 88–108).
- 28 The only fate admitted by Bardaisan is not an autonomous power, but depends entirely on God, as it coincides with God’s established order. Fate and the stars from which it derives are subject to God’s order, but human free will is not subject to them. One could, therefore, say that fate and the stars influence, but do not constrain. They may condition external events, but they do not morally determine human choices. Indeed, Bardaisan states: “Just as we see that fate annihilates nature, so too we see that man’s free will rejects fate and annihilates it: though not entirely, just as fate itself does not reject nature in everything. For it is fitting that these three things, nature and fate and free will, should be held in their existence until the process is complete and the measure and number are completed” (see Ramelli 2009, pp. 171–73).
- 29 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 125) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 248).
- 30 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 125) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 248). Among the divine characteristics listed, Thecla particularly insists on freedom from the passions (ἀσύμπλοκον πάθους). In fact, immediately afterwards, she presents temperance (σωφροσύνη) as a good, the opposite of which is intemperance (ἀκολασία), which will

therefore be an evil (Methodius, *symp.* VIII,16,31–38). It is as if human temperance were a reflection of that characteristic of God which is freedom from the passions: that is why God is pleased with temperance (χαίρει δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῇ σωφροσύνῃ, *ibid.* VIII,16,40, Musurillo and Debidour 1963, p. 250) which He sees embodied in men. It is hardly surprising that among the various divine characteristics the virgin insists on this one, within a work dedicated to the theme of chastity.

31 “But the divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness, and all such qualities” (τὸ δὲ θεῖον καλόν, σοφόν, ἀγαθόν, καὶ πᾶν ὅ τι τοιοῦτον). Translation by Fowler (1982, p. 473). The Greek text I refer to is the one in the same volume.

32 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 128) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 254).

33 Translation by Shorey (1980, p. 507). The Greek text I refer to is the one in the same volume. Other possible Platonic echoes in the anti-astrological section are pointed out by Jahn (1865, pp. 59–63).

34 Perhaps the best known testimony is found in Homer, *Il.* XXIV,525–530, where the two jars are evoked, one full of evils and the other full of goods, from which Zeus extracts now evils, now goods to assign to man. It is important to note that in Homer we also find the first attempt to relieve the deity of responsibility for evil: I refer, of course, to Homer, *Od.* I,34, a verse that Thecla, moreover, quotes twice.

35 On Platonic theology in relation to the problem of evil, see Ferrari (1998) and Ferrari (2017).

36 I refer here to Theophila’s response to Marcella’s objection, who asks, with a polemical attitude, whether her assertion that no one is born at the margin of God’s will also applies to illegitimate children. In order to demonstrate how God works directly for the birth of any human being, the virgin Theophila proposes the image of a house with many entrances, inside which a craftsman moulds all the clay offered to him from outside, even if it is brought in illicitly. Theophila then explains that there are no evil realities in themselves, but that they become so according to the use made of them. The image evoked by Theophila and his explanation can be found in Methodius, *symp.* II,4–5. In Tomaselli (2020), I have highlighted the Platonic influence in Theophila’s evocation of the image in question and, at the same time, tried to show how the content of this part of his discourse is in fact far removed from Platonic inspiration.

37 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 127) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 252).

38 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 128).

39 Concerning the argument of the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά employed by Carneades, see Amand (1973, pp. 55–60).

40 On the argumentation of the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά in Bardaisan and other Christian authors, see Ramelli (2009, pp. 104–6).

41 Studies questioning the argumentation of the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά in the discourse of the virgin Thecla and its possible sources include: Amand (1973, pp. 338–40); Ramelli (2013, pp. 272–73); Burns (2017, pp. 211–13). The latter believes that Methodius “must have known the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά via contemporaries, in turn likely reliant on Bardaisan, as were near-contemporaries such as Eusebius of Caesarea or the author of the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*” (Burns 2017, p. 212).

42 In 2 *apol.* 7,6–7 Justin also closely links the argument of the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά, albeit only hinted at, to the properly moral argument: “And this is the nature of all that is made—to be capable of vice and virtue. For neither would any of them be praiseworthy unless there was also power to turn to both. And this also is shown by those people everywhere who have made laws and conducted philosophy according to right reason, by their agreeing to do some things and refrain from others”. Translated by Barnard (1997, pp. 78–79). The moral argumentation in an anti-fatalist function also appears in Justin, 2 *apol.* 43.

43 Concerning Carneades’ elaboration of the moral argument, see the second and third chapters of Amand’s monograph (Amand 1973, pp. 41–68). Other texts—pagan, Jewish or Christian—that present the same or similar arguments are listed by Bandini (2003, p. 21, n. 38).

44 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 129) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, pp. 256–58).

45 The expression coined by Prinzivalli (1998, p. 47), according to which Methodius represents “una sorta di ponte culturale”, has had some success: on the one hand, he shows himself to be the heir and interpreter of traditions of Asian culture; on the other, he appears to be sensitive to and akin to modern Alexandrian culture. In the specific case of the *Symposium*, one must then consider what I like to call the polyphony of the ten virgins. Methodius did not compose a simple treatise on chastity, but gave voice to ten distinct characters, from whose speeches one cannot derive a systematic and coherent theological thought. None of the ten virgins’ speeches represent, taken in isolation, Methodius’ viewpoint; on the contrary, they contain elements that can be traced back to different theological traditions, which Methodius considered compatible with his own vision.

46 See, for example, Methodius, *res.* I,58,5–6 and I,59,1.

47 With regard to the judgement expressed above, I am indebted to Cantalamessa (1976, pp. 431–32). According to the Capuchin scholar, continence does not need marriage to be repudiated in order to be recognized in its validity. On the contrary, it does not make sense apart from the simultaneous affirmation of marriage. In Jesus, in fact, we observe this freedom in the face of marriage, as in the face of all reality.

48 This is the general conclusion reached by Theophila: “Now an art always operates on the material submitted to it. And there is nothing that is to be considered evil of itself, but rather becomes such by the act of the men who use it (οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτό τι καθ’ ἑαυτὸ τῶν πραγμάτων ἡγητέον εἶναι κακὸν ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὴν πρᾶξιν τῶν χρωμένων τοιοῦτο γίνεσθαι). For when a thing is dealt with in a good and prudent way, the result is good; and bad when it is treated improperly and disgracefully”.

Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 54) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 80). After proposing a general statement, the virgin presents some examples: iron is not responsible for its use in warfare; metals such as gold, silver and bronze are not to blame if they are used in the creation of statues that foment idolatry; one who works wool merely uses it for the project he has in mind, even if it has been supplied to him by the person who stole it; the same applies to an adulterous relationship, where the responsibility falls solely on the one who commits adultery, not on the fruit of the relationship.

49 On the fruitfulness of life's trials, see, firstly, Methodius, *De vita* 3, where he is defined as stronger than others who has endured great labours. In *arbitr.* 20,2–8, the orthodox character states that God, although he was able to annihilate the devil, he allowed the devil to exist so that men, who had previously been overcome by him, could overcome him. The world, therefore, is nothing but the gymnasium in which God's disciples wrestle against the Evil One: he who wins against the Enemy is praised by God, while he who does not try hard enough and is knocked down is condemned. This section is characterized by the use of agonistic terminology, probably of Pauline derivation, also used in several passages of the Methodian *Symposium*, including, for example, *symp. epil.* 107–113. The theme of the positivity of the experience of trial in human existence is, moreover, developed in *De cibis* 2–5, where the trials that man is called upon to go through are compared to the fertilizer that makes gardens more beautiful and lush (*ibid.* 5,4). In *res.* II,5,1–2, on the other hand, we do not go so far as to speak of the positivity of being put to the test, but only of its necessity.

50 That virginity has been revealed is, for example, the presupposition of the whole description of human progress made by Marcella (*cf.* Methodius, *symp.* I,2–5). In the first discourse, however, we also find explicit statements on the subject: in *ibid.* I,1,20–21 virginity is described as a drink that cannot flow from the earth, but only from heaven; in *ibid.* I,2,1–3 it is described as a plant that was sent from heaven to men at a certain moment in the history of salvation; finally, in *ibid.* I,4,7–9, Marcella explicitly states that only the Lord could proclaim the *μάθημα* of virginity, an assertion that is motivated throughout the paragraph. The notion of virginity as a gift from Christ appears several times, until the speech of the last speaker, Domnina, who interprets the fable of Jotham found in *Iud* 9:8–15. With this tale, according to Domnina, the Bible alludes to the different legislations up to Christ. The last commandment directed to man in salvation history is precisely that of virginity, which Christ offers to the apostles (*cf.* Methodius, *symp.* X,3–4).

51 The translation is mine, while the critical edition is that of Descortieux (1999, p. 252).

52 Critical edition by Bonwetsch (1917, p. 186).

53 See the previous note.

54 Critical edition by Bonwetsch (1917, p. 188).

55 Vaillant (1930, pp. 649–53) and Buchheit (1958, p. 172) argue for the anteriority of the *Symposium*; in addition to Patterson, Franchi (2015, pp. 108–10) is of the opposite opinion.

56 Translation by Musurillo (1958, p. 121) and critical edition by Musurillo and Debidour (1963, p. 240).

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Article

Free Will and Divine Sovereignty in Eusebius of Emesa: A Fourth-Century Antiochene Homily Against Determinism

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Abstract: This study examines Eusebius of Emesa's *De arbitrio, voluntate Pauli et Domini passione* (Homily I), a fourth-century homily rediscovered in the twentieth century, to elucidate its contribution to the theological debate on free will within early Christianity. While Eusebius, a bishop of the Antiochene school, has been historically overlooked, his homily offers a nuanced defence of human moral agency against the deterministic paradigms prevalent in late antiquity. Through a critical analysis of the text, focusing on key biblical episodes—the conversion of St Paul, the election of Jeremiah and Jacob, and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart—this article demonstrates how Eusebius reconciles divine sovereignty with free will by prioritising literal exegesis and emphasising humanity's God-given capacity for self-determination. The methodology combines close textual analysis with contextualisation within broader theological controversies, particularly addressing Stoic fatalism, Gnostic predestination, and Manichaean dualism. The results reveal that Eusebius's arguments, though pastoral in intent, are philosophically rigorous, asserting that free will underpins moral responsibility and virtue, while Christ's voluntary Passion exemplifies divine respect for human freedom. The study concludes that Eusebius's homily not only refutes deterministic worldviews, but also affirms free will as a theological cornerstone, bridging scriptural interpretation and doctrinal orthodoxy.

Keywords: free will; divine sovereignty; Eusebius of Emesa; Antiochene exegesis; early Christian theology; determinism; moral agency; patristic homiletics

1. Introduction

The central philosophical problem addressed in this article lies in the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom—a dilemma that held a prominent place in early Christian theology. How can God's omniscience and providence be reconciled with genuine human autonomy? This *philosopheme*, rooted in Hellenistic debates on fate (εἰμαρμένη) and self-determination, acquired specific contours in the fourth century amid the resurgence of deterministic currents such as Stoicism, Gnosticism, and Manichaean dualism.

The Greek-speaking Syrian bishop Eusebius of Emesa (c. 300–361 AD) engages with this issue in his homily *De arbitrio, voluntate Pauli et Domini passione*¹, offering a rigorous defence of free will against the fatalism of pagan thought, the predestination of Gnostic doctrines, and the determinism inherent in Manichaean views. For him, free will is the rational faculty that enables human beings to choose between virtue and sin (*De arbitrio* 13; Buytaert 1953, pp. 21:22–22:5), while divine sovereignty is understood as the providential governance that directs history toward salvation without suppressing human autonomy (*De arbitrio* 10; Buytaert 1953, pp. 19:15–20:5). Unlike Gregory of Nyssa, who approached free will from a Neoplatonic perspective emphasising the soul's participation in the divine (Peroli 1997, pp. 124–25, 130–31), or John Chrysostom, whose pastoral focus underscored

moral responsibility without delving into philosophical distinctions (Brestoiu 2013), particularly in his six homilies *De fato et providentia* (CPG 4367), Eusebius integrates Aristotelian logic with biblical exegesis. His distinction between primary causality (God) and secondary causality (human actions) allows him to reconcile divine omniscience with genuine human freedom.

This homily, which forms the focus of our critical analysis, exemplifies the exegetical method of the Antiochene school, prioritising the literal sense of Scripture to affirm free will as an essential attribute of human nature (Simonetti 1985, pp. 127–29; Ter Haar Romeny 1997, pp. 89–100; Winn 2011, pp. 58–68). Though Eusebius remained an obscure figure in ecclesiastical history until a century ago, his rediscovery—initiated by Wilmart’s (1920, pp. 241–52) identification of a Latin manuscript in the municipal library of Troyes shortly after World War I and furthered by E. M. Buytaert’s *editio princeps* in the 1950s—led to the recovery of twenty-nine homilies preserved in Latin translations from two distinct manuscript traditions (Buytaert 1953, 1957). This article demonstrates that Eusebius’s solution, though pastoral in intent, rests upon a coherent philosophical framework that anticipates later medieval debates on grace and free will, positioning him as a bridge between late antiquity and scholasticism.

This article does not seek to determine the precise Christological position of Eusebius of Emesa, as this work lies beyond the scope of our study. His reputation as an opponent of Nicaea—based on his rejection of ὁμοούσιος, his association with Eusebius of Nicomedia and Eusebius of Caesarea, his involvement in anti-Nicene circles, and accusations of Arianism by Jerome, Theodoret of Cyrus, and other historical sources—does not, in itself, constitute definitive evidence of his adherence to Arianism. The limited number of modern studies on his Christology have produced divergent interpretations², largely due to the absence of a comprehensive analysis of his entire corpus, including the texts preserved in Armenian (eight homilies and a commentary on the Octateuch and Kings). In this regard, we align with the more recent assessments of Maurice Wiles (1987), who argues that the available evidence is insufficient to determine his doctrinal position with certainty, and Robert Winn (2011), who contends that Eusebius employed different Christological frameworks according to his pastoral needs and context.

2. The Bishop Eusebius

Eusebius³ was born in Edessa, the capital of the Osroene region, located on the far side of the Euphrates. This city was the cradle of Christianity in the Syriac language and had a rich Christian culture long before it was definitively integrated into the Roman Empire (Segal 1970, pp. 62–82). Although no source specifies the year of Eusebius’ birth, it is generally placed around 300. He hailed from a noble family in Edessa, likely all Christians, and his mother tongue was Syriac. During his childhood, he received a dual education: on the one hand, a Greek education under the guidance of the Hellenic teachers residing in the city, which enabled him to master Greek and become an eloquent rhetorician, and on the other hand, he also received a Christian education, based on the Scriptures, in accordance with local customs, which would shape his future exegetical orientation and his love for the Bible. This biblical training was further enriched by a study trip to Palestine, where he studied under Eusebius Pamphilus at the renowned school founded by Origen in Caesarea. After completing his studies, Eusebius did not return to Edessa, but instead moved to Antioch, where he was eventually ordained a priest. Sometime later, during a council presided over by Eusebius of Nicomedia, the bishop of Constantinople, and his anti-Nicene followers, Eusebius was elected as the new bishop, replacing Athanasius, in Alexandria (Simonetti 1975, p. 143). He rejected such an honour to serve as the successor to the see of Alexandria, which ultimately fell to George of Cappadocia. He was eventually elected

to the see of Emesa, a city that was deeply paganized at the time, famous for its worship of the sun (Lipiński 2011), with Christianity not yet firmly established there. This likely explains why Eusebius became the second resident bishop of the city. However, shortly after his arrival, the Emessians accused him of practicing astrology. To avoid trouble, he fled and took refuge in Laodicea, where his personal friend, George, was bishop at the time. He later returned to his see but faced accusations of being a Sabellian⁴. Up to this point, ecclesiastical historians provide no further details of his life. We know from Jerome (*De viris illustribus* 91; Richardson 1896, p. 46) that he was buried in Antioch during the reign of Emperor Constantius, who died in 361. The historical sources do not indicate that he abdicated his see to live in Antioch. Ecclesiastical historians Socrates (*Historia ecclesiastica*, 2,9; Hansen 1995, p. 99) and Sozomenus (*Historia ecclesiastica*, 3,6; Bidez and Hansen 1960, p. 99) add that he enjoyed the confidence of Emperor Constantius and accompanied him on his campaigns against the Persians.

3. *De arbitrio*

The sermon *De arbitrio, voluntate Pauli et Domini passione* is only preserved in the Latin manuscript T. 523, discovered by André Wilmart and later edited by Eugène M. Buytaert. It has only survived in its entirety through a Latin translation by a Gallic author, likely from the same century as the Greek original (Buytaert 1949, pp. 5–7). However, two Greek excerpts from the sermon are found in *Eranistes* by Theodoret of Cyrus (Ettlinger 1975, pp. 250–52). This sermon exhibits the dynamic and intense style characteristics of a sacred orator. The sentences are concise, frequently employing rhetorical questions. Eusebius makes use of parallels and antitheses, demonstrating a penchant for puns and dramatic expressions. He often directly engages the audience, favouring reduplicative phrases, a feature influenced by his Semitic background, which leads him to repeat ideas for emphasis (Buytaert 1948, p. 31).

The homily, as its Latin title suggests, addresses the conversion of the apostle Paul, who, after being a fervent persecutor of Christians, suddenly became the most zealous evangelist and an apostle whose mission far surpassed that of the Twelve. However, this episode raises an apparent contradiction between divine election from all eternity—known in Christian theology as predestination (Levering 2011, pp. 36–67)—and human free will. Was Paul, a devout Jew firmly committed to his faith, compelled by God to assume his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles? Various biblical passages seem to suggest the absence of free will in certain acts of divine election. In Jeremiah 1:5, the prophet is said to have been chosen before his conception; in Romans 9:13, the preference for Jacob over Esau is affirmed, consistent with the account in Genesis 25:22–23; and in the narrative of Pharaoh’s hardened heart during the plagues of Egypt, the question of divine intervention in human will is once again raised. These scriptural texts prompt inquiry into whether God’s will operates in a determinative manner in the history of salvation, thereby limiting human free will, or whether free will remains an inalienable principle of human action. In addressing this tension, Eusebius sets aside his exegetical work to proceed with a theological foundation of free will as a fundamental aspect of human nature, aiming to elucidate this concept for *gentiles et Iudaeos et haereticos* (*De arbitrio* 13; Buytaert 1953, p. 21:25). To this end, he employs both philosophical reasoning and moral arguments, as well as concrete examples drawn from experience. Subsequently, our bishop argues that if Paul’s destiny had been to continue persecuting Christians, Christ’s intervention would have been futile. However, his spiritual blindness—conceived as an act of divine mercy—prevented him from persisting on that misguided path. In this way, grace effected a radical transformation in his being, akin to yeast transforming dough, thereby demonstrating that the change was not the result of fate, but the manifestation of an internal transformation guided by the light and

truth of Christ. Paul's sin as a persecutor of the Church is difficult to overcome. It can be remedied by acts that counterbalance the injustice he committed. Redemption arises from an individual's reparative and transformative actions.

The final section of Eusebius of Emesa's *De arbitrio* focuses on the suffering and death of Christ as a manifestation of divine free will. The main idea is that Christ's Passion was not an act of forced predestination, but rather a voluntary decision made by Christ, who, moved by love and obedience to the Father, chose to suffer for the salvation of humanity. Furthermore, Eusebius emphasises the relationship between human free will and divine will, suggesting that redemption does not stem from an imposition by God, but from a free divine consent, which is also reflected in the lives of saints, such as the Apostle Paul.

In summary, this homily directly challenges the pagan worldview of the Greco-Roman world (Chadwick 2001), and, in contrast, presents a Christian perspective in which human beings are truly free and, consequently, responsible for their actions. Based on this premise, divine punishment is justified if an individual fails to repent and seek God's forgiveness.

The homily was most likely composed in Emesa, where Eusebius held his episcopal see, reflecting his pastoral concerns in a city where Christianity was a minority within a profoundly pagan religious environment. In this context, the worship of Elagabalus, the sun god, held significant prominence in Rome during the third century, particularly under the last emperors of the Severan dynasty (Millar 1993, pp. 300–10; Icks 2009). Likewise, Babylonian astrology enjoyed a privileged status and was highly esteemed within Neoplatonic philosophy (Shaw 1995, pp. 147–62). Eusebius's reference to 'heretics' likely identifies the Manichaeans. The Church Fathers, however, classified them not as a formal religion, but as a sect. Augustine's *De moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae et de Moribus Manichaeorum* exemplifies this view; he systematically contrasts their doctrines with Christian orthodoxy. Similarly, Epiphanius of Salamis labels them Christian heresy in his *Panarion* (Haer. 66). These textual critiques will be analysed in detail later. Additionally, the homily exhibits a pronounced anti-Jewish tone, a characteristic feature of Eusebius' writings (Hennings 2001). This perspective can be partly attributed to the proselytising competition between Judaism and Christianity in the Antiochene region, where Judaism maintained a significant presence. Eusebius consistently employs this anti-Jewish stance whenever possible, unhesitatingly making his sentiments known to his audience; however, in this particular instance, he deliberately refrains from extending his polemics to issues concerning human determinism.

The homily develops its argument against the notion of fate on two distinct levels. The first, the exegetical level, sees Eusebius—following the Antiochene tradition—demonstrating remarkable proficiency. Here, he focuses on Paul's conversion and reinforces his exposition with the supreme example of Christ in his Passion, who willingly surrenders himself to death to save humanity. This level is both the most extensive and significant, as the bishop intends for his audience to regard Saint Paul as the ultimate model—both biblically and within the Christian tradition—of the human freedom bestowed by God.

The second level is theological. In this domain, his treatment is brief and less elaborate than that of other ecclesiastical writers. It is noteworthy that Eusebius is primarily recognised as an exceptional exegete and rhetorician, rather than as a speculative theologian. He acts more like a pastor, defending his flock while subtly alluding to his adversaries. It is in this realm that his opponents are most clearly discernible, comprising three distinct groups: Gnostics, Manichaeans, and Stoics. This pastoral approach stands in notable contrast to the work of a later bishop of the same see, Nemesis of Emesa (Torrijos 2023), whose intellectual orientation is markedly more philosophical than pastoral.

In what follows, we shall examine these two levels of argumentation: the exegetical and the theological.

4. Exegetical Level

Eusebius, following the exegetical tradition of the Antiochene school, adopts an approach similar to that of the Alexandrian philologists in their analysis of Homeric poems; he considers the text itself to be self-sufficient, thus eliminating the need to resort to external sources (Cebrián 2019, pp. 103–6). He applies the same perspective to the Bible, suggesting that obscure passages can be explained through other biblical verses (*De arbore fici* 4–5; Buytaert 1953, pp. 253–54). In this case, the passage in question is the conversion of St. Paul, which may appear to contradict the concept of human free will. To clarify this, Eusebius turns to other seemingly enigmatic texts, such as the predestination of the prophet Jeremiah, the divine preference for Jacob over Esau, and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart during the plagues of the Exodus. After elucidating these passages, Eusebius ultimately presents the Passion of Christ as the supreme model of human freedom.

4.1. Jeremiah and Jacob

The divine election of Jeremiah and Jacob is based on God's omniscience, by which He foreknows the actions and dispositions of each individual. As stated in Jeremiah 1:5, *Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; and before you were born, I sanctified you*. Jeremiah is sanctified before birth because God foresees his fervour. Similarly, Jacob is chosen over Esau because God anticipates his righteousness, whereas Esau will despise what is valuable. As written in Genesis 25:22–23, God declares that *the older shall serve the younger*, and Romans 9:13 affirms, *Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated*. Thus, divine justice is not arbitrary, but corresponds to the foreknowledge of human deeds, where the initiation belongs to man, but knowledge and completion belong to God.

Let us turn our attention to Jeremiah: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; and before you came forth from the womb, I sanctified you. God knew him and acted to sanctify him. For God was aware of Jeremiah's fervour, and therefore He granted him sanctification. Likewise, God chose Jacob and rejected Esau. Whom, then, should God have chosen: Jacob or Esau? If Esau, therefore, disregards, while Jacob acquires what is honourable, the One who possesses foreknowledge judges rightly before events take place. For what He has done, God already knew, since He possesses knowledge prior to occurrence. Thus, God chose Jacob, foreseeing his future diligence in works, and rejected Esau, knowing what Esau would do, so that the beginning indeed belongs to us, but the knowledge and completion belong to God (*De arbitrio* 10; Buytaert 1953, pp. 19:15–20:5).

Eusebius's exegesis of Jeremiah 1:5 and Romans 9:13 innovatively reinterprets divine election as a dynamic interplay between divine foreknowledge and human agency. Unlike contemporary theologians such as Augustine, who later emphasised predestination as an act of inscrutable divine will (Levering 2011, p. 45), Eusebius anchors election in God's anticipatory recognition of human merit. This approach subtly challenges deterministic readings of Paul while preserving Antiochene commitment to literal exegesis.

4.2. The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart during the plagues of Exodus is interpreted through a literalist approach, avoiding readings extraneous to the biblical text, in accordance with the exegesis of Eusebius of Emesa, who rejects the use of allegorical interpretations (*De arbore fici* 8; Buytaert 1953, p. 261). The key hermeneutical principle lies in the notion that God did not impose an artificial obstinacy upon Pharaoh, but merely withdrew His mercy, thereby allowing Pharaoh, who was left to his own wickedness, to persist in his inherent cruelty. Eusebius reinforces this interpretation through a detailed textual analysis;

at no point does Scripture state that God hardened Pharaoh's heart while he was suffering the plagues, but only once had they ceased. This exegetical nuance seeks to dispel any notion of divine arbitrariness, thereby avoiding the implication that God would be unjust in punishing Pharaoh for an action He Himself had directly caused.

Thus, Pharaoh, cruel and slaying the young children in the river, hardened against God's commandments, declared: *I do not know the Lord* (Exodus 5:2). Therefore, plagues were inflicted upon him, not out of God's wrath, but through divine providence. God says to Pharaoh: *For this very reason, I have raised you up, that I may demonstrate my power through you* (Exodus 9:16). And God hardened his heart, not by coercion, but by withholding His warning. The first plague was sent: the waters were turned into blood (Exodus 7:20). This softened Pharaoh's hardened heart. However, when God removed the plague and restored the waters, Pharaoh, now freed from affliction, hardened his heart once more—not because God compelled him, but because, with the removal of divine intervention, he seized the opportunity to persist in his obstinacy. Scripture does not state that *God hardened Pharaoh's heart* (Exodus 8:15) while the plague endured, but rather upon its cessation, meaning that God's action consisted in withdrawing the affliction (*De arbitrio* 11; Buytaert 1953, pp. 20:6–21:6).

Eusebius reinforces his exegesis through a medical analogy, introducing a significant simile: the Pharaoh is akin to a condemned body whose dissection enables the salvation of others. His fate was already determined by his own actions; however, his punishment serves not only to instruct the people of Israel, but also to manifest divine justice.

Just as physicians take a condemned man and examine his body—not out of cruelty toward him, but for the sake of those who must be healed—[...] so too was Pharaoh, already condemned by his own sins, afflicted with plagues to instruct the descendants of Abraham (*De arbitrio* 12; Buytaert 1953, pp. 21:7–8 and 16–19).

Eusebius's interpretation of Exodus 9:16 transcends mere Antiochene literalism by presenting a view of divine action that is permissive in certain instances, such as this biblical case, rather than coercive. His insistence that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" only after the cessation of the plague constitutes a critique of both Stoic fatalism and Manichaean dualism, which attributed evil to external forces. This exegesis reveals a remarkable theological subtlety by distinguishing between the active governance of God—understood as providence—and the permissive tolerance of human sin. In so doing, Eusebius teaches that although humanity incurs guilt, divine justice remains intact. This distinction, predating that formulated by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* (I–II, q.79), offered the small Christian community of Emesa an explanation of sin and divine punishment that contrasted with the prevailing astrological determinism in the city.

4.3. The Conversion of Saint Paul

Eusebius of Emesa's exegetical interpretation of Paul's conversion is found in several key passages, where he argues that this event was not a divine imposition, but rather the consequence of Paul's prior spiritual blindness and the illumination he received through the living and resurrected Christ. Below, we present six key points that, in our view, Eusebius of Emesa employs to understand the conversion of Saint Paul.

4.3.1. Their Persecution of Christians Is Based on Ignorance, Not Evil

Seeing clearly that Paul desires good things but is ignorant of them, God accepts his eagerness and grants him knowledge (*De arbitrio* 1; Buytaert 1953, pp. 13:19–14:2).

Eusebius describes Paul's zeal as a guardian of the Law of Moses and Jewish traditions, as well as his deep hatred towards Christ and his followers prior to his conversion, portraying him as an ignorant Pharisee blinded by fanaticism. His lack of knowledge of Christ's truth renders his sin a consequence of intellectual deficiency rather than innate depravity. Like Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* II, 15), our bishop holds that moral error is not always entirely voluntary, but may stem from an intellectual shortcoming or a lack of education that hinders correct action. By emphasising Paul's misguided sincerity, Eusebius not only humanises the apostle, but also underscores the dependence of free will on divine illumination.

4.3.2. Christ Does Not Impose Faith on Paul, but Enlightens His Soul

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Jesus said. The voice came from above; but Saul's zeal persecuted him whom he believed to be in hell (*De arbitrio* 3; Buytaert 1953, p. 15:2–4).

Eusebius, by noting that Saul persecuted Christ—whom he presumed to be in the *Sheol*—reveals a crucial detail: his attitude mirrors that of an intransigent Pharisee who regarded Jesus as a blasphemer condemned by God in accordance with Deuteronomy 21:23. The celestial voice constitutes a decisive revelation for Paul, as it not only extricates him from his obstinate error, but also unveils the truth: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the affirmation of his messianism by God the Father. This episode clearly demonstrates that God does not compel Paul to believe; rather, it illuminates his understanding, thereby enabling him to recognise his own ignorance and error.

4.3.3. Paul's Physical Blindness Symbolises His Spiritual Blindness

The light flashed, and the eyes of his persecutor were darkened, for he ought not to have pursued him. But why did the light flash, and why were Paul's eyes blinded? Clearly, out of mercy (*De arbitrio* 19; Buytaert 1953, p. 26:1–3).

Eusebius understands this episode as a manifestation of the balance between divine justice (punishing error) and mercy (transforming the heart). The homily invites us to recognise the divine action in trials, interpreting them not as arbitrary punishments, but as opportunities for conversion and spiritual growth. This approach reflects a profoundly optimistic view of providence, where even the darkest deeds can be redeemed by grace.

4.3.4. Predestination in Catholic Theology: Grace and Human Cooperation

However, let those things concerning Paul be placed before our eyes, so that we may understand what was meant by the words: *No one can come to me unless it has been given to him by my Father who is in heaven* (John 6:65; *De arbitrio* 7; Buytaert 1953, p. 17:17–19).

Eusebius of Emesa's commentary on John 6:65 refers to Romans 8:29–30, where predestination is understood as a process encompassing the call, justification, and glorification, all subject to divine will. In this respect, the author aligns himself with the Catholic view of grace: salvation is a divine work that nevertheless requires an entirely free human response, thereby avoiding the extremes of Gnostic determinism—which denies human freedom—and Pelagianism, which overemphasises human merit.

Eusebius of Emesa, an exegete of the Antiochene school, advocated an approach that highlighted both the humanity of the biblical characters and their moral agency. In doing so, he sought to steer clear of two extremes: fatalism, which nullifies human responsibility under a divine determinism, and the Pharisaic moralism that had influenced Saint Paul's formation. Although Eusebius identified with the Antiochene tradition, it is noteworthy that this school later gave rise to an incipient form of Pelagianism, as clearly manifested in Theodore of Mopsuestia—who, despite his open protection and sympathy towards Julian of Eclanum, was never doctrinally condemned for his stance (Lera 1973, pp. 95–100).

4.3.5. When Free Will Is Abolished, Law and Merit Become Meaningless

If free will is taken away, the law ceases, and the commandments become superfluous (*De arbitrio* 8; Buytaert 1953, p. 18:18–19).

Eusebius emphasises a fundamental Christian theological and moral premise: if free will were to be denied, the Mosaic Law—with its precepts and demands—would lose its entirely revelatory and pedagogical function. The Law in the Holy Scriptures not only establishes precepts, but also presupposes human freedom to either obey or reject divine will (Deuteronomy 30:19). If human being were to lack such freedom, commandments such as those of the Decalogue or the Levitical Law would be rendered devoid of any meaning regarding reward or punishment, as there would be no possibility for moral choice or responsibility. Through this argument, Eusebius rejects views that negate human agency—such as those put forward by the Gnostics—and defends the coherence of biblical revelation, in accordance with the assertion that “the doers of the law shall be justified” (Romans 2:13), which inherently presupposes the existence of human freedom.

4.3.6. Paul Not Only Accepts Suffering, but Desires Even More

I wish you would add even more to me! For I owe much, because I have persecuted them (*De arbitrio* 23; Buytaert 1953, p. 29:15–16).

Eusebius attributes to Paul a theological interpretation that highlights his stance on the suffering and pain experienced following his conversion, emphasising both its expiatory dimension and its connection to human freedom. According to this reading, Paul assumes a moral responsibility rooted in free will: he acknowledges his guilt for having persecuted Christians (Galatians 1:15) and accepts suffering as a means of settling his spiritual debt. In this way, an intrinsic relationship is established between human freedom (the capacity to sin and to repent) and divine justice, wherein suffering is not conceived as a passive punishment, but rather as a voluntary act of reparation.

In conclusion, the six points extracted from Eusebius of Emesa's homily demonstrate that Paul's conversion arises from the interplay between divine grace and free will, thereby rejecting deterministic positions. Eusebius contends that Paul's persecution of Christians stemmed from ignorance—a misdirected zeal for the Mosaic Law—which manifests as an intellectual deficiency rather than moral depravity. Divine intervention, as illustrated by Christ's rebuke on the road to Damascus, rectifies Paul's error by revealing the risen Messiah, while his physical blindness symbolises a spiritual darkness transformed by divine mercy. Furthermore, Eusebius reconciles predestination with human freedom, asserting that grace empowers free will—an essential element for the efficacy of the Mosaic Law and moral responsibility—and regards suffering as a voluntary act of reparation that integrates the acknowledgement of guilt with divine justice.

4.4. The Passion of Christ

The final section of the homily (*De arbitrio* 28–40; Buytaert 1953, pp. 31:26–43:5) presents Eusebius of Emesa's reflection on the Passion of Christ, highlighting it as the

supreme example of human freedom, as He voluntarily accepted His sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of humanity. In this passage (*De arbitrio* 29; Buytaert 1953, pp. 31:26–33:16), the bishop establishes a connection between Paul’s conversion and the Passion of the Lord, drawing a comparison between the apostle’s courage and Christ’s apparent withdrawal before His Passion. He begins by recounting the episode in *Acts* 14:8–18, in which Paul and Barnabas are mistaken for gods and, despite the acclamation of the crowd, humbly reject idolatrous worship. Ultimately, due to his unwavering fidelity to the Lord and his absolute rejection of idolatry, Paul is stoned to death. From this contrast, Eusebius raises a theological question: while the apostles confront suffering and death without renouncing their faith, Christ, in appearance, seems to evade or withdraw from the cross. In response to this apparent paradox, the bishop argues that He who grants His disciples the strength to face death without fear does not retreat out of fear Himself, but rather awaits the decisive moment within the divine plan of salvation (οἰκονομία). However, when His “hour” finally arrives, Christ surrenders voluntarily and faces His persecutors without resistance. To reinforce this argument, Eusebius emphasises that, had Jesus wished to avoid His death, He could have fled or summoned a legion of angels for His defence (*Matthew* 26:53).

Finally, Eusebius concludes with a theological reflection on the impassibility of divinity: although Christ suffered bodily on the cross, his soul could not be affected by death, just as the mind does not suffer when the body is wounded. Here, we have a good example of divine impassibility:

All these bodily sufferings are attributed to the one who dwells within. If you throw a stone at the image (imagine) of the king, what is said? “You have insulted the king.” [...] If you crucify the body of Christ, what is said? “Christ has died for us.” [...] Whatever happens to the body is ascribed to Him. For He also experienced hunger. Who? The one who provides food. [...] Since He dwelled in a body, He allowed the body to undergo what is natural to it, so that both aspects of His being might be truly revealed: that He is both God and man. [...] He raised the dead as God. He was seized as a man, He suffered as a man, and He died. However, He did not die merely as a man, for He was not born merely as a man. [...] How was the Lord born? Not from a man and a woman, but Wisdom took on a body from a created being, from the daughter of Adam, in order to bring salvation from that original error (*De arbitrio* 33–34; Buytaert 1953, p. 36:5–10 and pp. 36:15–37:10).

Eusebius’ literalist exegesis of Christ’s Passion reflects a primitive dyophysite Christology that distinguishes the dual nature of the incarnate Son of God. Historical sources indicate that he was accused of Arianism for rejecting the term ὁμοούσιος at the Council of Nicaea (Wiles 1987, pp. 267–69); however, there is no textual evidence to suggest that he adhered to radical Arianism (anomeanism, ἀνόμοιος), as advocated by Eunomius and Aetius. His distinction between the natures of Christ (“God and man”) might superficially resemble Nestorianism, yet he does not deny the personal unity of Christ. Whilst Nestorius posited such a separation of natures that he spoke of “two sons,” Eusebius insists on the oneness of Christ, employing the image of the king and clearly affirming the *communicatio idiomatum* (the reciprocal attribution of divine and human properties to Christ). In *De Fide*, his rejection of Nestorianism becomes even more evident, as he explicitly denies the division of Christ into two persons: *non aliud apud Patrem, alius autem nobiscum* (*De Fide* 14; Buytaert 1953, p. 87:14).

In the conclusion of the homily, Eusebius asserts that human free will is manifested in the capacity to make a personal decision regarding the truth of Christ, thereby responding freely and consciously to divine revelation—that is, by exercising one’s faith. Consequently, salvation is accessible to those who choose to correctly confess to Christ and adhere to

the orthodox faith, voluntarily aligning their will with that of God. In the absence of this freedom to accept or reject, salvation would lose its character as a personal and voluntary response, thereby undermining a fundamental aspect of the Christian message:

Each individual bears within themselves their own conception of faith. For one must not suppose that the Lord's primary judgement concerns what a person may have stolen. Rather, the first judgement lies in whether one has professed God as Father; or, alternatively, the judgement derives from His words (*De arbitrio* 39; Buytaert 1953, p. 41:7–11).

5. Theological Level

We now move from Eusebius the exegete to Eusebius the theologian and pastor of souls. In this brief section of his homily (*De arbitrio* 13–17; Buytaert 1953, pp. 21:22–25:7), he interrupts his exegesis on Saint Paul to present a systematic defence of free will against all forms of determinism. His argumentation extends from metaphysics—the nature of man—to ethics—the necessity of freedom for virtue—thus reinforcing the Christian doctrine of moral responsibility and divine justice. His teaching is firmly rooted in the orthodox Catholic tradition, rejecting Stoic fatalism, Gnostic predestination, and Manichaean dualism, while reaffirming the teaching of Genesis: man was created good and free, and in that freedom lies his dignity. Let us now examine in detail the arguments he puts forward to uphold the reality of free will in human nature.

5.1. Free Will as an Essential Attribute and Foundation of Morality

Eusebius begins with a fundamental premise: the nature (φύσις) of each being entails its essence (οὐσία), attributes (ἀποτελέσματα), and inherent properties. Just as the sun possesses light, fire heat, and water moisture, the human soul is endowed with *cogitatum* (thought), *arbitrium* (judgement), and *voluntatem* (will) (*De arbitrio* 13; Buytaert 1953, pp. 21:22–22:5). These elements are not mere accidents, but essential properties of human nature, intrinsic to its very constitution. In this way, Eusebius presents free will as an intrinsic component of the human condition, rendering untenable any deterministic conception wherein human actions arise from necessity or compulsion.

Building upon this foundation, Eusebius delves into the realm of morality. If human beings lacked the capacity to freely choose between good and evil, morality itself would be devoid of meaning and foundation. The faculty to discern between opposing concepts—such as *pudicitia* (chastity) and *libido* (lust), or justice and injustice (*De arbitrio* 14; Buytaert 1953, p. 23:5–9)—demonstrates the existence of an autonomous will capable of inclining toward one extreme or the other.

Eusebius explicitly rejects the position that it would have been preferable for humans to have been created innately good—that is, incapable of committing evil (*De arbitrio* 14; Buytaert 1953, p. 22:18–21). For him, such a notion negates the very essence of virtue, as genuine goodness can only arise from a free and conscious choice. To illustrate this argument, he employs an analogy: a chained dog does not bite—*canis enim ligatus invitus non mordet* (*De arbitrio* 14; Buytaert 1953, p. 22:27)—but this does not imply that the dog has developed self-restraint or chastity. Similarly, a human incapable of sin cannot be considered virtuous, but merely compelled to obey. Thus, Eusebius emphasises that virtue resides in the freedom of choice and the conscious exercise of the will oriented toward the good.

Through this conception of free will, Eusebius of Emesa makes a significant contribution to Christian theology and anthropology. His perspective reinforces the idea that human dignity lies in the capacity for self-determination and moral responsibility, distancing itself from both pagan fatalism and any form of absolute predestination. Furthermore,

his approach provides a rational defence of divine justice, asserting that God's judgement of humanity is legitimate only if individuals possess the freedom to choose their own path.

5.2. Free Will as the Foundation of Human Moral Responsibility

If free will did not exist, punishment for sin would be an injustice, and morality would lack a solid foundation. If our actions were inexorably determined by fate or an external will, it would be absurd to both reproach sin and praise virtue. Eusebius illustrates this idea with the example of Saint Paul's conversion (Acts 23:10–17). Had God created him predetermined as a persecutor or as an apostle, his transformation would lack merit. However, since it was Paul who freely chose to abandon his error, his conversion and preaching become genuinely human and meritorious acts.

Eusebius's argument centres on the interplay between divine grace and human agency, a balance that avoids the extremes of Pelagian self-sufficiency and deterministic fatalism. By framing Paul's conversion as a synergy of divine illumination (Acts 9:3–6) and voluntary repentance (Acts 22:16), he underscores a theological middle ground: grace enables freedom without negating it. This aligns with his Antiochian exegesis, yielding a theology that prioritises the moral choices of human actors within salvation history. Unlike Gnostic or Manichean systems—which attributed evil to cosmic forces or predestined dualism—Eusebius roots moral responsibility in humanity's inherent rationality (*λογικός*), a reflection of the *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27). His reasoning anticipates later scholastic distinctions between primary and secondary causality, yet remains grounded in pastoral concerns: without free will, the call to repentance (Matthew 4:17) would be meaningless in a paganised context like Emesa, where astrological and fatalist worldviews prevailed.

5.3. Against Gnosticism and Manichaeism: The World Was Created Good

At this point, Eusebius responds to Gnostic (Jonas 1934, pp. 156–210; Orbe 1974, pp. 343–47; Lewis 2013, pp. 85–101) and Manichean doctrines (Puech 1936; Bianchi 1983; Bermejo 2013, pp. 127–34), which viewed the material world as evil and mankind as trapped in a preordained fate. Following the teaching of the *Hexameron* (the six days of creation in Genesis), Eusebius emphasises that God made all things good, including man. Evil, therefore, does not stem from nature or from an external imposition, but from the misuse of free will. As Eusebius states, *If, however, we were created as rational beings, and we have senses, thought, and the will of free choice, these are features of our nature. He who eliminates the will of free choice destroys our nature* (*De Arbitrio* 14; Buytaert 1953, p. 22:14–17). This is a thoroughly orthodox position, rejecting the idea of predestination to evil and reaffirming the original goodness of creation.

5.4. Against Stoic Fatalism: Free Will and Morality in Eusebius

Eusebius not only articulates a defence of free will against Gnostic and Manichean determinism, but also implicitly extends his critique to Stoic fatalism, though—as was customary in patristic debates—his exegesis of these schools lacks precise historiographical nuance. The Stoics, indeed, posited a universe governed by cosmic necessity (*ἀνάγκη*) expressed through the universal *Λόγος* and *εἰμαρμένη*, a doctrine asserting that all events, including human actions, unfolded according to an immutable causal chain (Bobzien 1998, pp. 45–47). This radical determinism framed an ethical paradigm wherein virtue resided in resigned acquiescence to fate, thereby negating genuine volitional self-determination. Eusebius identifies here a problematic parallel with Gnostic doctrines, as both traditions, despite metaphysical divergences, converged in diminishing human moral agency.

Against this determinism, Eusebius advances a moral refutation of fate. Tim Hegedus (2007, pp. 114–24) observes that other patristic critiques of fate employ the same moral argument: ethics would lose its ontological foundation if choices between good and evil

were not products of autonomous deliberation (*De arbitrio* 14; Buytaert 1953, p. 22:14–17). He contends that, were Stoic predestination accepted, concepts such as guilt or merit would become chimaeras—a man predetermined to impurity could claim no responsibility for his vices, just as one destined to righteousness could assert no moral credit. However, as empirical evidence, Eusebius invokes introspective human experience—shame in transgression and satisfaction in virtue (*De arbitrio* 16; Buytaert 1953, p. 23:19–28)—psychological phenomena presupposing awareness of voluntary choice. This capacity for self-transformation, illustrated by historical examples such as pagans embracing Christianity or sinners adopting chastity (*De arbitrio* 17; Buytaert 1953, pp. 24:23–25:8), demonstrates for Eusebius that humans act as rational agents (λογικός) capable of transcending their condition through volition, not as passive epiphenomena of a predetermined cosmic order. In this context, Eusebius presents the paradigmatic example of the conversion of the Apostle Paul.

6. Conclusions

In the homily *De arbitrio, voluntate Pauli et Domini passione*, Eusebius of Emesa confronts the perennial dilemma of reconciling divine sovereignty with human free will—a *philosopheme* deeply rooted in Hellenistic debates on fate and autonomy and given particular urgency in the fourth-century context, where deterministic currents such as Stoic fatalism, Gnostic predestination, and Manichaean dualism threatened to undermine the Christian doctrine of moral responsibility. Through a rigorous analysis of pivotal biblical passages—including the conversion of St Paul, the divine election of Jeremiah and Jacob, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, and the voluntary nature of Christ’s Passion—Eusebius articulates a philosophically robust conception of human freedom that is firmly grounded in Scripture.

His exegetical methodology, characteristic of the Antiochene school, prioritises the literal and historical sense of the text, while his theological reflections underscore the intrinsic dignity of human nature, endowed by God with the capacity for self-determination. By systematically distinguishing between divine primary causality (God’s providential governance) and secondary causality (human volition), he preserves both divine omniscience and genuine human agency, positioning free will as an ontological attribute of humanity’s God-given nature. Unlike contemporaries such as Gregory of Nyssa or John Chrysostom—each of whom approached the tension between divine will and human freedom from differing perspectives—Eusebius synthesises Aristotelian logic with biblical exegesis to offer a distinct solution that serves not merely as academic discourse, but as a pastoral rebuttal to prevailing deterministic worldviews.

Ultimately, this homily transcends its historical context by providing a theological blueprint that reaffirms free will as both a divine gift and a cornerstone of Christian salvation. By integrating rigorous exegetical analysis with metaphysical reasoning, Eusebius bridges the gap between patristic and later scholastic thought, ensuring that moral responsibility remains intrinsically linked to divine justice. In doing so, he emerges as a pivotal—though historically underappreciated—figure whose insights continue to illuminate contemporary debates on faith, moral autonomy, and grace.

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Notes

- ¹ References to *Homilia I* of Eusebius of Emesa in this article follow the citation format: page number, followed by a colon and the line numbers, separated by a hyphen (e.g., 45:12–18). If the passage spans multiple pages, the format is: first page number, colon, starting line – final page number, colon, ending line (e.g., 45:12–46:4). The original text is in Latin, and all English translations provided herein are my own.
- ² For a summary of the various and divergent conclusions reached by these authors, see (Cebrián 2019, pp. 27–28).
- ³ In this section, we base our analysis on the most comprehensive account of Eusebius of Emesa, provided by Buytaert (1949, pp. 2–192) and updated by Robert Winn (2011, pp. 1–51), with further contributions from my own research (Cebrián 2019, pp. 23–31).
- ⁴ Contrary to expectations, he was accused of Sabellianism, despite two interrelated homilies—*De Fide* (Buytaert 1953, pp. 79–104) and the subsequent *Adversum Sabellium* (Buytaert 1953, pp. 105–27)—which clearly articulate the well-known anti-Sabellian doctrine to their audience. The latter homily is dedicated to his teacher, Eusebius of Caesarea, as can be deduced from its *incipit*, given that he was a prominent opponent of Marcellus of Ancyra and the author of *Contra Marcellum*. Furthermore, in *De Fide* 24, Eusebius mentions an individual referred to as “Galata” (Buytaert 1953, p. 93:5), whom we interpret as an allusion to Marcellus of Ancyra.

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Article

Nemesius of Emesa on Fate

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Abstract: This paper analyses the section of Nemesius of Emesa's treatise *On the Nature of Man* dedicated to fate. The main objective is to analyse Nemesius's response to the supporters of a notion of fate within the framework of astral determinism, Stoicism, and Middle Platonism. Following a mainly descriptive method, the paper focuses on Nemesius's own thought and not just on his treatment of his sources, as much of the existing literature has done until now. Without pretending to give a definitive answer on the originality of his own philosophy, we examine how Nemesius assigns some of the functions of fate in one of his Middle Platonic sources to divine providence. In doing so, he develops a personal theology in which he gives an innovative prominence to divine free will and transcendence in the traditional philosophical problem of providence.

Keywords: determinism; compatibilism; free will; divine providence; divination; Stoicism; Middle Platonism; Christianity; Christian philosophy

1. Introduction

As is well known, early Christian thought had a complex relationship with the notion of fate (Karamanolis 2021, pp. 158–61; Burns 2021, pp. 71–72). The most widespread position was to limit the power of fate and even to deny its existence, in order to exalt divine providence above it. At the end of the fourth century, we find an interesting Christian criticism of the notion of fate in Emesa of Syria. It is due to an author of whom we know very little, except his name, Nemesius, and his authorship of a famous treatise, *De Natura Hominis* (hereafter *De Nat. Hom.*). Apparently, he was bishop of Emesa (present-day Homs) and enjoyed an acquaintance with Greek medicine and philosophy (Dusenbury 2021, pp. 5–8; Karamanolis 2018; Ritter 2018, p. 1579; Chase 2005, pp. 626–28; Motta 2004, pp. 19–31; Vanhamel 1982, col. 92–93; Amann 1931, col. 62–63).

De Nat. Hom. is a writing on human being. It is even the very first extant work on human being studied in a holistic way, not from the point of view of physiology (like the homonymous treatise belonging to the *Corpus Hippocraticum*) or in the general framework of a study on life or the soul (as Aristotle proceeds in his *De Anima*). Instead, while introducing several elements of medical science, this treatise fundamentally intends to carry out a philosophical exploration of human beings and their very nature (Moreschini 2013, p. 834). In this framework, Nemesius concludes his book by studying how human beings relate to fate and providence. He sees this inquiry as a natural continuation of his account on free will (Streck 2005, p. 27) and an important part of it, especially if we bear in mind that the target audience for his work is not only composed of Christians, but also non-believers (*De Nat. Hom.*, 42; Morani 1987, p. 120, line 22).

Amand (1973, pp. 568–69) suggested that the section on 'fate' (εἰμαρμένη) of *De Nat. Hom.* (chap. 35–38) was an independent treatise inserted later in Nemesius's writing. From a redactional point of view, it is true that the section has its own unity. However, the whole

of the book is actually constructed by overlapping one section next to the other such that the author exploits different sources for each section. Consequently, the unity of the work is not quite achieved (Amand 1973, p. 551), although this does not mean that the book does not follow an organised plan (Dusenbury 2021, pp. 26–28). In that sense, the section on fate is no more editorially separate from the rest of the work than other parts. Moreover, a mention of this section can already be found in the second chapter of the book (Morani 1987, p. 34, line 17).

As for the sources on fate in *De Nat. Hom.*, Nemesius seems to be dealing mainly with Greek works. He aligns with Philo and other earlier Christian authors in rejecting astrological determinism, drawing on the argumentation of Carneades (Amand 1973, pp. 568–69). Although he is based in Syria, it is not easy to find in his book evident influence of the important work inspired by Bardaisan, *The Book of Laws* (Drijvers 1965), in which we find a suggestive development of the notion of fate contraposed to nature and subjected to divine providence (Jurasz 2021; Ramelli 2021). Nemesius's predecessor at Emesa, Eusebius, who is much closer temporally to him (Cebrián 2018, pp. 28–31), includes several passages in his homilies that bear some similarities to Nemesius's treatment of fate, as we shall see. Indeed, the connections between their concerns on the question of determinism and free will have been pointed out by Winn (2011, pp. 114–15, note 66).

My programme in this article is to study chapters 35–38, in which Nemesius deals with fate in the context of the question of 'what is up to us' (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν), the actions that are under our control. This is a technical term typically employed in this context by other authors such as the Stoics or Alexander of Aphrodisias. Such a study is close to the treatment of the concept of 'deliberation' (βούλευσις), a notion taken up by Nemesius in order to delineate a theory of free will.

The purpose of this article is rather modest: I simply aim to showcase Nemesius's exposition and criticism of fate in the aforementioned chapters, detailing aspects of his arguments that were until now presented by scholarship in the form of rather general accounts. Nemesius has largely been studied as a witness to various philosophical doctrines. My aim, however, is not to focus primarily on this aspect, but rather on Nemesius himself. This means examining the reasons he provides for rejecting certain views on fate and presenting his personal perspective on this matter. While it is true that our author draws on his sources both to critique his intellectual adversaries and to support his own views, this does not preclude him from formulating a personal synthesis. Nevertheless, although several of his sources will be considered, the primary goal of this paper is not to argue the degree to which Nemesius is original in this regard. It is sufficient for me to highlight the internal coherence of his treatise.

2. Criticism of Astral Determinism

Chapter 35 is the first devoted to the question of fate. By way of clarification, I would like to begin by stating that it seems preferable to translate εἰμαρμένη as 'fate' rather than 'destiny'. Indeed, later on (chap. 37), Nemesius gives a definition of what he understands by fate by appealing to the Stoa: "Fate is a concatenation of causes, for this is how the Stoics define it, i.e., as an order and binding together that admits of no exception".¹ Thus, fate is a causal concatenation a tergo and therefore not a 'destiny' in the sense of a goal, a telos. This way of understanding fate encourages us to exclude a term such as 'destiny', which rather points to an aim or a goal to be reached. It must be said, however, that Nemesius himself holds a personal conception of fate that does not correspond to the Stoic one, which we will see below.

Chapter 35 continues the question of 'deliberation' studied in chapter 34 in relation to 'what is up to us' (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν). As mentioned in the introduction, this topic is central to the

question of fate in philosophical literature. In chapter 34, it is established that we deliberate about things that are up to us and are therefore contingent, i.e., that they may or may not happen and are liable to be prevented by certain causes.

From this point onwards, throughout the entire section on fate in *De Nat. Hom.*, there is a successive refutation of a series of views of fate that are incompatible with the Christian worldview as understood by Nemesius.

Chapter 35 first refutes the idea of astrological fatal determinism (everything is determined by the action of the heavenly bodies) by giving the following reasons.

1. If the astrological causal determinism of fate were true, then praise, reproach, punishments, rewards, etc. and all laws would become useless. It is an argument inspired by Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* III.5, 1113b21–33) integrated in the discussion of Carneades, and it will be repeated many times in the different philosophical accounts of fate: if everything happens necessarily, it is absurd to praise and reproach men, to punish or reward them, because they only act according to what is dictated by fate.
2. If all events were determined by the stars, then ‘what is up to us’ (τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν) and ‘what is contingent’ (τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον) would disappear. In a word, all events would be necessary and there would be nothing contingent and nothing free.
3. Astral determinism would also be destructive for divine providence (πρόνοια) itself and consequently also for εὐσέβεια, human piety towards God: if everything is necessary, then there would be no divine freedom, everything would respond to a fatal necessity and not to a deliberate divine design. Therefore, it makes no sense either for human beings to freely thank God or to beg for gifts from Him, for the divinity would not be free to give them to the human beings or to freely answer their prayers.
4. If astral determinism were true, then the stars themselves would become evil, for they would be responsible for many evils. Moreover, God would be unjust since he is the creator of the stars. Consequently, a theodicy founded on ‘free will defence’ would become impossible.

As we can see, first Nemesius’s criticism centres on the usual argument against fate as a form of determinism that would endanger freedom of will on the one hand, and the very conception of a provident God on the other. This first section of Nemesius’s account of fate is not particularly original and has parallels in many other Christian authors (Hegedus 2007, pp. 113–18; Torrijos Castrillejo 2025, pp. 114–19). Significantly, we find it in his predecessor at Emesa, Eusebius (Eusebius Emesenus, *De Arbitrio*; Buytaert 1953, pp. 18, 22). However, Dusenbury (2021, pp. 132, 145) has recognised in it a personal feature of Nemesius’s thinking: if fate guided all things, including the human ones, the human being would become a “mere instrument” of fate. But, as Nemesius believes, human dignity is above this.

3. Criticism of Stoicism

In the same chapter, Stoic determinism and compatibilism (Salles 2005; Boeri 2014) are also contested. In her famous book on Stoic determinism, Susanne Bobzien (1998, pp. 368–69) believes that Nemesius attests in this section to a critique of Stoic compatibilism that is not only dependent on Alexander of Aphrodisias, but also takes on a new face, probably relying on Philopator, *On Fate*. In fact, he quotes Chrysippus and Philopator, but it seems likely that he could know their thought through a secondary source. In any case, this section is considered an important testimony of Stoic thought (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 718, §29.1).

Nemesius expounds the view of the Stoics, attributing to them a compatibilist understanding of the relationship between fate and free will: “Some say that both our freedom

and fate are preserved. For fate [they say] contributes something to each thing that happens".² According to the Stoics, every action (1) that is brought about by an internal impulse can be said to be 'up to us', (2) provided that neither fate nor any other external cause prevents the realisation of that impulse.

Nemesius's refutation of their doctrine is based on Stoic principles themselves. His reasoning follows these steps:

1. "In the presence of identical causes, as they themselves say, there is every necessity that the same things should happen".³
2. It is not possible that there are causes in the universe other than the ones that are in fact there.
3. Therefore, every living thing will always act in the same way: the same actually existent causes will always apply and will necessarily produce the same effects. But this contradicts our experience.

Moreover, Nemesius denies the major premise in two ways:

1. He believes that 'what is up to us' cannot always produce the same effect. By its very nature, it must be able to produce either one effect or another. But if the 'impulse' and the 'judgement' (which, according to the Stoics, are up to us) depend on fate, then the result is not up to us.
2. If, in the presence of certain causes, the 'impulse' does not occur, then the major would be false: it is not true that in the presence of certain causes, certain effects are produced.

In resolution, if the Stoics' position were true, a human being would be no more 'master of his acts' than are other entities, which also have an internal impulse that arises from certain causes. Within Nemesius's approach, since he establishes a profound gap between animal and human action, the Stoics' account of action is too physicalist.

Later, in chapter 38, Nemesius alludes to the Stoics again. I bring this mention forward here, since it is then a little out of place in relation to the very programme of the criticism of fate set out by Nemesius. There, he recalls the idea of the 'eternal return' and the 'great year', by which all history is completed: when the stars will align again and all the elements of the universe will be settled as they were at the beginning, a new 'great year' will begin and all events will be repeated down to the smallest detail: "For Socrates and Plato will exist again, and each person with the same friends and fellow-citizens, and they will have the same experiences, meet with the same events and undertake the same activities".⁴ This return is infinite and will be reproduced incessantly forever. However, Nemesius does not provide any criticism of this position, because he must consider it to be included in his preceding refutation of Stoic compatibilism.

In the same passage, he does take the opportunity to dismiss the misconception of some people who suggested that Christians had derived their idea of the resurrection of the flesh from this Stoic assertion. von Harnack (1916, p. 100) suggested that this accusation may have been due to Porphyry's *Contra Christianos*. Nevertheless, the association between resurrection and eternal return is earlier. In fact, Tatian (*Ad Graecos* 3) refers to the doctrine of the Stoics, saying that "by means of the universal conflagration the same men will resurrect to do the same actions".⁵ In this sentence, he employs the verb ἀνίστημι, generally used to refer to resurrection. Moreover, he is contrasting there the doctrine of resurrection with that of conflagration. Origen also refers to the thesis of the conflagration and the successive worlds to compare it with the resurrection of the flesh in *Against Celsus* 5, 20 (however, his interlocutor, Celsus, said that the resurrection was inspired not by the conflagration but by the metempsychosis: see *Against Celsus* 2, 54).

4. New Criticism of Astral Determinism

After Nemesisius's first criticism of Stoicism, astrological fatal determinism is again challenged in chapter 36. In particular, Egyptian astrological divination is targeted for his criticism. The source on which our author might rely here is perhaps a lost work from Origen, of which we learn from Philoponus in *De Op. Mundi*, IV, 18 (Reichardt 1897, pp. 195–96). Nemesisius's first refutation of the existence of the alleged divinatory art is developed thus:

1. Fate concerns necessary things.
2. But Egyptian priests claim to be able to change it by means of certain rites.
3. Therefore, according to 1, fate is about necessary things, but according to 2, it is about contingent and non-necessary things: this entails a contradiction.

After this first argument, Nemesisius lists a series of theses that he considers absurd:

1. That 'the trajectories' (σχιήματα) do not correspond to the prediction because 'a god has prevented it'.
2. That it is only 'up to us' to pray, but not to choose our actions: Aren't prayers a kind of human action that should therefore also not be 'up to us'?
3. The distribution of the divinatory art seems unsound insofar it is possessed only by some and not by all men. Accordingly, he infers:
 - a. If everyone could possess it, then everyone could change fate: for, if one could change fate, then, for him 'fate is nothing', but, if everyone could, fate would be nothing to none.
 - b. If only some people possess the art of divination, according to what criteria would it be distributed?
 - i. If it is distributed by fate (as one could think, since it is something 'divine'), then changing the fate is not up to us.
 - ii. If it is distributed by something else, that thing would be above fate.
 - iii. In any case, if such an art is unequally distributed, this would seem to be an injustice, even if it were distributed according to the merits, because merit itself would be produced by fate.

As a Christian, Nemesisius is convinced that it is possible for a human being to know the future if God, who knows it (*De Nat. Hom.*, 43; Morani 1987, pp. 129–30), reveals it. However, if knowledge of the future were to respond to some other cause different from God, then various absurdities would follow.

5. The Outcome of Actions as the Work of Providence, Not of Fate

In chapter 37, Nemesisius criticises another compatibilist doctrine, which has proved difficult for scholars to identify. However, in chapter 38, he attributes to Plato the idea that our choices are 'up to us' despite the fact that the 'outcome' of them depends on some fatal necessity (Morani 1987, p. 110, lines 9–15). Thus, he might be referring to a Middle Platonic approach, the author of which is difficult for us to identify. That this idea is linked to a Platonic source seems plausible, since it could be associated with an interpretation of the myth of Er from Plato's *Republic* (X, 617e), quoted by Nemesisius in chapter 38: the choice and the responsibility lies with human beings, the consequences of choices are determined by fate.

According to the authors reported by Nemesisius, a distinction must be made between the 'choice' (αἵρεσις) and its 'outcome' (ἀποβασίς). The choice is 'up to us', but the outcome 'depends on fate'. In order to refute it, Nemesisius draws the following absurd consequences from this theory:

1. If this is true, then fate would be imperfect, since it only deals with certain things (outcomes) while leaving others out of its power (choices).
2. Human beings would be masters of fate, since they would determine the works of fate and they would not be determined by it. Indeed, if the results, which supposedly depend on fate, depend primarily on preceding choices, which depend on human beings, then they are the first determiners of the effects of fate.
3. A problem arises with people with mental disorders and incapable of deliberation. Their disease may be attributable to two types of cause:
 - a. A cause different from fate: then, they represent an exception to its universal power.
 - b. The fate is the cause of their disease: (1) it is evident that these people also act, although there is no choice in them; (2) however, the 'outcome' of their actions still depends on the power of fate; (3) thus 'everything happens according to fate'. In the case of these human beings, therefore, there is no area outside the intervention of fate, as the authors of this theory claimed when they put the 'choice' outside the power of fate.
4. If only the choice were in our hands, but not the outcome of the action, the battle between reason and the sensitive appetites of the person who has self-control (ἐγκρατής) and the person who lacks it (ἀκρατής) would become superfluous⁶: in fact, at the end of the day, everyone will do whatever fate determines.
5. To say that fate controls the 'outcomes' means also to say that fate also controls the 'choices', since the outcome includes not only what is done but even how it is done.

Despite his criticism of this position, Nemesius believes that although it is true that the choice, which is up to us, is the main cause of the outcome of our actions, the outcome itself does not depend *only* on us. Nevertheless, it is not under the power of fate, but rather divine providence. As we shortly shall see in the texts, divine providence is not governed by men: on the contrary, it is God who governs them. It is God, in accordance with a free and rational plan, who decides that sometimes human decisions will be fulfilled and sometimes not. In this sense, Nemesius does accept the distinction between the choice and the outcome of free action, and even admits that a cause outside the choice is involved in the outcome. However, he removes fate from this intervention in order to introduce providence. He will present this view in chapter 40. There, after giving a couple of biblical examples where the centrality of the interior act of choice as opposed to the exterior execution appears, Nemesius adds: "For choice is the beginning of sin and of righteousness; for the deed is sometimes permitted by providence and is sometimes prevented".⁷ He had already expressed this idea in chapter 38 (Morani 1987, p. 110, lines 19–23): although moral choices are up to us, it is not up to us alone to bring them to completion. This does not diminish our responsibility but leaves the effective control of the cosmos in the hands of divine providence, even relying on the free acts of certain creatures at the same time. Similarly, in chapter 37, Nemesius argues that it is God's providence that determines the outcomes of actions, as opposed to fate:

But one must say that providence is the cause of the outcome of actions; for this is the work of providence rather than of fate. For it is peculiar to providence to assign to each according to what is suitable for each, and for that reason the outcome of choices will sometimes be advantageous and sometimes will not.⁸

In contrast to fate, God's providence can choose which outcome is to be brought about and which is not, because it acts according to rational and benevolent criteria. Nemesius applies this understanding of divine providence even in the case of sin, in order to explain how the outcomes of human actions are ultimately directed toward the greater good (*De*

Nat. Hom., 2; Morani 1987, p. 32, lines 15–19). On the opposite side, fate, as a necessary chain of causes, can neither derive good from evil nor pursue different goods in varying circumstances: instead, it exerts a homogeneous and uniform influence, much like any purely natural cause.

Moreover, within the framework of Nemesius's thought, once fate is removed from the control of human free will, human action unfolds without external interference. As we have seen in the preceding section, he admits the possibility of divine foreknowledge of the future. However, divine providence does not disrupt free will itself, even though it determines whether the outcome of an action is realised. Thus, there is genuine freedom of will in internal human decisions, even though external actions remain subject to God.

6. Criticism of Platonic Fate

In chapter 38 (Morani 1987, pp. 109–12), Nemesius studies fate in the framework of Plato's thought. In his reconstruction of the Platonic account, he seems to rely on some Middle Platonic source. His famous description of a triple providence (*De Nat. Hom.*, 43; Morani 1987, pp. 125–26) substantially coincides with that of Ps. Plutarch: this has led some to think of a common source (Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 27). Both agree (with other Middle Platonists) in attributing to Plato a distinction between fate's 'substance' (οὐσία) and 'activity' (ἐνέργεια) (Burns 2020, p. 46). The same is found in the treatise on fate by Ps. Plutarch (*De Fato*, 2–3), etc. The 'law of Adrasteia' (Ps. Plutarch, *De Fato*, 10, 574b) is also mentioned in this work. Nemesius states that fate for Plato is at the same time providence. However, he immediately seems to distinguish in Platonism between providence and fate, and subordinates fate to providence:

He [sc. Plato] says that this active fate is also in accordance with providence, for fate is delimited by providence. For everything that occurs by fate does so also in accordance with providence, but everything providential is not also fated.⁹

That fate is under divine providence is a Middle Platonic teaching (Magris 2008, pp. 480–81; Vimercati 2020, pp. 119–20) that can be traced, once again, in Ps. Plutarchus (*De Fato*, 9, 573b) or in Chalcidius (Chalcidius, *Timaeus*, 147; Wrobel 1876, p. 206). Christian authors in the atmosphere of Neoplatonism also admit that providence is above fate. Nemesius himself will later (in chapter 39) provide a summary of his own understanding of fate in relation to other Aristotelian concepts. Although in this passage he is outlining the ideas of his opponents, these words likely reveal the framework in which his own philosophy situates the role of fate in the universe:

Of God the work is existence and providence: of necessity the process of things that are always the same; of fate to bring to pass of necessity what is fated (for it too is a kind of necessity); of nature birth, growth, decay, plants and animals; of luck the rare and unexpected.¹⁰

According to Nemesius, fate seems related to heavenly causality, whereas the causality of nature (which is not 'always the same way' but 'usually', ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ) would not be properly 'fatal'. In short, his view is that everything is subject to the power of divine providence, while the role of fate (understood as astrological influence) is limited. Now, Nemesius agrees with most Platonists in the subordination of fate to divine providence. What is his disagreement with Plato?

Let us see first how Nemesius describes Plato's fate in order to understand his criticism later. According to Nemesius, Plato would have spoken of a hypothetical necessity. Therefore, we are able to do whatever we want, but once we have made our choice, there is a 'law' that follows inexorably:¹¹ 'If you do that, the consequence will necessarily be that'. Also within Middle Platonism, we find this hypothetical necessity understood as

a ‘law’ (Dillon 1977, pp. 296, 322–23). In fact, Nemesis quotes the famous passage from the myth of Er narrated by Plato: “Responsibility lies on him who has chosen. God is not responsible” (*Resp.*, X, 617e; Morani 1987, p. 110, lines 5–6; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 192) in the same sense as Chalcidius (*Timaieus*, 154).

In the Platonic account, Providence and fate would also direct all things in a conditional way (hence the idea of ‘law’, which commands hypothetically). The conditions are the judgements and impulses that are ‘up to us’, while what follows from them is an outcome set by fate. Therefore, the outcome of fate is not predetermined, but depends on the conditions we set (recall the distinction between choice and outcome in the preceding section of this article).

Thus, Nemesis’s main criticism of Plato is that the Athenian philosopher is associating fatal necessity with a fixed law, while the outcome of human actions should rather depend on divine providence: it is God who allows that our actions be fulfilled or not according to His free and rational design. God does not act uniformly, but proceeds in each case in one way or another according to His personal design. Nemesis’s understanding of divine control over the outcome of human actions (as stated in the preceding section of this paper) has the advantage of leaving open the possibility of prayer: if the outcome were always fixed, there would be no point in asking God for anything.

7. Divine Providence Above the Necessity of Fate

The criticism of Plato in chapter 38 introduces a passage of great doctrinal interest in which the originality of Nemesis’s theology is revealed. According to him, “the acts of providence do not come about of necessity, but contingently”.¹² God is above all, and is therefore the author even of causes which in the ancient world were considered ‘necessary’, since they were imperishable, such as the heavens. Fate itself, as the effect of the unfailing action of the heavens, is also considered necessary. However, not even the necessary things are necessary in all respects in relation to God, since He is the author *even of the necessary*. Therefore, even fate is, in a certain sense, ‘contingent’, since it is contingent in comparison with God. This does not mean that the causes that the standard philosophy of nature considers ‘necessary’ (as, for instance, the heavens) cease to be necessary. They are indeed necessary in relation to the creatures subject to them. However, their causality springs from God insofar as they are creatures:

For God is not subordinate to necessity, nor is it lawful to say that his will is the slave of necessity: for he is even the creator of necessity. For he placed a necessity upon the stars, so that they always move in the same courses, and he laid bounds upon the sea¹³, and he placed a necessary limit on the universal and generic. If they want to call him fate, since things come about wholly and completely in accordance with necessity in such a way that everything that comes to be ceases to be in its turn, it is of no account. For we do not quarrel with them about words.¹⁴

The necessity of the stars is also subject to God’s power such that even fate is under divine providence. Divine providence also controls this realm of reality. God is not chained by necessity, but rather is the one who has established its chains. Nemesis recognises that this understanding relativises the meaning of the word ‘fate’ itself, since its forces are subjected to divine power.

Nemesis is placing divine power and its creative capacity at the crux of the variety of this world and is aware that not even what we judge ‘necessary’ is above His activity. This places God on a higher ontological plane that distances Him from created causality by elevating Him to a different form of intervention in the world:

God himself is not only set outside all necessity, but is also its lord and maker. He is authority and his nature is authoritative, and he does nothing either by natural necessity nor by the dictate of law: everything is contingent to him including what is necessary.¹⁵

As ‘author’ of necessity, He stands ‘outside’ it such that the Middle Platonic notion of ‘law’, which establishes a hypothetical dictate of providence and sees its results as a *necessary* consequence, proves insufficient. Divine power is therefore on another plane: that even necessary things become ‘contingent’ for Him (Torrijos Castrillejo 2023, pp. 190–192). As we can observe, divine causality is on one hand more powerful than the causality of fate, since even what is deemed necessary within non-Christian philosophical paradigms is subject to its power. On the other hand, divine ‘authority’ does not make God an ‘even more necessary’ cause, but a cause ‘outside’ the regime of ‘necessity and contingency’, which are now only creatural properties. In a way that may seem paradoxical at first sight, God becomes a freer cause than fate, but also a firmer and more infallible cause than it, since He is the author even of fate.

The last paragraph quoted allow us to recognize that in Nemesius, we find a shift of the problem of divine providence from the realm of knowledge to the realm of God’s freedom. Certainly, he regards providence as an act of the divine will (*De Nat. Hom.*, 42; Morani 1987, p. 125, lines 6–7). God has ‘authority’ (ἐξουσία) insofar as He is the creator, but His power is also seen in His freedom, since it is characterised by His being a free subject: let us not forget that αὐτεξούσιος is the word for a person as free (*De Nat. Hom.*, 39).

Hence, the distinctive element of Nemesius’s position on fate and divine providence lies in his own way of introducing transcendence and freedom in God. The tendency of early Christian thought was to rely on Middle Platonism to defend human freedom against the threat of astrological or Stoic determinism (Félix 2013), yet characteristic of the Christian approach is a more ‘personal’ understanding of God (Burns 2020, pp. 55, 100). Nemesius is sympathetic to this approach, and in line with Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, sees fate as occupying only a limited place in natural causation, along with other forms of causation: he also accepts from them the sovereignty of divine providence over all causes, both necessary causes controlled by fate and free causes. In this, he departs from the Stoic approach, which identifies the extent of the power of providence and that of fate. However, the originality of Nemesius’s position compared to other Platonic positions, including Christian ones, is the insistence on a form of transcendence in God that places him in a metaphysical position above the difference between necessity and contingency. In this, Nemesius reveals a distinct Neoplatonic influence, yet imprints a uniquely Christian character by recognizing in God a power that transcends all necessity, while also affirming His free will. This is a subject that requires specific study. Nevertheless, in the freedom of Nemesius’s God, we already recognize a genuine capacity to act one way or another, or not to act, much more truly ‘free’ than the freedom admitted by Plotinus for the divine, as a mere exemption from external coercion (Reale 1987, p. 526). In a similar way, Nemesius’s idea of God above necessity itself we recognize a characteristic Christian way of divine transcendence.

8. Conclusions

We find in the section on fate in the treatise *De Nat. Hom.* by Nemesius of Emesa the usual criticism of an astrological fatalism that many times accompanies the defence of free will in ancient philosophy. However, these arguments are accompanied by a somewhat more subtle criticism of Stoicism, in which Nemesius reveals himself to be an interesting source of information on the compatibilism of the Stoa that complements the information provided by Alexander of Aphrodisias. He also criticises another form of

compatibilism, probably coming from a Middle Platonic source. Although he agrees with Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism that fate exists and is subject to providence, we find in his conception of providence as sovereign over fate a specifically Christian advance towards a consistent theology. In Nemesius's Christian theology, God becomes a more transcendent entity not only as the creative origin of the universe, which is typical of the Neoplatonist milieu in which he moves, but also because God is openly free. Divine freedom makes providence a more robust cause than the necessary causality of fate, but also more transcendent than it. God is free because He can self-regulate His own causality through a deliberative principle. Divine transcendence is evident in the fact that God's causality transcends the very distinction between contingency and necessity. Finally, the prominence of divine providence in his work highlights that for Nemesius, the question of fate is not inherently of great significance, as his philosophical contribution centres not on fate, but on God's providence.

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Notes

- ¹ ἡ δὲ εἰμαρμένη εἰρμός τις οὐσα αἰτιῶν [ἀπαράβατος] (οὕτω γὰρ αὐτὴν οἱ Στωϊκοὶ ὀρίζονται, τουτέστι τάξιν καὶ ἐπισύνδεσιν ἀπαράβατον (Morani 1987, p. 108, lines 15–17; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 189).
- ² Οἱ δὲ λέγοντες ὅτι καὶ τὸ ἐφ' ἧμῖν καὶ τὸ καθ' εἰμαρμένην σώζεται (ἐκαστῷ γὰρ τῶν γινομένων δεδῶσθαι τι καθ' εἰμαρμένην (Morani 1987, p. 105, lines 6–7; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 184).
- ³ εἰ γὰρ τῶν αὐτῶν αἰτίων περιεστηκότων, ὥς φασιν αὐτοί, πᾶσα ἀνάγκη τὰ αὐτὰ γίνεσθαι (Morani 1987, p. 105, lines 18–20; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 185).
- ⁴ ἔσεσθαι γὰρ πάλιν Σωκράτην καὶ Πλάτωνα καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν ἀνθρώπων σὺν τοῖς αὐτοῖς καὶ φίλοις καὶ πολίταις, καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ πείσεσθαι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς συντεύξεσθαι καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ μεταχειριεῖσθαι (Morani 1987, p. 111, lines 20–22; Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 451, §19.6; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 193).
- ⁵ τὸν γὰρ Ζήνωνα διὰ τῆς ἐκπυρώσεως ἀποφαινόμενον ἀνίστασθαι πάλιν τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς (Goodspeed 1984, p. 270). My translation.
- ⁶ About the Aristotelian topic of the ἐγκρατής and the ἀκρατής see Oriol (2023, pp. 514–16).
- ⁷ ἀρχὴ γὰρ ἁμαρτίας καὶ δικαιοπραγίας ἡ προαίρεσις· τὸ γὰρ ἔργον ποτὲ μὲν συγχωρεῖται παρὰ τῆς προνοίας, ποτὲ δὲ κωλύεται (Morani 1987, p. 116, lines 3–5; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 199). As we can see, here he uses ἔργον instead of ἀπόβασις. However, both approaches fit well together.
- ⁸ δέον πρόνοιαν λέγειν αἰτίαν τῆς ἐκβάσεως τῶν πραγμάτων· προνοίας γὰρ τοῦτο μᾶλλον ἔργον ἢ εἰμαρμένης· τῆς γὰρ προνοίας ἴδιον τὸ ἐκαστῷ νέμειν κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον ἐκάστῳ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τῶν αἰρεθέντων ἢ ἐκβασις κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον ποτὲ μὲν ἔσται, ποτὲ δὲ οὐκ ἔσται (Morani 1987, p. 108, lines 12–15; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 189). Notice that here we have not ἀπόβασις, but ἐκβασις, which is semantically close to it.
- ⁹ ταύτην δὲ τὴν κατ' ἐνέργειαν εἰμαρμένην καὶ κατὰ πρόνοιαν λέγει. ἀπὸ γὰρ τῆς προνοίας ἐμπεριέχεσθαι τὴν εἰμαρμένην, πᾶν γὰρ τὸ καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ κατὰ πρόνοιαν γίνεσθαι· οὐ μὴν πᾶν τὸ κατὰ πρόνοιαν καὶ καθ' εἰμαρμένην εἶναι (Morani 1987, p. 109, lines 15–18; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 191).
- ¹⁰ ἀλλὰ τοῦ μὲν θεοῦ ἔργον οὐσία καὶ πρόνοια, τῆς δὲ ἀνάγκης τῶν αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως ἐχόντων ἢ κίνησις, τῆς δὲ εἰμαρμένης τὸ ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὰ δι' αὐτῆς ἐπιτελεῖσθαι (καὶ γὰρ αὕτη τῆς ἀνάγκης ἔστι), τῆς δὲ φύσεως γένεσις αὐξησις φθορὰ φυτὰ καὶ ζῶα, τῆς δὲ τύχης τὰ σπάνια καὶ ἀπροσδόκητα (Morani 1987, p. 112, lines 15–19; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, pp. 194–95).
- ¹¹ Nemesius speaks also of Platonic fate as a law in chapter 2 (Morani 1987, p. 34, lines 14–15).
- ¹² οὐ κατ' ἀνάγκην ἐπάγεσθαι τὰ τῆς προνοίας φάμεν ἀλλ' ἐνδεχομένως (Morani 1987, p. 110, lines 14–15; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 192).

- ¹³ Although Sharples and Van Der Eijk (2008) do not notice it, but this seems to be a reference to Jeremiah 5:22. See also Job 38:8–10.
- ¹⁴ οὐ γὰρ ὑπ' ἀνάγκην ὁ θεός, οὐδὲ τὴν βούλησιν αὐτοῦ δουλεύειν ἀνάγκη· θεμιτὸν εἶπεῖν· καὶ γὰρ τῆς ἀνάγκης δημιουργός ἐστιν· ἀνάγκην μὲν γὰρ ἐπέθηκεν τοῖς ἄστροις, ὥστε αἰεὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ κινεῖσθαι, καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν περιώρισε καὶ τοῖς καθ' ὅλου καὶ γενικοῖς ὅρον ἀναγκαῖον ἔθηκεν, ὃν εἰ βούλονται καλεῖν εἰμαρμένην διὰ τὸ πάντῃ καὶ πάντως οὕτω γίνεσθαι κατ' ἀνάγκην, ὡς πάντα τὰ κατὰ διαδοχὴν ἐν γενέσει φθείρεσθαι, λόγος οὐδεὶς· περὶ γὰρ ὀνομάτων οὐκ ἀμφισβητοῦμεν πρὸς αὐτούς (Morani 1987, p. 110, line 21–p. 111, line 1; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, pp. 192–93).
- ¹⁵ αὐτὸς δὲ πάσης ἀνάγκης οὐ μόνον ἐκτὸς καθέστηκεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κύριος καὶ ποιητής ἐστιν. ἔξουσία γὰρ ὦν καὶ φύσις ἐξουσιαστική, οὐδὲν οὔτε φύσεως ἀνάγκη οὔτε θεσμῷ νόμου ποιεῖ, πάντα δὲ ἐστὶν αὐτῷ ἐνδεχόμενα καὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα (Morani 1987, p. 111, lines 1–4; Sharples and Van Der Eijk 2008, p. 193). I translate ἐνδεχόμενα as 'contingent' to be coherent with the preceding texts, although Sharples and Van Der Eijk render it as 'possible' in this case.

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Article

The Greek Philosophical Sources in Cicero's *De Fato*

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Abstract: Cicero's treatise *De Fato*, written during the political crisis of the Roman Republic, is a fundamental work for understanding the development of philosophical thought on fate and free will in antiquity. Influenced by Academic Skepticism, Cicero aimed to critically examine the positions of the major Greek philosophical schools, such as Stoicism and Epicureanism, regarding causality and the determination of future events. The concept of fate, however, was not only a philosophical matter but also a religious one in antiquity, deeply intertwined with practices such as divination and the belief in the gods' influence over the cosmos. This study explores the historical and philosophical context in which *De Fato* emerged, as well as the Greek sources that shaped Cicero's arguments. It analyzes the debate between the Stoics and Epicureans on fate, highlighting how Cicero adopts, adapts, and critiques their ideas. Additionally, it examines the structure and method of his work, identifying the three main approaches—physical, logical, and ethical—that he employs to address the question of fate. Finally, this study considers how Cicero's treatment of fate reflects not only philosophical but also religious concerns, especially regarding human freedom and the divine role in shaping the future. The enduring influence of *De Fato* on philosophical tradition and its relevance to contemporary discussions on human freedom is also considered.

Keywords: Cicero; Stoicism; Epicureanism; academic skepticism; Greek philosophy; fate; determinism; free will

1. Introduction

The question of fate and human freedom has been a central topic of philosophical inquiry since antiquity. However, it is crucial to recognize that the concept of fate was not only a subject of philosophical debate but also a deeply religious matter in ancient societies. Among the most influential ancient discussions on this issue is Cicero's *De Fato*, a treatise that engages with the Greek philosophical traditions that preceded him. This study examines how Cicero draws upon the debates between the Stoics and the Epicureans, two schools of thought with divergent views on determinism and free will. While Stoicism posited a deterministic cosmos governed by an unalterable fate, Epicureanism sought to preserve a degree of human autonomy through the concept of atomic randomness. In both philosophical systems, however, fate is inextricably linked to religious ideas about the gods' will and the role of divine forces in the cosmos. Cicero's engagement with these doctrines is not merely one of passive reception; rather, he appropriates, critiques, and reconfigures their arguments to construct his own position.

The significance of this analysis also lies in exploring the religious dimensions of Cicero's work, particularly the ways in which the question of fate intersects with religious practices like divination and augury, which were central to Roman belief systems. Cicero addresses these concerns within his philosophical framework, offering a complex view

of fate that reflects the tension between human agency and divine predestination. The study also highlights how Cicero's examination of fate engages not only with philosophical debates but also with religious concepts of divine intervention and cosmic order.

Cicero employs three principal approaches—physical, logical, and ethical—to tackle the question of fate, each providing a distinct perspective that reflects broader trends in Hellenistic philosophy. By assessing these dimensions, this study elucidates Cicero's philosophical method and his attempt to reconcile or challenge the ideas he inherits.

Despite its relative brevity, *De Fato* has had a lasting influence on the philosophical tradition, shaping subsequent discussions on determinism, human agency, and responsibility. The treatise's impact extends beyond antiquity, resonating in medieval, early modern, and contemporary debates on free will and causation. By situating Cicero's work within both its historical, philosophical, and religious contexts, this study aims to demonstrate the continued relevance of *De Fato* in addressing fundamental questions about human freedom, divine will, and the role of fate in shaping the human experience.

2. Historical and Philosophical Context of the Treatise *De Fato*

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE) was one of the greatest orators, politicians, and philosophers of ancient Rome. In his time, Rome was not only the center of a vast empire but also a melting pot of philosophical ideas, primarily emanating from Greece. Like many of his contemporaries, Cicero was profoundly influenced by Greek philosophical currents, which he adapted to the political and social realities of Rome (Cicero 1933, *De Natura Deorum*, I, 2). Indeed, the philosophical questions in Cicero's works are inseparable from political, cultural, and pedagogical concerns¹.

Philosophical syncretism is particularly evident in his treatise *De Fato*. In this work, Cicero addresses one of the most debated topics in both Greek and Roman philosophy: fate and its relationship to free will. However, the question of fate also carried profound religious implications in antiquity, influencing both personal belief systems and state rituals. The treatise was written during a period of political crisis in Rome, amid tensions stemming from the struggle for power within the Republic². Although *De Fato* has not survived in its entirety, it remains a deeply complex work. Composed around June 44 BCE, shortly after the assassination of Julius Caesar, it is not an isolated work but rather part of a broader trilogy that includes *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione*, both of which explore the nature of divinity, divination, and their relationship to human will. In this sense, Cicero's treatment of fate cannot be fully separated from a religious context in which divination and divine will played an essential role in shaping the destiny of individuals and societies.

In the first of these philosophical treatises, *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero examines various Greek conceptions of the gods, paying particular attention to Stoic and Epicurean ideas. Through a dialog among representatives of different philosophical schools, Cicero analyzes divine nature, the existence of the gods, and their relationship with the human world. The Stoics portray the gods as rational and providential beings, whereas the Epicureans conceive of them as blissful entities indifferent to human affairs³. This critical analysis of Greek theological doctrines lays the foundation for the debate on fate and providence, which Cicero delves into more deeply in *De Fato*. Here, he questions the compatibility between the idea of predetermined fate and the possibility of free will. Thus, *De Natura Deorum* is not merely a theological treatise but also a reflection on the philosophical and ethical implications of believing in a world governed by fate or divine providence. Cicero not only engages with the philosophical implications of fate but also considers how divine providence and the will of the gods were seen as active forces shaping the cosmos and human lives.

As Wynne has insightfully observed⁴, Cicero—especially in the introduction to *De Natura Deorum*—appropriates Stoic concepts of religious virtues such as *pietas* (piety), *sanctitas* (holiness), and *religio* (religion) to construct a philosophical and rhetorical critique of Epicureanism. Drawing on Stoic definitions, Cicero presents *pietas* as “knowledge of the service owed to the gods” and *sanctitas* as “justice toward the gods.” If the gods, as the Epicureans claim, are neither able nor willing to engage with human beings, then these virtues become meaningless—they are no longer genuine virtues. Cicero suggests that *religio*, when understood as an external practice performed with virtue (i.e., true *pietas*), is likewise rendered void if the gods have no interest in human affairs. In this sense, religion ceases to be a meaningful set of practices when it is severed from a real relationship with the divine.

Cicero also explores the social and ethical consequences of Epicurean theology: if the gods are not part of the *societas generis humani*—the community of humankind—then even virtues such as *fides* (good faith) and justice lose their ultimate foundation. While this does not necessarily entail the immediate collapse of society, it does imply, philosophically, that its values are left without true justification.

Wynne argues that Cicero reveals the fundamental purpose of *De Natura Deorum* in the dialog’s opening sentence: a philosophical inquiry into the nature of the gods that is both intellectually beautiful and necessary for the moderation of religion. As the dialog states, “Inquiry into the nature of the gods [...] is both most beautiful for the mind to grasp, and necessary for the moderation of religion” (Cicero 1933, *De Natura Deorum* I, 1). For Wynne, this opening statement is not mere rhetorical ornament—as some have suggested, citing Cicero’s letter to Atticus about reusing prologs—but rather a deliberate and thematically coherent introduction. As Wynne puts it, “It is plain that a large part, if not all of it, was written specifically for a philosophical work on the nature of the gods” (Wynne 2019, p. 3).

From this perspective, the “moderation of religion” (*ad moderandam religionem*) does not refer to altering public rituals or performances, but to reforming the private beliefs that give those rituals ethical significance. For Romans, *religio* was orthopraxic rather than orthodox; what mattered was the correct performance of rites, not the internal beliefs of the practitioner. “Orthopraxy required only performances [...] Roman religion demanded certain performances, but did not mind what actions those performances were part of” (Wynne 2019, p. 7). However, Wynne shows how Cicero—and the characters in his dialogs—distinguish between a correct external performance and an act that is pious or impious depending on the agent’s beliefs: “A Roman could think that both men made a religiously correct performance, but that the first man did a pious action while the second did an impious one” (Wynne 2019, p. 9).

Thus, philosophical inquiry can moderate religion not by changing its external forms but by purifying the underlying beliefs. This moderation is not revolutionary, nor is it an institutional reform; it is an internal transformation of the believer.

In the second treatise, *De Divinatione*, Cicero examines the practice of divination, a widespread tradition in ancient Rome that was closely tied to the belief in predetermined fate and divine intervention in human affairs. For Cicero, the persistence of divination as an institution was fundamental to the harmony and stability of political and social organization⁵. Divination was not only a philosophical topic for Cicero but also a religious practice that expressed the belief that gods could reveal the future and guide human actions through various forms of omens, prophecies, and signs. In *De Divinatione*, he critically assesses the notion that the future can be known through methods such as augury, oracles, and prophetic dreams. Through dialog, Cicero questions the validity of these practices and the reliability of divination, arguing that if fate is immutable, knowing it does not alter its course—thereby calling into question the usefulness and logic of attempting to

predict it. Furthermore, he raises doubts about the coherence of divination with free will, suggesting that if the future is predetermined and knowable, then human freedom of choice is undermined. These doubts and inquiries are further explored in *De Fato*, where Cicero analyzes the philosophical and ethical implications of an inevitable fate versus the human capacity for free decision-making. The religious role of divination is inseparable from the concept of fate, as it reveals how deeply intertwined the notions of divine intervention and human agency were in Roman religious thought.

As previously noted, Cicero wrote *De Fato* in the context of great political uncertainty, following the assassination of Julius Caesar and amid the tensions and power struggles that shook Rome. Cicero refers to these events in the introduction to his treatise⁶. This climate of instability deeply influenced his philosophical reflections, leading him to question the foundations of fate, causality, and free will. In this context, Cicero's reflections on fate also echo the political and religious crises of his time, where questions of destiny were not only philosophical but had direct implications for the future of Rome itself and its religious practices. The work stands as the culmination of a trilogy in which Cicero explores, from different perspectives, the implications of fate in human life. Within this framework, the political crisis not only shapes the philosophical content of his work but also imbues it with a metapolitical dimension, wherein the analysis of fate can be interpreted as a reflection on the destiny of Rome itself.

The primary objective of *De Fato* is to synthesize and critique Greek ideas about fate, particularly those of the Stoics and Epicureans. Throughout the treatise, Cicero grapples with the central question of whether it is possible to reconcile the existence of fate with human freedom. The concept of fate had been a subject of profound speculation in Greek philosophy, from the Presocratics to the Stoics, and Cicero seeks to evaluate these theories in light of their ethical and moral implications.

In his analysis, Cicero not only examines the deterministic doctrines of the Stoics—who maintained that everything that happens is predetermined by an unbreakable chain of causes—but also considers the more atomistic conceptions of the Epicureans, who introduced the concept of *clinamen*⁷, or the random swerve of atoms, to explain free will. Throughout the work, Cicero synthesizes and critiques the ideas previously discussed in *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione*, exploring how different philosophical perspectives attempt to reconcile fate with human decision-making capacity. In this process, Cicero underscores the religious implications of these ideas, acknowledging that in the ancient world, discussions on fate were intimately tied to the divine and the transcendent forces believed to shape human destiny.

At the culmination of his analysis, Cicero presents his own position, which seeks to balance the influence of fate with individual moral autonomy. He acknowledges that while some events may be determined by a causal chain, human beings retain a sphere of free action in which they can exercise judgment and ethical responsibility. For Cicero, this is the key to preserving human dignity and moral responsibility in a world that, in many respects, appears to be governed by forces beyond our control. Thus, Cicero's treatment of fate becomes a nuanced inquiry into the balance between determinism and moral responsibility.

3. The Influence of Greek Philosophy on *De Fato*: Greek Philosophical Schools and Their Treatment of Fate

Since the dawn of Greek philosophy, fate (ἡ ἐιμαρμένη) has been a central theme. Terms associated with fate, such as *moira* (μοῖρα) or *tyche* (τύχη), appear in Homeric poems and Greek tragedies, reflecting a vision of human life as being subject to forces beyond individual control⁸. This reflects not only a philosophical concept but also a deeply religious view, as fate in Ancient Greece was often seen as a divine force that governed the cosmos,

with the gods playing a central role in determining the fate of individuals and nations. However, it was the Presocratics who rationally considered fate to be inextricably linked to the universal order and the immutable nature of the cosmos.

Heraclitus, for instance, viewed the cosmos as a series of constant changes that nevertheless obey an unchanging law, implying a universal fate governing all things⁹. This cosmic law was often equated with divine will in religious thought, suggesting that the gods were the agents through which fate was enacted in the world. Meanwhile, Empedocles posited *philia* (Φιλία) and *neîkos* (νεῖκος) as the primary forces that unite and separate the four elements (fire, water, earth, and air)¹⁰. For Empedocles, these forces were not merely natural but also spiritual, with divine agency playing a central role in the cosmic order. Democritus' atomism implicitly presented a form of blind, mechanical determinism, asserting that everything occurred out of necessity¹¹. Although this view leans toward a naturalistic explanation of fate, the broader religious framework of Ancient Greece also allowed for the possibility that the gods could intervene in these deterministic processes.

Interestingly, Cicero includes Aristotle among the Greek philosophers who defended fate (Cicero 1923, *De Fato* 17, 49). However, Aristotle developed a more nuanced theory of causality—his doctrine of the four causes (material, formal, efficient, and final)—and introduced the concept of chance (*tykhe*) as opposed to necessity (*anágkē*)¹². The idea of chance, however, was often viewed in religious terms as the moment when divine will could intervene or reveal itself in unpredictable ways. By distinguishing between necessary and accidental causes, he offered a more refined perspective on fate than his predecessors. Nonetheless, according to Cicero, for this first group of thinkers, fate constituted the essence of necessity (Cicero 1923, *De Fato* 5, 9–10)¹³.

It is noteworthy that in *De Fato*, Cicero does not explicitly mention Plato. However, it is well known that the founder of the Academy argued that reason and necessity operate jointly in the creation of the cosmos, as stated in the *Timaeus* (47e–48a)¹⁴. This view aligns with religious conceptions of fate, where the divine rationality of the cosmos is intimately connected with the will of the gods. This dialog, translated by Cicero himself shortly after composing *De Fato*, is directly related to his theological works *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione* (Cicero 1942, *De Natura Deorum* I, 2–3)¹⁵. In these works, Cicero explores how fate, divination, and the divine interplay to reveal the nature of the cosmos and human life within it. Likewise, Socrates and his *daimon* are not considered in *De Fato*. Nevertheless, it is important to remember, first, that Cicero's treatise contains gaps, and second, that it must be understood within a broader framework that includes the two aforementioned works.

In this context, Socrates is mentioned in the treatise dedicated to divination. Divination was a key practice in the religious life of Ancient Greece and Rome, seen as a means to understand the will of the gods and the forces that shape human destiny. As is well known, the philosopher received signs whenever he was about to act wrongly, which tradition, according to Cicero, considers a form of “almost divine” knowledge (*mantiké*) (Cicero 1923, *De Divinatione* I, 1)¹⁶. This connection between divine signs and fate underscores the religious dimension of the concept of fate, where divination is a way to engage with the divine and to align one's actions with the gods' will. During his trial, Socrates did not hear any divine voice, which he interpreted as a sign that his fate was rightly decided, allowing him to accept death with “a very serene spirit” (Cicero 1923, *De Div.* I, 54, 124). Socrates' acceptance of death exemplifies the religious view of fate as something predetermined by the gods, and his ability to accept it peacefully reflects the Stoic virtue of aligning with divine will. Socrates' acceptance of death without fear reflects his belief that his fate was predetermined and just. This resignation to fate exemplifies the philosophical approach to fate as something that should be accepted. This argument in the first book of *De Divinatione* introduces a defense of fate based on the existence of divination.

The next significant school is Stoicism, one of the philosophical currents that most influenced Cicero. The Stoics conceived of fate as an unalterable sequence of causes (*causarum series sempiterna*)¹⁷, closely linked to divine providence (*prónoia*). Let us consider Cicero's definition:

I call fate what the Greeks call *heimarmene* (εἰμαρμένη), that is the order and series of causes, when cause linked to cause produces of itself an effect. That is an eternal truth which flows from all eternity. Because this is so, nothing has happened which was not going to happen and for the same reason nothing will happen the efficient causes of which nature does not contain. From this we recognize that Fate is not what is called superstitiously but what it is called scientifically, the eternal cause of things, why things that are passed have happened and why impending events occur and why what follows will be. (Cicero 1923, *De Divinatione* I, 55, 125–126).

The Stoic conception of fate closely aligns with religious views that understand fate as divine will, guiding all events through a rational and unalterable process. However, the Stoics also attempted to reconcile this determinism with a form of human freedom, a balance that Cicero explored in his work, particularly through Chrysippus, whom he called an “honorable arbiter” for his ability to “occupy the middle ground” in the debate on the existence of fate (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 17, 40)¹⁸. This tension between fate and human freedom reflects the religious belief that, while the gods may determine the broad course of events, humans still possess the ability to align their wills with divine purpose through virtue and reason. Nevertheless, Cicero observes that the Stoic leans more toward those who wish the movements of the soul to be freed from necessity. Cicero suggests that the Stoic view on the freedom of the soul is more inclined toward freedom from necessity (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 11, 23), even if their deterministic outlook on the universe remains dominant.

Additionally, the perspective of the Megarian philosopher Diodorus Cronus is introduced. He argued that “only what is true or will be true is possible” (Epictetus 1995, *Discourses* II, 19)¹⁹. Diodorus' view of fate presents a deterministic vision that mirrors religious belief in a fixed, divinely ordained future, where the possibility of future events is inseparably tied to the will of the gods. By contrasting absolute necessity with conditional necessity, Diodorus sought to derive real necessity from logical necessity. In this approach, he identified the possible with the necessary—that is, with what is or will be true. In doing so, he suggested that everything that can happen must ultimately happen. This implies that any future event that is possible is also inevitable; if something is possible, it will necessarily occur, and if it does not occur, it was never truly possible. This implies a vision of fate in which the gods have already determined the course of all events, reinforcing the idea of an unchangeable, divine order.

This reasoning leads to a view of fate in which there is no room for chance or contingency: everything is predetermined. If the possible is equivalent to the necessary, then everything that happens in the world is inevitable, and the future is fixed in advance. The idea that “what is or will be true” is already determined reinforces a deterministic vision of the universe, where the course of events is governed by an inalterable logical necessity. The idea that everything that is possible will inevitably happen presents a deterministic worldview, where the future is already fixed, and human action cannot alter its course (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 11, 24–25).

Although Stoicism occupies a central place in *De Fato*, Cicero also examines other philosophical doctrines that address the question of human freedom without resorting to the concept of fate. This is the case with Epicurus²⁰, who, taking a perspective more inclined toward chance, introduced the concept of *clinamen*—the unpredictable deviation of

atoms—as an escape from the laws of fate (*fati foedera*), thus allowing for a form of freedom (Lucretius 1992, *De Rerum Natura* II, 251–293). Epicurus’ view, while more naturalistic, still allows for the possibility that chance or divine intervention could alter the course of events, hinting at a more fluid understanding of fate in the context of religious belief. Unlike the Stoics, who held that every proposition is either true or false and that all events occur as a result of fate, Epicurus did not argue that all occurrences are determined by eternal causes or by the necessity of nature (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 13, 30–32).

The other doctrine that stands in opposition to Stoic determinism is represented by Carneades, who criticized both Chrysippus’ doctrine and the idea of secondary causes, advocating for a more flexible conception of human beings as possessing a certain degree of freedom (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 15, 33). Carneades, a scholar of the Academy, argued that the distinction established by Chrysippus between auxiliary causes—which stimulate the senses and initiate the process of assent—and principal causes—related to the intrinsic nature of the subject—did not effectively reconcile universal causality with individual autonomy. Carneades’ critique of determinism highlights the limitations of causal distinctions in reconciling freedom and fate. He argues for a more flexible view of human autonomy. His critique points to the inadequacy of any causal distinction that seeks to justify freedom within a universe where everything is predetermined (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 15, 34–35). According to Carneades, if fate is absolute and everything follows an unbreakable causal chain, then the notion of individual freedom is ultimately illusory. This critique also reflects the religious tension between divine control over fate and human free will, where philosophical debates about autonomy often intersect with religious views on divine intervention and destiny.

4. The Debate Between the Stoics and the Epicureans on Fate

The debate between the Stoics and the Epicureans on fate and freedom did not focus so much on free will as we understand it today but rather on the nature of human beings within an ordered cosmos²¹, which was seen as being governed by divine principles. In this regard, it is essential to consider that the concept of fate in antiquity was deeply connected to religious beliefs, with gods playing an active role in shaping the course of human events. The idea of fate, therefore, cannot be fully understood without considering its religious dimension, particularly in relation to the role of divine providence and the practice of divination. The Stoics argued that fate was an aspect of the divine principle that governed the universe, or the “connecting cause of things”, whereas Epicurus maintained that, thanks to the *clinamen*, humans possessed a degree of autonomy (Long and Sedley 1987, pp. 323–28).

For the Stoics, freedom was not merely about doing as one pleased but about living in accordance with nature—that is, in harmony with the order of the universe (Bobzien 1998, pp. 87–91). This paradoxical view defines freedom as the capacity to voluntarily align oneself with fate. Those who fail to attain wisdom are dragged along by fate, much like dogs tied to a cart, according to the well-known Stoic metaphor. This metaphor illustrates the Stoic conception that while fate establishes a general framework within which events occur (the cart), human beings can act and make decisions within that framework—like the dogs²²—which can move to the extent permitted by the rope (T. Brennan 2005, pp. 131–33).

Thus, the dog has only two options: to go along with the cart or to resist. For the Stoic, the former constitutes true harmony with fate, while the latter means opposing it. Seneca encapsulates this idea by stating, *Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt* (“Fate leads the willing and drags the unwilling”) (*Epistulae Morales* 107, 11). In other words, although fate establishes the context and limits of what happens in the world, individual actions and decisions still have relevance and effects within that context (Inwood 1985, p. 72). This

view, however, is not entirely secular in nature, as it relies on the assumption of a divinely ordered universe, where human agency is in harmony with divine order.

Stoic determinism was based on several fundamental premises. First, it was rooted in the conception of the world as a continuous whole, where nothing escapes universal interconnection. This interconnection of bodies is governed by the Stoic *logos*, or reason. Within this framework, Chrysippus classified causes in various ways, although sources do not completely agree on the details (Frede 2011, pp. 52–55). The key point of these classifications is the distinction between primary and auxiliary causes, highlighting the importance the Stoics placed on differentiating between self-sufficient causes and accessory causes. An illustrative example used by Chrysippus, and later recorded by Cicero in *De Fato*, is that of a rolling cylinder. Here, a clear distinction²³ is established: while the initial push acts as an auxiliary cause, the nature of the cylinder (its shape) is the primary cause that determines how it will move after being pushed (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 10, 22). This idea, that certain external factors influence human actions only as secondary causes, positions the Stoic doctrine between absolute determinism and total independence of the will (Bobzien 1998, pp. 159–63).

The Stoic doctrine of fate was also closely related to logical problems. The Stoics contributed to discussions on possibility and necessity, which were of great importance to the Megarians. Furthermore, they connected the universal nature of fate with the principle of bivalence—that is, the idea that all statements about the future are either true or false, leaving no room for ambiguity (Bobzien 1998, pp. 124–26). This physical determinism arose from logical determinism, leading to the notion that future events are as fixed as past ones (Sedley 2006, p. 120).

The critique of the Stoic position was formulated by Carneades and the Academics, who made a clear distinction between cause and condition. Cicero points out that there is a difference between that without which something cannot happen and that in relation to which something necessarily happens. This distinction is fundamental to the Academic critique, which argues that the Stoic classification of causes confuses very different factors under the general concept of cause (Brittain 2001, pp. 187–90). As a result, the Stoic principle that everything happens due to prior reasons appears ambiguous, as it can be interpreted in multiple ways, including conflating cause with condition. Carneades' critique, which challenges the notion of an unbroken chain of causes, also raises questions about the role of divine intervention in determining human actions. If everything is predetermined by fate, how can divination, which relies on the interpretation of divine signs, function within such a deterministic worldview?

Carneades opposed the idea that everything is determined by an unbroken chain of causes, as argued by Chrysippus. His argument offered an alternative to the determinist dilemma, suggesting that there are caused events that are not part of an endless causal chain, implying that not everything is predetermined by fate. By challenging the idea of an unbroken causal chain, Carneades opens the possibility that some events are not predetermined and that human freedom may exist in a less rigidly determined universe. This opens up the possibility that not all events are fixed, allowing for a reinterpretation of causal structure.

Carneades suggested that Stoic determinism does not resolve the question of human freedom, and although his own proposal of spontaneous motions is also debatable, he successfully highlighted the limitations of the Stoic doctrine regarding causality and predestination. Additionally, Carneades postulated that voluntary human actions are caused by the will itself and do not need to be linked to an eternal natural sequence to have causality (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 15, 34). In this sense, Carneades' critique presents a challenge not only

to Stoic determinism but also to the religious conception of a universe fully governed by divine fate.

Cicero, in recounting these critiques in *De Fato*, also recognizes the distinction between necessary causes and necessary conditions, a point that allows the Stoics to differentiate between what must inevitably happen and the conditions that merely facilitate an event (Frede 2011, p. 74). This differentiation is crucial for understanding the Stoic position and its attempt to balance fate with human autonomy. However, as Cicero notes, this reconciliation is unsatisfactory from a critical perspective, since even our own nature and character, which are considered primary causes of our actions, are themselves influenced by factors beyond our control.

Finally, Carneades attacked the Stoic doctrine of divination²⁴. The Stoics argued that divination was possible thanks to divine providence, which provided humans with the necessary signs to predict the future. This divine providence was viewed as a direct link between the human world and the divine, a mechanism that allowed the gods to reveal their will through signs, omens, and other forms of divination. Carneades, however, challenged this idea, arguing that if there is no present basis for a future event, it cannot be predicted. Moreover, if everything is predetermined by fate, divination would have no practical value, as it would not alter the inevitable course of events (Hankinson 1998, pp. 223–28).

Carneades' critique, as presented by Cicero, poses a significant challenge to Stoic determinism²⁵. By suggesting that it is inappropriate to consider the remote factors of an event as true causes, Carneades undermines the global causal structure defended by the Stoics (Sedley 2006, pp. 145–47). His argument implies that while some events may be causally connected in a chain, not all necessarily are, and that there may be causes that are not part of a universal and immutable fate. This critique questions the role of religious practices, such as divination, in a world where fate is understood to be fixed and unchangeable. Carneades' perspective offers room for the possibility that the divine might reveal itself through mutable signs, allowing for a more dynamic relationship between humans and the gods. This alternative perspective opens the door to a more flexible conception of causality and human freedom, which has remained a central topic of philosophical debate ever since. Carneades proposes a more flexible understanding of causality than the Stoics, suggesting that not all events are part of an unchanging causal chain. This alternative view allows for human freedom and provides a framework where events can be caused by a variety of factors, not all of which are determined by a universal, fixed fate. His challenge to Stoic determinism continues to influence modern discussions on the relationship between causality, fate, and freedom. Furthermore, his critique of Stoic divination reflects a broader questioning of how divine will operates in a world where human freedom is possible.

5. Cicero's Appropriation and Critique: Structure and Method

The Latin term *fatum*²⁶ carries philosophical connotations derived from its Greek equivalents, such as *heimarmenē* and *anankē*. In the religious and philosophical context of antiquity, the question of fate was not solely a metaphysical or ethical issue but also a deeply spiritual one, directly tied to beliefs about divine influence and the workings of the cosmos. In this way, *fatum* not only refers to an impersonal force or law of the universe but also has a strong connection to the divine will and the role of the gods in shaping human destiny. *De Fato* represents an important philosophical adaptation of Greek concepts into Roman thought. While the Greek word εἰμαρμένη (*heimarmenē*) refers to a "portion" assigned by fate, the Latin *fatum*, originating from the verb *fari* (to speak), evokes a sense of a pronounced, almost oracular destiny, a concept that deeply resonated with Roman religious practice, where omens and prophecies played a central role in guiding public and

private decisions. This oracular nature of *fatum* aligns with the Roman understanding of the gods' direct influence over the course of human affairs, suggesting that fate was not merely a deterministic force but also an expression of divine will. The Stoics reinterpreted *heimarmenē* not only as a portion of fate but as a chain of causality (White 2003, p. 138)²⁷. *Fatum*, in turn, acquired a more emotional connotation, associated with inevitability, as suggested by its persistence in the Portuguese *fado*²⁸, a musical expression of melancholy in the face of the inevitable (Vernon 1998).

In *De Fato*, the first Latin treatise equivalent to *Peri tēs heimarmenēs* (Περὶ τῆς εἰμάρμενης), Cicero explores the nature of *fatum* as an “everlasting series of causes” (*causarum series sempiterna*), a concept he adopts from Stoic philosophy²⁹. However, Cicero does not merely adopt these ideas wholesale. In *De Fato*, he navigates among these philosophical currents, adopting and adapting concepts to construct his own vision. While he shows sympathy for Stoicism, particularly in the figure of Chrysippus, he also engages with the critiques of skeptics such as Carneades, who defended human freedom against Stoic determinism.

Cicero's dialectical method in *De Fato* is similar to that used in his *Tusculan Disputations*, where a disciple proposes a thesis and the master refutes it³⁰. In this treatise, the supposed dialog is held with his disciple Aulus Hirtius at Cicero's villa in Pozzuoli; his brother Quintus does not appear. The style follows the Academic Skeptic tradition, where the master argues *contra omnia* (against everything), as propounded by Arcesilaus (Cicero 1998, p. XIII)³¹. In this regard, Cicero notes that the goal is to respond to everything (Cicero 1923, *De Divinatione* II, 4, 10)³². Likewise, at the beginning of *De Fato*, he states the following:

It is also necessary to expound the meaning and the theory of propositions, called in Greek axiomata; what validity these have when they make a statement about a future event and about something that may happen or may not is a difficult field of inquiry, entitled by philosophers *Peri dynatōn*; and the whole subject is *Logiké*, which I call “the theory of discourse” (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 1, 1)³³.

Moreover, a certain circumstance prevented Cicero from doing, in this discussion on fate, what he did in other books—those that deal with the nature of the gods and, similarly, those in which he addressed divination—where the discourse unfolded without interruption, with arguments for and against, so that each one could more easily prove what seemed most probable to them³⁴. This approach highlights the religious importance of divination in understanding fate, as divination was often seen as a means of accessing divine will regarding future events. For Cicero, this method is the “Roman method” because “it advances with caution” (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 2, 4).

Cicero, far from advocating for religious dogmatism, proposes a skeptical suspension of judgment as a legitimate and virtuous way of living religiously. For Cicero, accepting religious beliefs without clear evidence can lead to both superstition and impiety—two equally serious errors. Skeptical moderation thus becomes a rational alternative that avoids error, guided not by dogmatic certainties but by what appears “plausible” or “probable.” As Wynne notes, “Philosophical inquiry may impose two sorts of bound on Roman religion, that is, on Roman religious practice: that it be neither *superstitious* nor *impious*” (Wynne 2019, p. 72).

This position does not call for an external reform of religious worship, but rather an internal reorientation of its meaning: traditional practices are preserved, but false beliefs that might corrupt them are purged. Cicero's philosophical interpretation of traditional Roman religion is part of a broader project, developed in dialog with authors such as Varro and Nigidius Figulus, aimed at recovering a rational and virtuous understanding of Roman civic religion. In contrast to Varro, who seeks to reconstruct religion from its historical

origins, Cicero advocates for interpreting it from a skeptical philosophical standpoint—one that allows for its continued practice without falling into superstition.

It should also be noted that the reference to *De Fato* in *De Divinatione* is explicit; Cicero mentions that he plans to address superstition and the Stoic theory of fate in a future treatise, which is none other than *De Fato*. In fact, the central theme of *De Fato* can be closely linked to the discussions of Quintus, Cicero's brother, in *De Divinatione*, who argues that “everything happens because of fate” (Cicero 1923, *De Div.* 9, 24).

6. Cicero's Three Approaches to Fate

One of the most intriguing ideas derived from the fragmented *De Fato* is that Cicero approaches the problem of fate from three distinct perspectives. This allows him to merge and contrast various Hellenistic philosophical systems, creating a complex and nuanced dialog among them.

The first of these approaches is the physical (sections 5–11), in which Cicero investigates, on the one hand, the possibility that, as the Stoics maintained, there exists a natural interconnection among all parts of the world. This idea, known as *sympátheia*³⁵ or “universal sympathy”, is one of the fundamental pillars for understanding Stoic cosmology and ethics and is deeply related to the doctrine of fate. This Stoic view of fate is not merely philosophical but also intersects with religious ideas about the cosmos being governed by a divine rationality, or *logos*, a principle closely associated with divine will and the gods' involvement in the world. On the other hand, he also explores the existence of chance and human will³⁶.

According to the Stoics, *sympátheia* or universal sympathy refers to the idea that everything in the cosmos is interconnected and that each element influences and is influenced by all others. In Stoic philosophy, the universe is a living organism, where every part, no matter how small, is linked to all the others through a rational and divine principle known as the *logos*³⁷. The *logos* is often associated with divine providence and the will of the gods, shaping the cosmic order and, consequently, human fate. This *logos* not only orders and governs the cosmos but is also the source of its internal coherence and harmony (Long 2006)³⁸.

To understand this phenomenon of cosmic contiguity, Cicero explains that Stoicism derives from inherited physical characteristics or external influences, such as environmental factors, which are considered crucial in understanding a person's fate. These environmental influences are often interpreted through religious practices, such as oracles and divination, which seek to explain the influence of the cosmos on individual destinies. For example, in Athens, where the atmosphere is light, its inhabitants are thought to be more astute. In Thebes, where the atmosphere is denser, its inhabitants are considered “coarser and more vigorous” (Cicero 1942, *De Fato*, 5–11)³⁹. However, to these examples, Cicero responds by emphasizing the diversity and plurality of natures, as well as the difficulty of defending this argument in absolute terms. Cicero challenges the Stoic view of fate by raising questions about human freedom. If everything is interconnected and every event is part of an unbreakable chain of causes, Cicero asks whether humans can truly exercise free will. Cicero's skepticism also extends to the religious belief that divine will, manifested through oracles and prophecies, dictates the course of human life. If everything is fated, how can humans interpret divine signs as anything other than a confirmation of an already determined destiny? He argues that if all actions are predetermined by the causal chain, the concept of personal responsibility and moral agency becomes meaningless. This critique of determinism invites a more nuanced view of human action and the possibility of free will⁴⁰.

This universal interconnection, which ties into the system of divination, means that events do not occur in isolation; rather, each event is determined by a complex network

of causes ultimately linked to fate. For the Stoics, fate, or *heimarmene*, is the chain of causes extending from the beginning of time to the end, determining everything that happens in the universe. Consequently, everything that occurs in the world is the result of a rational and necessary order. Due to this interconnection, the Stoics argue that there can be no random events; each occurrence is predetermined by this network of interrelated causes. Moreover, fate is not merely a fixed sequence of future events but an expression of the cosmos' intrinsic rationality, where every element plays its role in a preordained cosmic plan.

In his physical approach to fate in *De Fato*, Cicero critically examines this Stoic idea. Although universal sympathy is a compelling explanation of cosmic order, it has implications that challenge the notion of human freedom. If everything is so closely interconnected and every event is part of an unbreakable chain of causes, what room is left for free action? Can humans truly exercise their will independently, or are we all trapped in an immutable web of fate? Cicero questions whether this *sympátheia* implies absolute predestination, where every detail of our lives is already determined by the interconnection of causes⁴¹. In this framework, the idea of personal and moral responsibility dissolves, because if our actions are merely the inevitable result of a predetermined causal chain, freedom and the ability to choose become illusions. This challenge to determinism also casts doubt on religious practices like divination, which claim to reveal the future based on signs and omens, as Cicero questions whether such practices truly allow for human agency or merely reveal a predetermined fate.

For example, Cicero mentions a curious episode related to Socrates' physiognomy according to Zopyrus' interpretation⁴². The latter claimed that Socrates' facial features revealed that he had the temperament of a "stupid and slow-witted person" because he "did not have sunken collarbone hollows" and also accused him of being a womanizer. This seemingly absurd interpretation provoked laughter from Alcibiades, who could not take seriously the idea that physical traits could determine Socrates' character or fate⁴³. Cicero uses this anecdote to illustrate a deeper critique: physical traits are not absolute determinants of a person's character or fate.

From a contemporary perspective, we could extrapolate this critique to the belief in zodiac signs, which hold that a person's character and temperament are predetermined by their birth month and day. Just as Cicero questions the idea that physical traits determine fate, we could argue that attributing personal qualities and specific destinies solely based on the position of the stars at birth limits our understanding of human complexity and underestimates the importance of free will, determination, and learning in shaping character and life (C. Brennan 2017). Similarly, Cicero critiques the ancient reliance on prophetic signs, arguing that such beliefs obscure the true agency of individuals in shaping their own future.

Cicero's aim is to reconcile the idea of a cosmic order with the notion of human freedom. While he acknowledges that there may be universal principles governing the cosmos, he insists that these principles do not negate the possibility of human autonomy. For Cicero, individuals retain the capacity to make moral decisions and act responsibly, even within a universe governed by rational laws. This perspective affirms the importance of free will, moral responsibility, and personal agency in shaping one's life.

For Cicero, what truly defines an individual's fate is not inherited physical characteristics or immutable external influences but rather "will", "effort", and "learning" (Cicero 1942, *De Fato*, 5–11). These are the factors that allow humans to overcome the limitations imposed by nature or any deterministic interpretation of character. By emphasizing the importance of will and personal effort, Cicero rejects the notion of absolute dependence on nature in shaping human destiny. Cicero's vision of fate is not one of rigid determinism but

rather a flexible and humanistic conception that recognizes the interplay between cosmic order and human freedom. This view allows for personal effort, reason, and choice to shape one's character and life. Cicero's rejection of absolute determinism reflects his commitment to the idea that individuals are capable of making autonomous decisions and achieving excellence through their own efforts. This view also stands in contrast to religious fatalism, which often denies human agency and the ability to alter one's fate through effort and moral action.

Ultimately, Cicero's goal is to strike a balance between recognizing a certain cosmic order—a universal harmony that, according to some philosophical schools, could influence fate—and preserving free will and moral responsibility. These elements are essential to his ethical and political vision, as they allow individuals to be agents of their own destiny, capable of making moral decisions and acting responsibly in public life (Inwood 2005). Furthermore, Cicero argues that although the cosmos may be governed by certain laws and universal principles, this does not negate human capacity for autonomous decision-making and action. Thus, his stance distances itself from rigid determinism and moves toward a more flexible and humanistic conception of fate, in which personal effort and reason play a crucial role in shaping one's character and life⁴⁴. In contrast to religious practices that promote an unalterable fate, Cicero's view offers hope for personal transformation and the power of individual agency in determining one's future.

This Ciceronian perspective not only defends personal freedom against predestination but also underscores the importance of moral and educational development as tools for achieving excellence and virtue, which are central objectives in his philosophy. In a world where many believed that fate was inscribed in the stars or in physical traits, Cicero proposes a more optimistic and empowering vision of the human being, one capable of shaping their own future through reason and constant effort⁴⁵.

7. The Influence of the Treatise *De Fato*

After Cicero's death, *De Fato* continued to be an influential work in philosophical debates concerning fate and free will. Thinkers such as Gellius, Macrobius, Plutarch, and Alexander of Aphrodisias referenced his work, but it was Saint Augustine, in his *De libero arbitrio*, who revisited and expanded upon Cicero's ideas, adapting them to the Christian context⁴⁶. The debate on fate and freedom did not conclude with the Middle Ages. Cicero's influence became particularly evident during the Renaissance. The revival of humanism in Italy was no accident; the prosperous and politically independent Italian city-states fostered an environment that highly valued individual freedoms and civic rights⁴⁷. This climate facilitated the revival of ancient ideals, largely thanks to the deep connection to the traditions of ancient Rome (Oakeshott 1986).

In the context of the Renaissance, Cicero's thoughts on freedom and human dignity had a significant impact. Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), for example, addressed the issue in his *De libero arbitrio* (1437)⁴⁸, and many later authors engaged in the theological dispute over predestination and the origin of evil, a theme that also reflected the Renaissance interest in fate. Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) also wrote a treatise titled *De Fato, Libero Arbitrio et Praedestinatione* (1520), exploring these questions from a religious perspective, drawing on Aristotelian philosophy and Scholastic traditions. In this work, he critically examines whether human actions are determined by an unbreakable chain of causes or if there is room for genuine freedom, all within a theological framework influenced by divine will. In this work, he critically examines whether human actions are determined by an unbreakable chain of causes or if there is room for genuine freedom. Pomponazzi argues that, from a naturalistic and Aristotelian standpoint, events unfold according to necessary causal laws. This perspective leans toward a form of natural determinism, where human choices

are deeply influenced—if not entirely dictated—by prior causes and the structure of the universe. However, he also engages with the theological perspective, acknowledging that divine providence introduces a degree of uncertainty into strict determinism. Additionally, the concept of “fortuna” in the European literature of the time, though sometimes stripped of its original philosophical content, remained a manifestation of Ciceronian influence (Akopyan 2021)⁴⁹.

Cicero, with his defense of freedom and human activity, contributed to the formation of a mindset that valued dignity and individual freedom—core elements of Renaissance humanism (Grafton 2000). In his treatise *De Fato*, he argued that “not everything that happens comes from fate” (Cicero 1942, *De Fato* 34–38), defending the human capacity to act independently of it. Cicero’s argument against absolute fatalism aligned with his Academic Skepticism, which encouraged questioning rather than rigid adherence to deterministic views. This position, however, was not just a philosophical stance, but one that also held profound religious implications, challenging the conception of an omnipotent fate or divine will governing all human action.

Furthermore, in his work *Pro Archia*, Cicero not only defended an individual but also promoted the value of the humanities. The defense of the humanities in *Pro Archia* aligned with Cicero’s broader advocacy for a well-rounded education as being essential to civic and moral excellence. The philosopher argued that the study of Greco-Roman culture and the heroic deeds of the past ennoble human beings and bring them closer to virtuous ideals. Cicero’s engagement with human dignity and moral freedom, however, can also be seen as part of a broader conversation on divine will and human agency in religious contexts, where the search for moral virtue intersects with theological reflections on providence and grace. This approach was interpreted during the Renaissance as an early manifestation of humanism, a movement that believed the study of the ancients elevated and humanized individuals. Petrarch, one of the first humanists, rediscovered this text and saw it as fundamental to his own conception of humanism⁵⁰.

Cicero opposes a rigid view of fate. For him, although some events may be predestined or influenced by prior causes, not everything in life is predetermined. There is space for human action, freedom, and decision-making that are not entirely subject to an inexorable fate⁵¹. This is particularly relevant in religious contexts, where the question of divine providence and the human capacity for free will have been central to theological discussions for millennia. This defense of individual freedom left a profound mark on Western thought, where the dignity and autonomy of the human being were established as central values.

Not only did he reject absolute determinism, but he also promoted an ideal of humanity based on education, virtue, and freedom—elements that became pillars of Renaissance humanism (Baker 2015). His legacy in philosophy and political thought remains relevant⁵², emphasizing the importance of freedom and dignity in human life, concepts that continue to be fundamental in our understanding of the modern world⁵³. In conclusion, *De Fato* remains an essential work for understanding philosophical discussions on fate in antiquity, but also for recognizing the enduring religious and theological dimensions of these debates.

8. Conclusions

Cicero’s *De Fato* is a fundamental philosophical inquiry into the relationship between fate and free will. Through its three main approaches—physical, logical, and ethical—Cicero examines and critiques various Hellenistic doctrines, particularly Stoic determinism and the Epicurean theory of *clinamen*. His objective is not merely to refute these positions but to seek a balance between the existence of a cosmic order and the possibility of free and responsible action. This balance is crucial, as it reflects the theological tension between the divine will and human agency that has long been central to religious discussions.

In *De Fato*, Cicero critically engages with the debate between determinism and free will, interacting with Stoic and Epicurean perspectives while defending a position that preserves human autonomy. He challenges the Stoic notion of absolute fate, arguing that necessity does not govern all events, thus allowing for contingency and voluntary action. Additionally, his analysis addresses the implications of divine foreknowledge, questioning whether omniscience necessarily entails determinism. He refutes fatalistic interpretations by emphasizing the role of probability and human reasoning in decision-making. Through these arguments, he upholds the idea that moral responsibility requires a degree of freedom, which would be impossible under strict determinism. In this way, he acknowledges the theological concerns surrounding divine omniscience and free will, highlighting the philosophical and religious complexity of the topic.

From a physical perspective, Cicero explores the Stoic doctrine of *sympátheia*, which posits a universal interconnectedness governing the fate of all things. However, he challenges the notion that this interconnection necessitates absolute predestination, emphasizing the significance of effort, will, and learning in shaping individual destiny. His critique extends to the belief in the influence of celestial bodies and physical traits on human character, reaffirming the individual's capacity to shape their own future. This critique is also relevant in religious thought, where the question of how divine providence interacts with human efforts remains a key theological issue.

In the realm of logic, Cicero engages with the determinism of Diodorus Cronus and the position of Chrysippus, confronting the idea that only what actually occurs is truly possible. He argues that the ability to foresee the future does not imply that it is immutably fixed. Furthermore, he rejects the Epicurean theory of *clinamen* as a valid solution to the problem of free will, maintaining that randomness is insufficient to account for human freedom. Cicero's exploration of divine foreknowledge and free will offers a crucial perspective for theological discussions about the nature of God's knowledge and human free will.

Cicero's ethical approach reinforces individual autonomy in decision-making, opposing absolute fatalism. He underscores the importance of moral responsibility and the capacity for choice within a framework where causes and necessary conditions exist but do not entirely determine human action. In religious terms, this aligns with theological ideas that emphasize human moral responsibility in the face of divine providence, affirming that divine order does not negate free will.

The significance of *De Fato* extends beyond its historical context, influencing later philosophical and theological discussions on free will, fate, and moral responsibility. While Cicero's reasoning is not systematized as a formal theory, it provides a crucial foundation for later debates in medieval and modern thought. Philosophers such as Saint Augustine reinterpreted Cicero's ideas within a Christian framework, while Renaissance humanism found in his defense of dignity and individual freedom a foundation for the development of modern thought. His rejection of absolute fatalism and his advocacy for human agency contributed to a more flexible conception of fate, in which will and reason played a fundamental role in shaping both individual and collective futures. This theological legacy, shaped by Cicero's exploration of fate, continues to influence contemporary religious thought, reminding us that while certain circumstances may be shaped by divine will, we remain the architects of our own destiny.

Ultimately, Cicero succeeds in reconciling the existence of a universal order with humanity's capacity for choice and action. His optimistic and humanistic vision of fate and freedom remains relevant in contemporary philosophical debates, as well as in religious discussions that seek to understand the interplay between divine providence, free will, and moral responsibility. It serves as a reminder that, although our lives may be shaped by certain circumstances, we remain the architects of our own destiny.

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Notes

- ¹ Philosophical syncretism refers to the blending of different philosophical traditions and schools of thought. Cicero was particularly adept at integrating Greek philosophical ideas into Roman thought, creating a unique synthesis that was accessible and relevant to the Roman political and social context.
- ² The political crisis refers to the tumultuous period in Rome after the assassination of Julius Caesar, which led to civil wars and the eventual downfall of the Roman Republic. The resulting instability deeply influenced Cicero's philosophical reflections, especially on the issues of fate and free will.
- ³ The Stoics believed that the gods were rational and operated according to a divine, unchangeable plan. In contrast, the Epicureans viewed the gods as detached from human affairs, living a life of blissful indifference. This theological debate set the stage for Cicero's later discussions on fate.
- ⁴ For a detailed discussion on this issue, see: Wynne (2019, pp. 50–82).
- ⁵ Divination was a central aspect of Roman religious and political life. It involved interpreting omens or signs from the gods to guide human action. Cicero critiqued this practice, especially in relation to the idea of an immutable fate.
- ⁶ The assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE marked a pivotal moment in Roman history. Cicero, who had been a vocal supporter of the Roman Republic, was deeply affected by the event, which spurred his reflections on political destiny and personal autonomy.
- ⁷ The *clinamen* is an essential concept in Lucretius' philosophy, which introduces the idea of random atomic swerve to explain the possibility of free will in an otherwise deterministic universe. In Epicurus, this concept is referred to as *parénklisis* or "atomic deviation", which plays a fundamental role in his ethical framework. Cicero explores this idea in his own critique of the Stoics and Epicureans in *De Fato*.
- ⁸ The Homeric poems and Greek tragedies, particularly the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, often present fate as an unavoidable force, governed by the gods or cosmic principles. *Moirai* and *Tyche* represent different aspects of fate: *moira* as the personification of fate and *tyche* as the goddess of chance. See: (Homer 1999, pp. 417–20).
- ⁹ Heraclitus' doctrine of the unity of opposites and the flux of the universe suggests that although the world is in constant change, it follows an underlying rational principle or law—what Cicero might interpret as fate. See: *Fragments*, DK B30.
- ¹⁰ Empedocles' theory of the four elements and the forces of *philia* (love) and *neikos* (strife) that bind and separate them reflects a cosmic balance that Cicero could associate with fate, governing the elements' interactions. See: *Fragments*, DK B17.
- ¹¹ Democritus' atomism suggests that all events, including human actions, are the result of mechanical necessity. Everything happens as a result of the interaction of atoms, with no room for randomness or free will, leading to a deterministic worldview. See: *Fragments*, DK B156.
- ¹² Aristotle's concept of causality is more complex than that of earlier philosophers. His introduction of *chance* (*tykhe*) contrasts with *necessity* (*anágkē*), allowing for a more flexible understanding of fate and causality in the natural world. See: *Physics* II, 4–6.
- ¹³ In fact, this "essence of necessity" reflects Stoic influence, in which fate is an unalterable cosmic principle, yet tempered by Cicero's emphasis on human autonomy.
- ¹⁴ In *Timaeus*, Plato (1902) proposes that the cosmos is created by a divine craftsman who works according to a rational plan that combines necessity and reason. Cicero's translation of this work reflects his interest in reconciling divine reason with fate.
- ¹⁵ Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione* also explore the intersection of fate, divine providence, and human agency. His translation of *Timaeus* helped frame his own views on fate and divine order. See Cicero, *Timeus*, 3, 10.
- ¹⁶ Socrates' encounters with his daimonion (divine voice) are often interpreted as moments of divine intervention. Cicero references this in *De Divinatione*, linking the philosopher's guidance from this voice to a belief in divine fate or providence.
- ¹⁷ The Stoic conception of fate as a series of unalterable causes linked to divine providence suggests that all events are part of a larger, rational plan that human beings should align themselves with.
- ¹⁸ Chrysippus, a key Stoic philosopher, attempted to reconcile determinism with human freedom by suggesting that while events are determined, human beings can still act freely within this framework through reason.
- ¹⁹ Diodorus Cronus, a Megarian philosopher, argues that only what is true or will be true can be possible, thus introducing a strict form of determinism based on logical necessity.
- ²⁰ Epicurus introduced the concept of *clinamen* to explain how free will can exist in a world that might otherwise be deterministically governed by the laws of nature. This swerve of atoms represents an escape from fate's laws.

- 21 The core difference between the Stoics and Epicureans lies in their interpretation of fate and human autonomy. While the Stoics believe that fate is a necessary and divine part of the universe's structure, the Epicureans assert that humans have a measure of freedom due to the *clinamen* or the "swerve" of atoms, which introduces unpredictability into the natural order. This swerve allows for human agency to disrupt the chain of causes that would otherwise lead to determinism.
- 22 The image of the dog tied to a cart is a powerful representation of Stoic thought. The dog symbolizes the individual who, although tethered to the larger framework of fate (represented by the cart), can choose to align or resist its course. Stoics argue that harmony with fate—accepting one's circumstances—leads to tranquility, whereas resistance brings suffering. "When we are told both that everything is fated, and also that our souls are somehow free, it seems natural to conclude that there is a sort of causal fire-wall separating inside from outside, insulating the soul within from the ineluctable causal nexus without. The dog's body may be fated to move, but its mind is still free to cooperate or not. Or at least, however it goes for dogs, our human minds are free to think, choose, decide and react however we want, and the mental events are not fated, not caused, and not destined—surely that is the point of Stoicism, to counsel virtue through resignation, and to give us the freedom to cooperate with the dictates of fate. But we have seen ample evidence that this simply was not their view. There is, to begin with, the repeated affirmation that everything, without exception, happens by fate and as the result of antecedent causes—and the arguments used to bolster this claim are just as applicable to mental events as to extra-mental events. Furthermore, there is the fact that their account of the soul makes it simply another parcel of matter in a material world—a part of the cohesive and coherent *pneuma* that constitutes the cosmos. Had they wished to purchase it some exemption from causation, they might at least have made it of a different stuff, or no stuff at all. Consider, too, the care with which they elaborated the causal connections between the soul and the rest of the world, working in both directions. The theory of perception tells us how the objects around us impose a physical alteration on our impressionable souls; the theory of impulse tells us how our souls reach out to change the world in turn" (T. Brennan 2005, p. 316).
- 23 Chrysippus' distinction between primary and auxiliary causes is central to Stoic determinism. Primary causes are those intrinsic to an object, like the shape of a rolling cylinder, while auxiliary causes are external influences, such as the initial push. This distinction illustrates that while external factors may influence actions, they are not the primary drivers of events, maintaining the Stoic view that the universe operates in a deterministic and interconnected manner.
- 24 Carneades questions the Stoic belief in divination as a means of knowing the future. He argues that if everything is predetermined by fate, divination would be futile, as it would neither alter nor predict the inevitable course of events. His critique points to the inherent contradictions in the Stoic worldview, where the existence of free will and predictive practices like divination seem incompatible.
- 25 Cicero, in his discussion of the Stoic position, recognizes the distinction between necessary causes and necessary conditions, which helps Stoics argue that while some events are inevitable, others are merely facilitated by specific conditions. However, Cicero points out the difficulty in reconciling this view with human nature, as even our own character—considered a primary cause—can be influenced by factors beyond our control, raising questions about true autonomy.
- 26 The Latin term *fatum* is derived from Greek concepts such as *heimarmenē* and *anankē*. Both of these terms emphasize the inevitability and determinism associated with fate. In Greek philosophy, *heimarmenē* refers to a portion of the cosmos allocated to an individual, indicating an element of fate assigned by the natural order, while *anankē* refers to necessity or the unchangeable nature of fate.
- 27 The Stoics adopted *heimarmenē* as a chain of causality, positing that everything in the universe was interconnected and followed a causal order dictated by divine reason (the *logos*). This reinterpretation signaled a shift from a more passive conception of fate to an active process of cause and effect governing the cosmos.
- 28 The term *fatum* in Latin takes on a more emotionally charged connotation compared to its Greek counterpart. While *heimarmenē* could be understood as a more neutral or impersonal portion of fate, the Latin *fatum* evokes a sense of inevitability, as seen in the melancholic cultural tradition of *fado*, the Portuguese music genre that expresses resignation to an inescapable destiny.
- 29 Cicero's *De Fato* explores the idea of fate as an "everlasting series of causes" (*causarum series sempiterna*), a notion borrowed from Stoic philosophy. This interpretation implies that fate operates through an unbroken chain of events that stretch across time, dictated by rational principles. Cicero's treatment of this concept reflects his engagement with Stoic thought while seeking to shape his own understanding of fate and free will.
- 30 Cicero's dialectical method in *De Fato* follows a pattern similar to his other philosophical works, such as the *Tusculan Disputations*, in which he uses a dialog format. A disciple proposes a thesis, and the master, Cicero in this case, provides counterarguments. This approach facilitates the exploration of multiple perspectives on the issue of fate.
- 31 The dialog structure in *De Fato* reflects the influence of the Academic Skeptic tradition, which Cicero followed. The master's role in this tradition is to question all assumptions and challenge every argument, as exemplified by Arcesilaus, a leading figure in Academic Skepticism. This method aims to uncover the truth by scrutinizing every claim.

- 32 In *De Fato*, Cicero emphasizes the importance of questioning rather than affirming. His statement, “I do not affirm anything and question everything”, aligns with the skeptical approach of doubting all propositions, even his own conclusions. This method was central to his philosophical approach, which aimed at testing the limits of knowledge and certainty.
- 33 Cicero introduces the term *peri dynatōn*, meaning “concerning the possible” to discuss questions about the future. This idea falls within the realm of logic, where philosophers engage with the possibility of future events. Cicero underscores the importance of logic as a “science of argumentation” in addressing such questions about fate and contingency.
- 34 Cicero notes that, unlike in some of his other works, where the arguments for and against a particular view are presented in a straightforward manner, in *De Fato*, the discussion on fate does not proceed without interruption. This method reflects the Roman philosophical tradition of cautious deliberation and careful analysis, rather than quick conclusions.
- 35 The idea of *sympátheia* or “universal sympathy” is central to Stoic cosmology, which holds that all parts of the universe are interconnected. According to the Stoic doctrine, every element of the cosmos is linked to all others through a rational principle, the *logos*, which is both the governing force and the organizing principle behind the universe (Long 2006). This idea suggests that everything that happens in the cosmos is part of an ordered and rational plan, with each part playing its role in a unified whole.
- 36 The Stoic *logos* is often described as a divine reason or rationality that permeates the universe. It is through the *logos* that the Stoics explain both the existence of the cosmos and the harmonious interrelation of all its parts. In this worldview, fate is not a random occurrence but a necessary and rational sequence of events determined by the *logos*. This view of the universe as a living organism is foundational to understanding Stoic ethics, where everything is connected by a web of rationality and necessity.
- 37 Cicero critiques the Stoic idea of *sympátheia* by examining the influence of environmental factors on a person’s fate. He uses examples like the lighter atmosphere in Athens, which supposedly makes its inhabitants more astute, and the denser atmosphere in Thebes, which makes its people “coarser and more vigorous.” These examples reflect an attempt to show how external factors might influence a person’s character and actions, but Cicero ultimately questions whether such factors alone can fully explain a person’s fate.
- 38 Cicero’s response to the Stoic notion of universal sympathy reflects his belief that the influence of external factors, such as the environment or the stars, is not absolute. While he acknowledges that such factors may play a role in shaping certain aspects of a person’s fate, he emphasizes the complexity and diversity of natures and argues that fate cannot be determined solely by these external influences. This perspective critiques the determinism inherent in the Stoic worldview (Rist 1972).
- 39 In the Stoic view, fate is synonymous with the idea of *heimarmenē*, the chain of causes that extends from the beginning of time to the end. This deterministic view posits that every event is the result of an unbroken sequence of causes, meaning that nothing happens by chance. For the Stoics, even seemingly random events are the result of a rational and divine order, and human free will is subordinated to this cosmic plan.
- 40 Cicero challenges the Stoic view of fate by raising questions about human freedom. If everything is interconnected and every event is part of an unbreakable chain of causes, Cicero asks whether humans can truly exercise free will. He argues that if all actions are predetermined by the causal chain, the concept of personal responsibility and moral agency becomes meaningless. This critique of determinism invites a more nuanced view of human action and the possibility of free will.
- 41 Contemporary beliefs in astrology, which claim that a person’s character and fate are determined by the positions of the stars at birth, are reminiscent of the deterministic ideas that Cicero critiques in *De Fato*. Just as Cicero questions the role of physical traits in shaping a person’s destiny, modern critiques of astrology argue that such beliefs oversimplify the complexity of human nature and the influence of free will and personal effort in shaping one’s life.
- 42 The anecdote about Socrates’ physiognomy, as interpreted by Zopyrus, highlights Cicero’s skepticism about the deterministic interpretation of physical traits. Zopyrus’ absurd conclusion that Socrates’ facial features determined his character or fate illustrates the dangers of reducing complex human nature to a set of physical characteristics. Cicero uses this example to argue that fate cannot be determined by physical traits alone.
- 43 Cicero rejects the idea that fate is determined by external factors such as physical traits or environmental influences. Instead, he argues that “will”, “effort”, and “learning” are the true determinants of a person’s fate. These factors, which reflect a person’s ability to shape their own destiny through conscious effort and decision-making, are key to Cicero’s conception of human freedom. For Cicero, the capacity for personal growth and self-determination is what truly defines an individual’s fate (Cicero, *De Fato*, 5–11).
- 44 Cicero’s philosophy emphasizes the importance of moral and educational development as essential tools for achieving virtue. In a world where many believed in a predetermined fate governed by the stars or physical traits, Cicero proposes a more optimistic vision in which individuals can shape their own destinies through reason, effort, and education (Rist 1972). This vision empowers individuals to take responsibility for their actions and strive for moral excellence.
- 45 Cicero’s perspective on fate in *De Fato* reflects a balance between determinism and human agency. While he critiques the Stoic notion of absolute fatalism, he does not wholly reject the idea that external forces influence human lives. Instead, he adopts a more pragmatic approach that acknowledges a degree of cosmic order while emphasizing the role of human will, reason, and education in shaping one’s destiny. This perspective is deeply rooted in the Roman intellectual tradition, which sought to adapt

Greek philosophical doctrines—particularly Stoicism and Academic Skepticism—into a practical framework suitable for political and ethical life (Rist 1972). Cicero’s argument serves not only as a philosophical inquiry but also as a rhetorical tool reinforcing the Roman ideal of the virtuous statesman: an individual capable of navigating external constraints through wisdom and ethical action. By maintaining that moral development and effort remain central to personal excellence, Cicero presents a vision of fate that allows for self-determination within a structured but not wholly predetermined cosmos.

46 Augustine’s engagement with Cicero’s *De Fato* reflects an attempt to reconcile classical philosophy with Christian doctrine. By integrating Stoic and Ciceronian notions of fate with theological ideas on divine providence and free will, Augustine helped shape medieval debates on predestination and human agency.

47 The political structure of the Italian city-states, such as Florence and Venice, promoted values of civic participation and individual responsibility, which aligned with Ciceronian ideals of active citizenship and personal virtue.

48 Lorenzo Valla’s *De libero arbitrio* challenged Scholastic determinism, reinforcing a humanistic approach to free will that drew from Cicero’s critique of fatalism.

49 The concept of “fortuna” in the Renaissance literature, notably in Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, echoes Cicero’s discussions on fate by emphasizing the balance between external circumstances and human agency.

50 Petrarch’s admiration for Cicero led to the widespread revival of Ciceronian ideals during the Renaissance, influencing figures such as Erasmus and Thomas More.

51 Cicero’s nuanced stance on fate and freedom influenced later Enlightenment thinkers, including Rousseau and Montesquieu, who sought to reconcile necessity with moral responsibility (Berlin 1976).

52 The philosophical discussions on fate and free will continued in early modern philosophy, particularly in Descartes’ theory of innate ideas, Leibniz’s concept of pre-established harmony, and Kant’s transcendental idealism, which sought to balance determinism and autonomy (Kuehn 2001).

53 The enduring relevance of Cicero’s ideas can be seen in modern discussions on political philosophy, particularly in liberalism and republicanism, where his emphasis on virtue and civic responsibility continues to inspire contemporary thought (Pocock 1975).

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Article

Fate and Freedom in Ancient Stoicism and Augustine's Critique

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Abstract: This article is divided into three parts. First, a brief exposition of the ontological foundations of ancient determinism is provided to explain the worldview held by such a philosophical position. The second part sets out the argument used by Chrysippus to make causal determinism compatible with moral responsibility, and points out the tensions that such a position entails. In the third part, the notion of freedom of ancient Stoicism is contrasted with the philosophy of Augustine in order to determine the novelty that Christianity represented in this matter.

Keywords: ancient stoicism; determinism; freedom; moral responsibility; Saint Augustine

1. Introduction

It is not easy to reconstruct Stoic thought, whose first representatives can be placed in the 4th century B.C. and its last around the 2nd century A.D., not even if we limit its thought to its early stages, namely from Zeno of Citium to Antipater of Tarsus. For the reconstruction of Stoic thought, we have at our disposal fragmentary material that is not always coherent¹. Moreover, even among those considered representatives of this school, there is no homogeneous thought².

In the conception of reality held by the early Stoics, there are two theses that are difficult to reconcile: that everything is determined and that man is a moral agent. The difficult reconciliation of these two postulates has recently given rise to an abundant and valuable specialised literature, such as *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* by Susanne Bobzien (1998) and, more recently, *Responsabilidad moral y destino en el estoicismo temprano* by Laura Liliana Gómez Espíndola (2017). Both works focus, as we will, on the position of Chrysippus, not only because he was the first author to deal systematically with this question in his works *On Fate*, *On the Possible*, *On Providence* and *On Nature*, but also because, for the Stoic world, this author's doctrine was considered the undisputed authority (Bobzien 1998, p. 6). This article does not aim to contribute to the reconstruction of the Stoic strategy in order to make determinism and moral responsibility compatible, a task satisfactorily accomplished by the aforementioned works. Through this research, we attempt to open the debate from a new perspective, that is, to determine the concept of freedom implicit in the Stoic proposal by comparing it with the concept of freedom present in the work of (Saint Augustine 1913), specifically in three of his works: *The City of God*, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, and *On Grace and Free Choice*. As is well known, in chapter VIII of book V of *The City of God*, Augustine takes up both the Stoic conception of causal necessity and Cicero's critique of it, showing how both positions are overcome by Christianity by making divine omniscience compatible with the freedom of the creature. However, it is in

the treatise *On the Free Choice of the Will* that we find the most solid arguments against the concept of freedom present in the works of the ancient Stoics. In *On Grace and Free Choice*, there are subtle considerations that allow us to discern how grace works in the intimacy of the person, and how this cannot be assimilated into causal determinism.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first, entitled “Physics, divinity, eternal return and fate”, is introductory in nature and seeks to contextualise the Stoic proposal on determinism within the framework of its ontology. Although this section may be very introductory for specialists, we believe it is important to show how the Stoic proposal on destiny and freedom is indebted to certain philosophical assumptions. The next section, “Determinism and freedom”, critically presents the main theses of the issue at hand, and the last section presents Saint Augustine’s explicit and implicit criticisms of Stoic determinism.

2. Physics, Divinity, Eternal Return and Fate

The first thing to note is that there is a close connection between the physics of these philosophers and their conception of fate, just as their tripartition of philosophical knowledge into logic, physics and ethics presupposes a profound unity³. Stoic philosophy is a thought about unity and, like many of their predecessors, the early Stoics give a reason for this from the interaction of two original principles—in their case, matter and reason. These principles are differentiated as the passive and the determinate. Matter is a receptive principle; reason, on the other hand, is determinate and therefore divine. Perceivable reality is co-principal and its qualification is the responsibility of reason, which is diffused in matter. Even if the thought of the ancient Stoics does not constitute a unitary system, a certain coherence can be found in their physics: “the Stoic philosophy of nature is an attempt to provide a rational explanation for all things in terms of the intelligent activity of a single entity which is coextensive with the universe” (Long 1986, p. 168).

It is more problematic to determine what divinity is. Some identify it with the “ether”, while others consider it to be reason or the active principle⁴. In Cleanthes, according to Cicero, we find divinity assimilated to the cosmos itself by attributing to it the doctrine according to which, on the one hand, god is the cosmos itself and the name for the mind and soul of the totality of nature and, on the other, he establishes that the truest god is the most remote heat, which he calls ether, highest and everywhere surrounding, which surrounds and embraces all things to the extreme. Cicero himself, in the same work, *On the nature of the gods*, attributes to Chrysippus the affirmation that the world itself is god, while at the same time affirming—and what we are most interested in emphasising here—the connection between such pantheism and the fatality and necessity of future things: god is the world itself, an intelligent conductor because he operates in the mind and reason, being at once the common and universal nature of things, containing them all and being the force of fate and the necessity of future things (Salles 2022).

Regardless, for these authors, neither theology nor physics are the ultimate, definitive part of their reflection. Practical philosophy is the knowledge in which man must engage and its foundation is to be found in the rationality of the cosmos, since the presence in the cosmos of an immanent rational principle gives reason for it to be administered “by reason and providence” (κατὰ νοῦν καὶ πρόνοιαν), as (Diogenes Laertius 2013) states in the same aforementioned passage.

There is no realm of the cosmos apart from *logos*, for the cosmos is an animate, rational whole, a whole that constitutes the perfect and absolute. Man, although having a privileged place among the determined beings, is nevertheless a part and therefore imperfect. The perfect is the cosmos, which, according to Cleanthes, according to Sextus Empiricus, “is indistinguishable from a god” (*Against the professors* IX 88-91 = SVF I 529). The radical difference between part and whole is that only the most perfect is outside the causal

order, namely, with the exception of the cosmos, all the various things are generated by other causes.

As has been stated, Stoic determinism is fully indebted to its physics and its concept of unity. The unity of the cosmos is not merely a spatio-temporal unity, but the unity of an eternal necessary causal order. The existence of a closed series of causes is what guarantees that every rational proposition can be true or false:

“Chrysippus uses the following argument: ‘If there is motion without a cause, not every proposition (what the dialecticians call *axioma*) will be either true or false, since anything lacking efficient causes will be neither true nor false. But every proposition is either true or false. Therefore there is no motion without a cause. If this is so, everything that happens happens through antecedent causes—in which case, everything happens through fate. The result is that everything that happens happens through fate” (Cicero, *On fate* 20–21 = LS⁵ 38 G).

Providence or fate is identified with this eternal series of closed causes. “For providence will be god’s will, and furthermore his will is the series of causes. In virtue of being his will it is providence. In virtue of also being the series of causes it gets the additional name ‘fate’” (Galen, *On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s doctrines* II 5, 9–13 = LS 54 U)⁶. There is no place in the cosmos for *arbitrium* or freedom understood in the strong sense, as we intend to show.

The cosmos being the ultimate, none of its parts, which are constantly subject to conflagration and destruction (Mansfeld 1979), is ultimate: “Once again the world returns anew to the same condition as before; and when the stars are moving again in the same way, each thing which occurred in the previous period will come to pass indiscernibly [from its previous occurrence]”⁷. This process of renewal probably has its *raison d’être* in the difference that necessarily remains between the whole and the part. Everything is destroyed and rebuilt an infinite number of times; only the gods exist outside this process and therefore they know perfectly well what will happen in the future, for “there will be nothing strange in comparison with what occurred previously”⁸, not even virtue or vice. “Indeed, no particular thing, not even the smallest thing, can happen otherwise than in accordance with the common nature and according to its reason”⁹. The cosmos is a whole in the strong sense, for all things that happen in it are causally related; it would cease to have the unity that constitutes it if a causeless movement were introduced into it, which would occur “were everything that exists or happens not to have some preceding causes from which it necessarily follows”¹⁰. Hence Chrysippus judged fate to be “an invincible, unblockable and inflexible cause, Unfondable, Inescapable, Necessity and Fatality”¹¹.

“In this way all things are bound together, and neither does anything happen in the world such that something else does not unconditionally follow from it and become causally attached to it, nor can any of the later events be severed from the preceding events so as not to follow from one of them as if bound fast to it; but from everything that happens something else follows, with a necessary causal dependence on it”¹².

What is suggestive of the position of the ancient Stoics, in particular Chrysippus (Bobzien 1998), is that they do not see this determinism as incompatible with the concept of moral responsibility or a certain ethics of happiness¹³. In what follows, we will try to reconstruct their position.

3. Determinism and Freedom

Against the deterministic presuppositions presented, there arises an obvious objection, which the Stoics knew as the *lazy argument* (*ἀργὸς λόγος*), as Cicero testifies¹⁴ and which Eusebius presents thus:

“If, for example, a man were at once to give credit to the marvellous responses of the gods, that truthfulness or falsehood, and the will to start upon an expedition or any other business, or the unwillingness to undertake such matters, was no work of ours but of inexorable fate, would he not choose to be careless and indolent in all matters that could not be performed without labour and pains and exertion on our own part? For if he thought that this or that would take place by fate, whether we took trouble and care about it or not, would he not certainly wish to choose the easier course, and give himself up to carelessness, since the result to be attained would be brought to pass by fate and necessity?”¹⁵

As Cicero, and Aristotle before him, had ruled, once the deterministic assumptions were assumed, all activity would withdraw from life¹⁶. Chrysippus solves this objection with manifest perspicacity by distinguishing simple events from concatenated events (Bobzien 1999). This is the theory known as the theory of ‘codestined’ events (*confatalia* or συγκαθαιμαρμένα) (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 700). Simple are those events that occur independently of people’s actions; for example, “every human being will die” is something whose truth does not depend on the subject, since death is a necessary condition of every mortal being; concatenated events, on the other hand, cannot occur independently of the agent’s actions. Thus, the statement “from Laius will Oedipus be born” depends on Laius actually having sexual relations. This is how Eusebius summarises Chrysippus’ position: “For many things cannot take place without the addition of our willing them, and bringing into play the most intense earnestness and zeal concerning them, because it was fated, he says, that they were to take place with this condition”¹⁷. In this way, Chrysippus understands that what is destined to happen with the intervention of a rational agent must happen on the assumption of the will of the rational agent. In this way, man is implicated in becoming, even if it is eternally determined¹⁸. As Boeri summarises, the early Stoics maintain that “what happens through us by the work of fate depends on us or (...) what happens through us depends on us” (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 712).

Alexander of Aphrodisias, one of the important detractors of the Stoic position (Astolfi 2014), criticises Chrysippus’ position “For they (the Stoics) deny that man has the freedom to choose between opposite actions, and say that it is what comes about through us that is in our power”¹⁹. In the causal order, man’s freedom is not at odds with causality, since he acts on the assumption of his will. According to the definition of freedom used by these authors, therefore, he is free who has the capacity to do what he wills or acts with will. As Boeri states, “freedom is a certain power of self-determination (ἐξουσίαν αὐτοπραγίας), which can simply mean the capacity to act on the basis of one’s desires and inclinations” (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 716). Nothing, therefore, prevents a given agent from acting freely. Moreover, as Boeri rightly states, “in fact, according to this idea, freedom seems to require, to a certain extent, determinism, for I will only really be able to do whatever I want (and thus be free) if I include the domain of things I want within the set of things I am destined to do” (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 717). Nevertheless, as seems to us, this conception of freedom can be characterised as a “weak freedom”, for it identifies the will of the subject with an act of will, which, nevertheless, could not be other than that determined by the causal order. In other words, it is a freedom that does not introduce into reality something truly original.

It seems to us that the concept of “weak freedom” is incompatible with moral responsibility. This is emphasised by Bishop Nemesius, among others:

“But if impulse also follows from necessity where is what is up to us left? For what is up to us must be free. But it would be free if in the same circumstances it were up to us sometimes to have impulse, sometimes not to. But if impulse also follows by necessity, it is clear that the result of impulse will also come to be by fate, even if it is brought about by us and in accordance with our *nature*, our *impulse* and our *decision*.”²⁰

That the impulse (*ὁρμή*) is prescribed all by necessity is explicitly defended by the Stoics; indeed, if it were not, it would be outside the order of nature (*φύσις*). The relationship between nature and discernment (*κρίσις*), however, is less clear, as we shall now explain.

The concept of causality and the concept of nature are intimately linked in the conception of these thinkers. All reality is permeated by *logos*, so that everything has its own nature. This is how (Nemesius 2008) explains it:

“For if, in the presence of identical causes, as they themselves say, there is every necessity that the same things should happen, and it is not possible for them to happen at one time this way, at another differently, because things have been thus ordained from eternity, then it is necessary that also the appetite of a living thing should utterly and wholly occur in this way in the presence of the same causes.”²¹

By nature, the animal is directed towards its own self-preservation, rejecting what harms it and craving what is familiar to it by virtue of the principle of self-attachment, and cannot behave differently from what is prescribed by its nature. In the face of certain circumstances, behaviour must be what it is, guaranteeing the order and necessity of the cosmos. The same is true of man; the principle that drives his action is self-esteem. In man, however, the imposition of nature does not immediately follow representation, for man has to evaluate, that is, to discern, unlike irrational animals, whether or not the representation is in keeping with reality: “And since reason (*logos*) has been given to rational beings as a more perfect supervision, living correctly by reason becomes what is natural for them, since reason becomes an artisan for their drives.”²²

According to Alexander of Aphrodisias, all the Stoics agree that the human being “has this advantage from nature over living creatures, that he does not follow appearances in the same way as them, but has reason from her as a judge of the appearances that impinge on him concerning certain things as deserved to be chosen”²³. In Origenes’ testimony we find it stated that “a rational animal, however, in addition to its impressionistic nature, has reason which passes judgement on impressions, rejecting some of these and accepting others, in order that the animal may be guided accordingly”²⁴. As Boeri explains, relying on Sextus Empiricus, among the possible persuasive representations for action, some can be true and others false and it is man’s duty to discern between them: “assent can be understood as the mental act by which the subject considers the presentation or proposition to be true” (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 125). Three factors are involved in every action: “impulsive presentation (*φαντασία ὁρμητική*), assentment (*συγκατάθεσις*), and impulse (*ὁρμή*)”. In fully rational action, a fourth factor is added: “this is a reasoning that precedes assent in which the agent investigates the veracity of the impulsive presentations he receives, which, according to the Stoics, the hasty agent does not do” (Boeri and Salles 2014, pp. 553–54).

Nature is the guarantor that man does not err in the discernment of these representations, for man has by nature “the inclinations for the discovery of what is proper”, as Stobaeus takes up and (Epictetus 1877) affirms: “Just as it is every soul’s nature to assent the true, dissent from false, and suspend judgement in reference to the non-evident, so it is its nature to be moved appetitively towards the good, with aversion towards the bad, and in neither of these ways towards what is neither good nor bad”²⁵. While it is not possible for reason to err in judging, it is possible for man to be hasty and not subject the representation to due discernment. Man can fail in the judgement of reason, not because of a failure of the judgement itself, but because he is hasty in deliberation. Thus, a wise or virtuous man is one who, before acting, pauses and says to his representation: “Appearances, wait for me a little: let me see who you are, and what you are about: let me put you to the test”²⁶; precipitancy and assenting to a cognition uncritically, on the other hand, is proper to vile persons: “So precipitancy and assent in advance of cognition are attributes of the precipitate

inferior man, whereas they do not befall the man who is well-natured and perfect and virtuous”²⁷.

Having established these distinctions, it seems to us that, if there is any area of moral responsibility in ancient Stoicism’s theory of action, it is precisely the instant prior to discernment, the determination to discern or not (Eshleman 2024). Paradoxically, if there is no discernment, there is precipitation and, therefore, an action outside rational nature. The question that can be asked is whether that which occurs outside nature also occurs outside the causal order. If the answer were affirmative, we would be faced with an unbridgeable fissure in Stoic determinism; if the answer were negative, it would be difficult to assume moral responsibility. However, according to Epictetus, he who acts without prior discernment acts freely.

And who is able to compel you to assent to that which appears false? No man. And who can compel you not to assent to that which appears true? No man. By this then you see that there is something in you naturally free. But to desire or to be averse from, or to move towards an object or to move from it, or to prepare yourself, or to propose to do any thing, which of you can do this, unless he has received an impression of the appearance of that which is profitable or a duty? No man. You have then in these things also something which is not hindered and is free.²⁸

In this summary review of the Stoic position, we find at least two notions of freedom, one positive and the other negative. The first, which we have called “weak freedom”, consists of the rational agent acting on the assumption of his will and occurs when man acts by submitting his representation to the judgement of reason, that is, when he acts in accordance with what corresponds to a rational agent; the second, acting without prior discernment, is an act outside rational nature but, paradoxically, made possible by it. It is by virtue of this second freedom that the rational agent becomes guilty of his acts. The acts of a rational agent in conformity with nature, although performed by the agent on the assumption of his will, are determined by the pattern of concatenated events; the latter, being contrary to nature, and therefore morally evil, could not occur outside the causal order.

So far, we have set out our exposition and analysis of the relationship between determinism, freedom and moral responsibility in ancient Stoicism. In the following section, we will try to deepen the concept of weak freedom by countering it with the Christian conception of freedom present in Saint Augustine.

4. Augustine’s Critique of Stoic Determinism

Augustine’s critique of Stoic determinism can be found explicitly in the fifth book of *The City of God*, and implicitly in his *On the Free Choice of the Will*. Despite a certain evolution in Saint Augustine’s thought, we maintain here not only a genuine fundamental unity in his affirmation of human freedom, but also a simultaneous awareness of the novelty and continuity with the philosophical reflections of his predecessors: “The main lines of Augustine’s doctrine become all the more clear, but they do not represent a real discontinuity or rupture with what philosophy had brought before (Augustine 2010). What they do represent is an ongoing discovery of the central and all-embracing role of the will in human behaviour” (Van Riel 2007, p. 279). In addition, Ganssle (1996, p. 1) underlines the core Augustinian idea on freedom: “Throughout this development, Augustine maintained the position that people have sufficient freedom for moral responsibility”. For his part, Verbeke (1958) demonstrated long ago that Saint Augustine knew and was influenced by Stoic philosophy, and that he fought against many of its elements, especially those related to pantheism and moral responsibility.

In Chapter VIII of Book V of *The City of God*, Augustine introduces a subtle distinction that allows him to reconcile divine providence with free will: from God comes all power, although not all “will”. Willing is in the possession of the creature who has free will. In Byers (2006), we find a detailed analysis of the Stoic elements of the Augustinian concept of *voluntas*, as well as the various interpretations to which it has given rise. Against Cicero’s recourse to deny divine omniscience in order to save human freedom, Augustine gives a reason why God’s knowledge of what is going to happen does not eliminate free will:

“We assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it. But that all things come to pass by fate, we do not say; nay we affirm that nothing comes to pass by fate.”²⁹

God irrevocably knows everything that is going to happen, precisely because He has foreknowledge: everything is present in His sight. He knows all events, not because they all follow His will, but because everything depends on His power. It can safely be said that, for God, the order of causes is determined; that is, He knows everything in its mutual causal dependence, but within this order, He knows and distinguishes those things that happen by necessity from those that follow the free determination of the created will. And this not as one who interprets what He beholds before His eyes, but as one who knows that in which he is present, for God is intimate to ourselves. Barry A. David (2001) provides a summary of the various interpretations of Augustine’s theory of divine prescience.

In Augustine’s doctrine of freedom, to be free means that a person possesses his own will. Here, in our opinion, lies the radical difference between freedom as understood by this author and what we have called “weak freedom” in the Stoics. Whereas the will in a model of “weak freedom” is determined by a cause other than the will itself, in Augustine, the origin of the will is in the will itself: “For we do many things which, if we were not willing, we should certainly not do. This is primarily true of the act of willing itself—for if we will, it is; if we will not, it is not—for we should not will if we were unwilling”³⁰. Further on, he insists, “our wills, therefore, exist as wills, and do themselves whatever we do by willing, and which would not be done if we were unwilling”³¹. What is proper to free will for Augustinianism, therefore, is that the will itself is not explained by some cause prior to it; it is the will that “puts” its act or which is the cause of its willing (Warchał 2023). In contrast to this position, the will in the Stoic model is presented to us as a merely psychological will. The will of man in Augustine is a “real” will; in fact, the Hipponian argues that God knows what we are going to choose since, being omniscient, what He knows is “real”, not apparent.

In his *On the Free Choice of the Will* this same question is explained in terms of “power”:

“Hence our will would not be a will if it were not in our power. Quite the contrary: since it is in our power, it is free in us. What we do not have in our power, or what can not be what we have, is not free in us”³²

There can be no distance between one’s will and the act of will. “Yet when we will, if we lack the will itself, surely we do not will”³³. There is nothing that belongs so intimately to the person as his own will. A will whose act is determined by nature or fate is an impotent will. In this same writing *On the Free Choice of the Will* we find an objection that is directly applicable to the conception of the early Stoics that has been set forth:

You said: “If free will was given in such a way that it has this movement as something natural, then it is turned to these lesser goods by necessity, and no blame can be attached where nature and necessity predominate.” You should have had no doubts that it was not given in this way, seeing that you do not doubt that the movement is blameworthy³⁴.

If the faculty of will receives its act of will by nature, in those things in which it departs from God, it cannot justly be considered guilty (Rogers 2004). It is remarkable that

Augustine appeals to his own experience of the guilty act to argue for the origin of this disordered will. As in the case of the knowledge that the soul comes to have of its own existence, it is not by looking outside, but by attending to one's own intimacy that we find certainty that the origin of our will is in ourselves.

“Evodius: I see and somehow grasp and comprehend the true things you are saying. For there is nothing I sense as firmly and intimately as that I have a will and that I am moved by it to the enjoyment of something. Surely I find nothing I might call mine if the will—by which I am willing or unwilling—is not mine! Accordingly, if I do anything evil through it, to whom should it be attributed but me? Since the God who made me is good, and I do nothing good except through the will, it is clearly apparent that it was given to me by God, who is good, for this purpose”³⁵.

There is nothing more proper than one's own will, and that the origin of this willing or unwilling is to be found in one's own will is a truth which is experienced by everyone and therefore not susceptible to being argued from a syllogism or apprehended as a necessary truth (Hughes 2016). It can be affirmed, however, that if the origin of one's willing or unwilling were not in one's own will, we could not be worthy of reward or justly held to be guilty, and he who does not recognise this truth, Augustine judges, “deserves to be excluded from the number of men”.

Consistent with this doctrine, Augustine considers that the origin of moral evil and moral good is not to be found in actions, but in the will itself, for “nothing is so much in our power as the will itself. Surely it is at hand with no delay as soon as we will”³⁶. Hence he can affirm in his treatise *On the Trinity* that “he who knows righteousness perfectly, and loves it perfectly, is already righteous; even if no necessity exists of working according to it outwardly through the members of the body”³⁷. The will of each one is not only what is most proper to him, but a condition of all true possession. We cannot will something “without the will to will it” (*On the Free Choice of the Will* III 3, 6).

However, an objection can be raised to what has been said so far, since in his treatise *On Grace and Free Choice*, we read that “For He begins by working that we will, which He perfects by working along with our willing”³⁸. Moreover, following the Holy Scriptures, he affirms that “not only that good human wills are in God's power—that is, wills which He makes good from evil, and, once made good by Him, He directs to good acts and to eternal life—but also [human wills] which maintain their worldly condition are in God's power, in such a way that He makes them inclined as He wills when He wills: either to rewards offered to some people, or to penalties inflicted on others, as He judges in His judgment which is completely hidden but undoubtedly completely just”³⁹. It is worth asking ourselves if, with these affirmations, Augustine is not contradicting himself and presenting us again with a pattern of “weak freedom”. But, undoubtedly, as Weismann (1989, p. 112) argues, Augustinian freedom is existential and integral: “For Augustine, freedom is an existential matter: supernatural love gives significance and shapes existence allowing man to be fully free. So Augustine offers to us an integral freedom comprising the aspects of the whole human existence: his origin and final purpose”.

The difference between Stoic determinism and the order of grace lies in a metaphysics of creation. Only he who has created man and is in his inmost heart can move his wills from “within” by making them will his own will, for “The Almighty accomplishes in human hearts even the movement of their will”⁴⁰. God moves the will of man by moving his own will, for that same heart is the place where He dwells. Thus, without falling into contradiction, Augustine affirms that “God hardened [the heart of Pharaoh] by His just judgment, and Pharaoh himself did so by free choice”⁴¹.

5. Conclusions

Consistent with what is stated in the first part of this work, the primary focus of ancient Stoic philosophy is practical reflection, but all second philosophy must be grounded in an ontology. In the case of the Stoics, a rational discourse of moral action is possible because the cosmos is permeated by rationality: all reality is permeated by *logos*. Their concept of nature and causality depends directly on the presence of this formal shaping principle. In their conception of reality, there is no room for the arbitrary, the fully contingent or the random, but neither is there room for the truly novel. This worldview allowed them to establish an ethic of “conformity”, i.e., a man is wise and virtuous whose will is fully identified with the course of events and desires nothing that does not depend on him. However, if reality is determined by a necessary order of causes, it becomes difficult to safeguard the free determination of the rational agent. As highlighted, the strategy adopted—at least by Chrysippus—was to appeal to a “weak” concept of freedom: that which the agent does, assuming his will, is voluntary, even when this is determined by nature itself. The fact that the will of the rational agent is determined by nature is explicitly affirmed by Stoic thinkers. Human nature differs from animal nature not because the voluntary prevails over the natural, but because natural action must be preceded by discernment. This understanding of free action, as we have emphasised, makes it difficult to explain vicious actions. For there to be an action contrary to nature, there must be a sphere in which the subject is situated outside of nature. Such is the case, it seems to us, with culpable actions, i.e., those in which man has acted without deliberation.

Now, if the action of the subject, even when it occurs outside of nature, could not have been different from how it occurred, since all action is virtually contained in the causal order, it seems to us that the strategy chosen by Stoicism to explain moral responsibility does not go beyond a mere psychological description of the possibility of wrongdoing. In our opinion, the incompatibility of Stoic determinism with an ethics of responsibility is best seen in the classic question of the indiscernibles. They understand that, when the same cosmos is necessarily destroyed and regenerated, both the people in it and their circumstances will necessarily be the same, such that there would be no way to distinguish the Socrates who lived in the second cycle from the Socrates who would live in the fifth: he and all his decisions would necessarily be the same. Any novelty in the elements of the cosmos, even in the smallest, would make the generated world completely different, and therefore would occur outside of necessity.

From the perspective presented, it seems to us that the philosophical doctrine of freedom that emerged with Christianity, and specifically with Saint Augustine, represents a true novelty. Free will is such because the will of the subject is not determined by the subject’s nature. For an action to be voluntary, it is not enough for a will to be assumed; this will must have its origin in the will itself. It cannot be explained by anything prior to the subject itself, such as its nature, except by divine motion. God, who is a personal being with intelligence and will, can move wills toward Himself, such that, in this way, man can possess what He wishes to give him. The doctrine of creation, and specifically of the presence of God in the depths of the heart, makes it possible to justify a will that, being moved by another, truly belongs to the subject, since this “other” is not a principle that is in the order of nature, but rather is a transcendent, creative being who is present in the interiority as “someone”, not as “something”. The way God can move wills toward Him is not the order of a determined causality. A sign that man is free is that he can not only will personally that to which God “moves” him, but that he can also will to oppose this motion, giving rise to a disordered will, which is the origin of moral evil. Moreover, ultimately, divine will (a completely free will) is not determined by anything prior to its will. God wills what He wills because He wills, without this perfect self-determination entailing

contingency or arbitrariness. In the universe of the Stoics, whatever is not determined by a cause exists outside the order of rationality and therefore outside of reality itself. It seems to us that the difficulty these thinkers had in proposing a strong concept of freedom capable of safeguarding moral responsibility lies in a metaphysics incapable of accounting for the positively indeterminate, i.e., the truly free and, therefore, novel.

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Notes

- ¹ “Stoicism was the most important and influential development in Hellenistic philosophy. For more than four centuries it claimed the allegiance of a large number of educated men in the Graeco-Roman world, and its impact was not confined to Classical antiquity. Many of the Christian fathers were more deeply affected by Stoicism than they themselves recognized, and from the Renaissance up to modern times the effect of Stoic moral teaching on Western culture has been pervasive” (Long 1986, p. 107).
- ² Max Pohlenz (2022, p. 46) highlights two aspects of Stoicism that make it particularly difficult to interpret. The first is the extra-Hellenic origin of most of its representatives, several of them of Phoenician origin, which implies a much less defined cultural context than that of Athens, where, for example, most members of the Epicurean school came from. The second is the diversity of opinions from their origin, attested by the neoplatonist Numenius of Apamea: τὰ δὲ τῶν Στωϊκῶν ἐστασίασται, ἀρξάμενα ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ μηδέπω τελευτῶντα καὶ νῦν, “There have, on the other hand, been factions among the Stoics which started with their founders and continue today” (Eusebius of Caesarea 1903, *Evangelical preparation* XIV 5, 4 = SVF II, 20, trans. by George Boys-Stones (2018); hereinafter SVF is an abbreviation for Arnim, Hans Friedrich August von, ed. 1903 (Arnim 1903). *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. Stuttgart: Teubner. Reprint: München, Leipzig: K.G. Sauri, 2004).
- ³ “. . .the subject-matter of logic, physics and ethics is one thing, the rational universe, considered from three different but mutually consistent points of view” (Long 1986, p. 119).
- ⁴ Οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὸν ὅλον κόσμον, ζῶον ὄντα καὶ ἔμψυχον καὶ λογικόν, ἔχειν ἡγεμονικὸν μὲν τὸν αἰθέρα, καθά φησιν Ἀντίπατρος ὁ Τύριος ἐν τῷ ὀγδόῳ Περὶ κόσμου. Χρύσιππος δ’ ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ προνοίας καὶ Ποσειδώνιος ἐν τῷ Περὶ θεῶν τὸν οὐρανὸν φασὶ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν τοῦ κόσμου, Κλεάνθης δὲ τὸν ἥλιον. ὁ μὲντοι Χρύσιππος διαφορώτερον πάλιν τὸ καθαρώτατον τοῦ αἰθέρος ἐν ταύτῳ, ὃ καὶ πρῶτον θεὸν λέγουσιν αἰσθητικῶς ὥσπερ (Diogenes Laertius 2013, *Lives of eminent philosophers*, VII 139–140, ed. by Tiziano Dorandi), “In this way too the whole cosmos, which is an animate and rational animal, also has a command faculty, which is the aether, according to Antipater of Tyre in *On the Cosmos* Book 8; but Chrysippus in *On Providence* Book 1 and Posidonius in *On Gods* say heaven is the command faculty of the cosmos, and Cleanthes says it is the sun. Yet Chrysippus in the same work again says rather differently that it is the purest part of the aether, which they say is also the first god and, just as it permeates the things in the air, so it does in a sensory way all the animals and plants, and the earth itself as a state.” (Trans. by White 2021)
- ⁵ Hereinafter LS is an abbreviation for (Long and Sedley 1987). *The Hellenistic Philosophers, volume I, translations of the principal sources with philosophical commentary*. Cambridge: CUP.
- ⁶ Quippe providentiam dei fore voluntatem. Voluntatem porro eius seriem esse causarum. Et ex eo quidem, quia voluntas, providentia est, porro quia eadem series causarum est, fatum cognominatam (SVF II, 933).
- ⁷ καὶ πάλιν ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ τὸν κόσμον ἀποκαθίστασθαι, καὶ τῶν ἀστέρων ὁμοίως πάλιν φερομένων ἕκαστον <τῶν> ἐν τῇ προτέρᾳ περιόδῳ γενομένων ἀπαραλλάκτως ἀποτελεῖσθαι (Nemesius, *On the nature of man* XXXVIII 111 = LS 52 C = SVF II, 625).
- ⁸ οὐδὲν γὰρ ξένον ἔσεσθαι παρὰ τὰ γενόμενα πρότερον (Nemesius, *On the nature of man* XXXVIII 112 = LS 52 C = SVF II, 625)
- ⁹ ‘οὐθὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ἄλλως τῶν κατὰ μέρος γενέσθαι οὐδὲ τοῦλάχιστον ἢ κατὰ τὴν κοινὴν φύσιν καὶ κατὰ τὸν ἐκείνης λόγον’ (Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1050A = SVF II, 937).

- 10 εἰ μὴ πάντα τὰ ὄντα τε καὶ γινόμενα ἔχου τινὰ αἷτια προγεγονότα, οἷς ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔπεται (Alexander of Aphrodisias 1983, *On fate* 192, 13 = LS 55 N = SVF II, 945).
- 11 τὴν δ' εἰμαρμένην αἰτίαν ἀνίκητον καὶ ἀκόλυτον καὶ ἄτρεπτον ἀποφαίνων αὐτὸς Ἀτροπον καλεῖ καὶ Ἀδράστειαν καὶ Ἀνάγκην καὶ Πειρωμένην ὡς πέρας ἔπασιν ἐπιτιθεῖσιν (Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1056C = LS 55 R = SVF II, 997).
- 12 καὶ μήτε οὕτως τινὸς ἐν αὐτῷ γινόμενου, ὡς μὴ πάντως ἐπακολουθεῖν αὐτῷ καὶ συνῆφθαι ὡς αἰτίῳ ἑτερόν τι, μήτ' αὖ τῶν ἐπιγινόμενων τινὸς ἀπολελύσθαι δυναμένου τῶν προγεγονότων, ὡς μὴ τινι ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖν ὥσπερ συνδεόμενον, ἀλλὰ παντὶ τε τῷ γενομένῳ ἑτερόν τι ἐπακολουθεῖν, ἡρημένον <ἐξ> αὐτοῦ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ὡς αἰτίου (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On fate* 192, 4 = LS 55 N = SVF II, 945).
- 13 “Chrysippus was concerned to support not free will but moral responsibility. In a sense man’s actions are in his power, since he can do them, but it is not in his power not to do them. Yet he is to be praised for acting rightly and blamed if he acts wrongly. This is a position that many people find it impossible to accept, feeling that if a man’s character and actions are finally determined by Fate, he cannot be held responsible and cannot be blamed for them. Yet although there were Greeks who took this view of the problem, it was by no means universally held. The chorus in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* speaks of Zeus ‘responsible for all things, worker of all things’ and ask ‘what of these happenings was not ordained by the gods?’ (1485–8), but a few lines later demand of Clytaemnestra ‘who will testify that you are not responsible for this murder?’ A similar attitude was required of the Stoic. The fact that he could not help acting as he did in no way diminished the fact it was he who so acted.” (Sandbach 2001, p. 104).
- 14 Appellatur enim quidam a philosophis ἀργὸς λόγος, cui si pareamus nihil omnino agamus in vita” (Cicero, *On fate* 28 = LS 55 S), “the so called ‘Lazy Argument’ (the ἀργὸς λόγος, as the philosophers entitle it). If we gave in to it, we would do nothing whatever in life”. John M. Rist suggests that Cicero is a hostile critic of the Stoics and does not do justice to Chrysippus’ arguments: “It might be supposed that Cicero’s habit of using the phrase ‘necessity of fate’ and consequent suggestion that fated events are necessary and therefore determined in such a way as to leave nothing ‘in our power’ is a piece of deliberate or careless confusion of the doctrine of Chrysippus about the need to distinguish ‘fate’ from ‘necessity’ (Rist 1977, p. 125)
- 15 τόδε τι γενήσεσθαι νομίζοι, εἴτε ποιοίημεν ἡμεῖς περὶ αὐτὸ καὶ σπουδάζοιμεν εἴτε καὶ μὴ, πῶς οὐκ ἂν τις ἐθέλῃσειε τὸ ῥῆον αἰρεῖσθαι, παρεῖς ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀμελῶν, ὡς ἐξ εἰμαρμένης καὶ ἀνάγκης γενησομένου τοῦ πραχθήσομένου; ὅθεν καὶ λεγόντων ἔστιν ἀκοῦσαι τῶν πολλῶν ὅτι ἄρα πραχθήσεται τοῦτο, εἴ γε εἴμαρται μοι, καὶ τί με χρὴ παρέχειν ἑμαυτῷ πράγματα; (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Evangelical preparation* VI 6, 9–10, trans. by Edwin Hamilton Gifford).
- 16 “Aristotle is probably the one who formulated, for the first time in a philosophical context, the objection that fatalism encourages inaction” (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 700). When Aristotle in *On interpretation* deals with the question of contingent futures—with the famous example of the naval battle—he argues the absurdity of the determinist position. The absurdity lies in the fact that it would nullify the meaning of human deliberation: “These awkward results and others of the same kind follow, if it is an irrefragable law that of every pair of contradictory propositions, whether they have regard to universals and are stated as universally applicable, or whether they have regard to individuals, one must be true and the other false, and that there are no real alternatives, but that all that is or takes place is the outcome of necessity. There would be no need to deliberate or to take trouble, on the supposition that if we should adopt a certain course, a certain result would follow, while, if we did not, the result would not follow” (Aristotle 1928. *On interpretation* IX, 18b25–33, trans. by E. M. Edghill). John M. Rist (1977, p.112) attaches so much importance to this passage from Aristotle that he goes so far as to argue that all the arguments of Chrysippus and other Stoics about human freedom in conjunction with determinism are to be understood only as a certain response to what they thought Aristotle had put forward there.
- 17 πολλὰ γὰρ μὴ δύνασθαι γενέσθαι χωρὶς τοῦ καὶ ἡμᾶς βούλεσθαι καὶ ἐκτενεστάτην γε περὶ αὐτὰ προθυμίαν τε καὶ σπουδὴν εἰσφέρεισθαι, ἐπειδὴ μετὰ τούτου, φησὶν, αὐτὰ γενέσθαι καθεῖμαρτο (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Evangelical preparation* VI 8, 29 = SVF II 998, trans. by Edwin Hamilton Gifford).
- 18 “Fate is to be found in the relation of a principal cause to its substratum (e.g., the power of a plant to bear certain kind of fruit to the plant). In the case of a quality such as intelligence, however, although the intelligence exists in the substratum ‘man’ according to fate, the exercise of intelligence is within the power of the man himself. Fate is also found in the network of initiating causes, external to the principal cause, and either contemporary with it or prior to it, which might prevent it from being realized. These are the conditions in which the object is found, and over which the object has no control. Since every actual event has an initiating cause, every actual event is according to fate.” (Reesor 1965, p. 289).
- 19 ἀναίρουσιν γὰρ τὸ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν τὸν ἄνθρωπον τῆς αἰρέσεώς τε καὶ πράξεως τῶν ἀντικειμένων λέγουσιν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν εἶναι τὸ γινόμενον καὶ δι’ ἡμῶν (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On fate* 181, 13= LS 62 G = SVF II, 979).
- 20 εἰ δὲ καὶ ἡ ὁρμὴ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐπακολουθεῖ, ποῦ λοιπὸν τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν; ἐλεύθερον γὰρ εἶναι δεῖ τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν· ἦν δ’ ἂν ἐλεύθερον, εἰ τῶν αὐτῶν περιεστηκότων ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἦν τὸ ποτε μὲν ὁρμαῖν, ποτε δὲ μὴ ὁρμαῖν. εἰ δὲ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐπακολουθεῖ καὶ τὸ ὁρμαῖν, δῆλον ὡς καθ’ εἰμαρμένην καὶ τὰ τῆς ὁρμῆς γενήσεται, εἰ καὶ ὑφ’ ἡμῶν γίνεται καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν καὶ ὁρμὴν καὶ κρίσιν (Nemesius, *On the nature of man* XXXV 105–106, trans. by R. W. Sharples and P. J. van der Eijk).
- 21 εἰ γὰρ τῶν αὐτῶν αἰτίων περιεστηκότων, ὥς φασιν αὐτοί, πᾶσα ἀνάγκη τὰ αὐτὰ γίνεσθαι, καὶ οὐχ οἶδόν τε ποτε μὲν οὕτω, ποτε δὲ ἄλλως γενέσθαι διὰ τὸ ἐξ αἰῶνος οὕτως ἀποκεκληρῶσθαι ταῦτα, ἀνάγκη καὶ τὴν ὁρμὴν τὴν τοῦ ζώου πάντη καὶ

πάντως τῶν αὐτῶν αἰτίων περιεστηκότων οὕτω γενέσθαι (Nemesius, *On the nature of man* XXXV 105 = SVF 991, trans. by R. W. Sharples and P. J. van der Eijk).

22 τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῖς λογικοῖς κατὰ τελειοτέραν προστασίαν δεδομένου, τὸ κατὰ λόγον ζῆν ὁρθῶς γίνεσθαι <τού>τοις κατὰ φύσιν· τεχνίτης γὰρ οὗτος ἐπιγίνεται τῆς ὁρμῆς. (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of eminent philosophers*, VII 86, ed. by Tiziano Dorandi, trans. by Stephen White) “The animal genus is defined by the possession of impulse and assent (. . .). To indicate what is peculiar to the human species within the animal genus, the theory resorts to the notion of κρίσις, which refers to the specifically human capacity to rest our practical decisions, or impulses, on a prior examination of the desirability of a given action (. . .) this critical examination of presentations prior to action is sufficient to be morally responsible for the action once it is performed (. . .) we are worthy of praise or censure for those actions we choose to perform on the basis of a prior examination of presentations, understood as that which distinguishes us from other animals” (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 713).

23 ὁμολογεῖται δὴ πρὸς ἀπάντων τὸ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτο παρὰ τῆς φύσεως ἔχειν πλεον τὸ μὴ ὁμοίως ἐκείνοις ταῖς φαντασίαις ἔπεσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἔχειν παρ’ αὐτῆς κριτὴν τῶν προσπιπτουσῶν φαντασιῶν περὶ τινων ὡς αἰρετῶν τὸν λόγον (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On fate* 178, 17, trans. by R. W. Sharples).

24 Τὸ μέντοι λογικὸν ζῶον καὶ λόγον ἔχει πρὸς τῇ φανταστικῇ φύσει, τὸν κρίνοντα τὰς φαντασίας καὶ τινὰς μὲν ἀποδοκιμάζοντα, τινὰς δὲ παραδεχόμενον, ἵνα ἄγεται τὸ ζῶον κατ’ αὐτάς (Origenes, *On principles* III 1, 2–3 = LS 53A = SVF II, 988)

25 πέφυκεν δὲ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ὥσπερ τῷ ἀληθεῖ ἐπινεύειν, πρὸς τὸ ψεῦδος ἀνανεύειν, πρὸς τὸ ἄδηλον ἐπέχειν, οὕτως πρὸς μὲν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὁρεκτικῶς κινεῖσθαι, πρὸς δὲ τὸ κακὸν ἐκκλιτικῶς, πρὸς δὲ τὸ μήτε κακὸν μήτ’ ἀγαθὸν οὐδετέρως (Epictetus, *Discourses* III 3, 2 = LS 60F)

26 ‘ἐκδεξαί με μικρόν, φαντασία· ἄφες ἴδω τίς εἴ καὶ περὶ τίνος, ἄφες σε δοκιμάσω’ (Epictetus, *Discourses* II 18, 23, trans. by George Long).

27 δι’ ὃ καὶ τὸ προπίπτειν πρὸ καταλήψεως <καὶ> συγκατατίθεσθαι κατὰ τὸν προπετῆ φαῦλον εἶναι καὶ μὴ πίπτειν εἰς τὸν εὐφυῆ καὶ τέλειον ἄνδρα καὶ σπουδαῖον. (Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II 7, 111 = LS 41 G = SVF III, 548)

28 ‘καὶ τίς ὑμᾶς ἀναγκάσαι δύναται συγκαταθέσθαι τῷ ψευδεῖ φαινομένῳ; ‘οὐδεῖς.’ ‘τίς δὲ μὴ συγκαταθέσθαι τῷ φαινομένῳ ἀληθεῖ; ‘οὐδεῖς.’ ‘ἐνθάδ’ οὖν ὁρᾶτε, ὅτι ἔστι τι ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλεύθερον φύσει. ὁρέγεσθαι δ’ ἢ ἐκκλίνειν ἢ ὁρμᾶν ἢ ἀφορμᾶν ἢ παρασκευάζεσθαι ἢ προτίθεσθαι τίς ὑμῶν δύναται μὴ λαβὼν φαντασίαν λυσιτελοῦς ἢ μὴ καθήκοντος; ‘οὐδεῖς.’ ‘ἔχετε οὖν καὶ ἐν τούτοις ἀκώλυτον καὶ ἐλεύθερον. (Epictetus, *Discourses* III 22, 42–43, trans. by George Long). An expert on Stoic philosophy like Boeri states precisely that assent depends on the subject: “Assentment can be understood as the mental act by which the subject considers the presentation or proposition to be true” (Boeri and Salles 2014, p. 125).

29 Nos adversus istos sacrilegos ausus atque impios et Deum dicimus omnia scire antequam fiant, et voluntate nos facere, quidquid a nobis non nisi volentibus fieri sentimus et novimus. Omnia vero fato fieri non dicimus, immo nulla fieri fato dicimus (*The city of God* V 9, 3, trans. by Marcus Dods).

30 Multa enim facimus, quae si nollemus, non utique faceremus. Quo primitus pertinet ipsum velle; nam si volumus, est, si nolumus, non est; non enim vellemus, si nollemus (*The city of God* V 10, 1, trans. by Marcus Dods).

31 Sunt igitur nostrae voluntates et ipsae faciunt, quidquid volendo facimus, quod non fieret, si nollemus (*The city of God* V 10, 1, trans. by Marcus Dods).

32 Voluntas igitur nostra nec voluntas esset, nisi esset in nostra potestate. Porro, quia est in potestate, libera est nobis. Non enim est nobis liberum, quod in potestate non habemus, aut potest non esse quod habemus (*On the Free Choice of the Will* III 3, 8, trans. by Peter King).

33 Si voluntas ipsa deest nobis, non utique volumus (*On the Free Choice of the Will* III 3, 8, trans. by Peter King).

34 Si ita data est voluntas libera, ut naturalem habeat istum motum, iam necessitate ad haec convertitur; neque ulla culpa deprehendi potest, ubi natura necessitasque dominatur. Nullo modo autem dubitare debuisti non esse ita datam, quando istum motum culpabilem esse non dubitas (*On the Free Choice of the Will* III 1, 1, trans. by Peter King).

35 Ev.—Video, et quodammodo tango, et teneo vera esse quae dicis: non enim quidquam tam firme atque intime sentio, quam me habere voluntatem, eaque me moveri ad aliquid fruendum; quid autem meum dicam, prorsus non invenio, si voluntas qua volo et nolo non est mea: quapropter cui tribuendum est, si quid per illam male facio, nisi mihi? Cum enim bonus Deus me fecerit, nec bene aliquid faciam nisi per voluntatem, ad hoc potius datam esse a bono Deo, satis apparet (*On the Free Choice of the Will* III 1, 3, trans. by Peter King).

36 nihil tam in nostra potestate, quam ipsa voluntas est. Ea enim prorsus nullo intervallo, mox ut volumus praesto est (*On the Free Choice of the Will* III 3, 7, trans. by Peter King).

37 qui enim, verbi gratia, perfecte novit, perfecteque amat iustitiam, iam iustus est, etiamsi nulla exsistat secundum eam forinsecus per membra corporis operandi necessitas (*On the Trinity*, IX 9, 14, trans. By Marcus Dods).

38 . . . quoniam ipse ut velimus operatur incipiens, qui volentibus cooperatur perficiens (*On grace and free choice* XVII 33, trans. by Peter King)

- 39 ... non solum bonas hominum voluntates quas ipse facit ex malis, et a se factas bonas in actus bonos et in aeternam dirigit vitam, verum etiam illas quae conservant saeculi creaturam, ita esse in Dei potestate, ut eas quo voluerit, quando voluerit, faciat inclinari, vel ad beneficia quibusdam praestanda, vel ad poenas quibusdam ingerendas, sicut ipse iudicat, occultissimo quidem iudicio, sed sine ulla dubitatione iustissimo (*On grace and free choice* XX 41, trans. by Peter King).
- 40 agit enim Omnipotens in cordibus hominum etiam motum voluntatis eorum (*On grace and free choice* XXI 42, trans. by Peter King).
- 41 ... ac per hoc et Deus induravit per iustum iudicium, et ipse Pharaon per liberum arbitrium (*On grace and free choice* XXIII 45, trans. by Peter King).

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Article

Fate or Free Will? The Reception of Greek Religion in Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale* (1934)

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Abstract: In the present article we propose to analyse the link between Greek religion and philosophical concepts of the human condition as a problem of reconciling determinism and at the same time free will, with its existential and moral implications. This issue has remained a matter of revision and discussion throughout the ages and latitudes within philosophy, but also in the literature, where through myths, these questions reappear, although in very different historical and religious contexts. We propose to approach these themes through the myth of Oedipus, immortalised by Sophocles in his tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, which Jean Cocteau, in the tragic interwar period, rereads and resemanticises, but without losing the essential question of whether there is an insurmountable destiny that imposes itself on free will.

Keywords: Cocteau; Sophocles; Oedipus; fate; free will; Greek religion

1. Introduction

Within Western culture, there are certain recurring themes that always resurface and are revisited in the humanities and the arts, especially in philosophy and literature, which engage in dialogue with each other and with religion. In this sense, all of them address, in a more or less direct way, the theme of the human condition, in its natural and supernatural dimensions. In this sense, it is precisely Greek mythology that is the place of convergence par excellence for these three fields, where within a literary framework, but from a religious perspective, the deepest and most unfathomable themes of human existence are addressed, all of which become the subject of philosophical inquiry.

Myths are often associated with religious rituals and are considered to contain, implicitly or allegorically, a deeper truth about nature, human psychology, or the divine. This truth is transmitted in a coded language that needs to be deciphered, like allegories (Konstan 2021, p. 35). Myths tell sacred stories, which is equivalent to revealing a mystery and giving literary form to the irruptions of the sacred into the world since its creation (Eliade 1957, pp. 84–85).

And it is precisely the Greek tragedies, which are the dramatisation of myths, that always offer us reflection and analysis of a theme that is central to Greek religion and, in general, to Western culture: fate. From a Christian perspective, it is called providence, but both terms have in common the idea of a supernatural entity that guides and powerfully influences the lives of men. Particularly in view of the perception of evil in the world, the question arises as to what extent human freedom is independent of supernatural forces and whether man can change his destiny of his own free will or whether he can only accept it. This question also raises the issue of the evil that is suffered and of personal moral responsibility in relation to numerous immanent and transcendent issues. Many of

these were not initially formulated theoretically, but rather symbolically or allegorically, as Mircea Eliade asserts:

Obviously, the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world were not always formulated in theoretical language; but the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different planes and through the means proper to them, a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things, a system that can be regarded as constituting a metaphysics. (Eliade 1959, p. 3)

In Greek religion, also disseminated through tragedies, heroes are subjected to vicissitudes and suffering derived from an apparent determinism, while the inability of man to escape misfortune is emphasised, questioning the effectiveness of free will. However, Aeschylus' conservative approach is not the same as Sophocles' more moderate one or Euripides' questioning religiosity.

On the other hand, tragedies, with their moralising function, insist on showing that passion ungoverned by reason is devastating for those who suffer it and for society, which seems to indicate the existence and power of free will. In this sense, Kitto rightly asserts that the essence of classical poetry is extremely serious, since its salient quality is a sense of moral responsibility (Kitto 1961, p. 223). Likewise, Aristotle, in his *Poetics* (1453b), emphasises the fundamental importance of tragedies producing fear and commiseration in the audience,¹ that is, fear of suffering the punishment of the gods because of a *hamartia*, or personal fault, as the audience contemplates it on stage. Tragedies have a primary religious function in that they warn of the dangers of acting against the laws and designs of the gods.

On a supernatural level, tragedies also deal with man's relationship with the divine, prophecy and divine foreknowledge, destiny, and hereditary punishment. Greek tragedies are, in essence, literary expressions of Greek religion, which has profound psychological, historical, linguistic, artistic, and sociological dimensions, which often find resonance in modern interpretations (Eliade and Couliano 2023, p. 175), giving Greek religion and its literary manifestations an enduring relevance.

Therefore, the themes dealt with in the tragedies continue to be very present in contemporary philosophies of religion and literature, making it particularly useful to, on the one hand, explore how Sophocles addresses these issues in his *Oedipus Rex*, and to, on the other hand, with a view of highlighting the continuity and relevance of these issues throughout the history of thought, propose to bring into dialogue Jean Cocteau's play *La machine infernale* (1934)—a modern version of the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*—with Greek religion and its philosophical components, mainly in relation to the exploration of the conflict between determinism and free will.

2. Greek Religion

Greek religion differed markedly from the Judeo-Christian conception, which is predominant in the Western world, so much so that there were those who rejected it as such, preferring to consider it a mere cult, that is, a set of ritual rules, and its myths as poetic fables (Vernant 1990, p. 8). This perspective constitutes a reductionist view of Greek religion, disqualifying it and separating it from the truly religious sphere it possessed. Furthermore, there are numerous analogies between Judeo-Christian monotheism and Greek religion, as concepts, such as fear of God, purity, and defilement, sacrifice, ceremonies in honour of the deity, and the direct influence of the divine on human life, underlie both.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference is the lack of a revelation as the basis for their beliefs. On the contrary, Greek religion is based on the customs or *nomoi* of ancestors that were inherited as a tradition, which legitimises them because they have always been practised (Vernant 1990, p. 12).

The conception of the gods is also very different, in that the Greek gods are also in the world, come from it, and did not create the world *ex nihilo*. The Olympian gods came into the world when it was already complete, thanks to the primitive power of Gaia ('the earth') and Chaos ('the dark abyss') (Kitto 2007, p. 228). The divine and the earthly are closely linked, with the divine having earthly elements and the earthly having divine elements. This is why Greek religion does not separate the natural realm from the supernatural as two opposing realms, but rather they remain linked. The same occurs with the religious and the social. Religion impregnates all areas of human life, the family, the professional, and the political—everything merges into the same melting pot. In fact, with regard to archaic and classical Greece, one speaks of a "religion civique" (Vernant 1990, p. 12), precisely because of how integrated it is in all social spheres, which are permeated at all levels by the religious sphere. The consequence of this type of religion is that the individual as such does not occupy a central place. When practising worship, they do not participate as individual beings, but rather fulfil a role assigned to them by society: king, magistrate, citizen, member of a lineage, etc. Greek religion legitimises a collective order, but believers do not build a personal relationship with the gods, as these manifest themselves more as forces than as persons (Vernant 1990, p. 13) and worship is based on recognising their immense superiority over men. The lineage of the gods does not represent the absolute, the infinite, as in monotheistic religions, but rather the full possession of the earthly values that make life valuable: beauty, strength, youth, wisdom, etc.

We stated above that the entire social world is impregnated by religion, including the political sphere. Every political position has a sacred character, and religious positions have political dependencies. This sphere will prevail in the myth of Oedipus, which we will discuss here.

In summary, the rules of collective life and the value system are underpinned by religious tradition, but as there is no fixed creed, variations can be observed, due to the existence of many versions and variants of the same thing. Each believer accepts a repertoire of stories that they have known since childhood, which offers a great deal of room for interpretation due to the different variants that circulate. Even the Greeks always reserved a space for a personal and sometimes critical view of their religion.

3. The Place of Myth in Greek Religion: Between Literature and Religion

All this traditional baggage, which made up the content of Greek religion, was transmitted through narrations about the gods, their lineages, their conflicts, and their adventures via oral tradition, initially within the family, where it was mainly women who recounted these *mythoi*. Secondly, it was transmitted through the tragic poets, heirs to the Dionysian religious festivals. In fact, the theatrical genre has its roots in the religious cult of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, whose life was represented in scenes performed during the festivals in his honour. Little by little, other mythological content, which was also represented in the Dionysian festivals, was incorporated into the performances. Gradually, these performances became independent of the context of the Dionysian festivals, becoming social institutions with a very marked didactic and religious meaning. Tragic poets constructed their dramas based on their own struggles with the religious, philosophical, and moral problems of their time, using myth as a vehicle. They always conveyed a clear moral message, such as the danger of disobeying divine laws, of being carried away by *hybris* or irrational passions, both for the individual and for society as a whole.

Written literary activity, based on oral tradition, had a very important social and spiritual function: it preserved social memory and transmitted knowledge. Literary activity in classical Greece was not intended to entertain the elites or the people, but was a central institution in Greek life, a means of transmitting Greek religiosity and social and family

order; in short, it transmitted Hellenic culture and identity. Vernant asserts that without these epic, lyrical, and dramatic works, one could speak of Greek cults but not of a Greek religion (Vernant 1990, p. 22). These works served as a social mirror, teaching people about their dependence on the divine, the difference that separated them, and what united them as a Hellenic community. The poets presented an encyclopaedia of religious knowledge that every Greek should know.

During the Renaissance and in the 19th century, these literary works were considered religious documents. From the mid-20th century onwards, however, some historians began to consider religion as the organisation of worship, the calendar of sacred festivals, and the specific liturgies of each god (Vernant 1990, p. 25). The rejection of mythology as a reflection of religion today is based on an anti-intellectual prejudice against Greek religion.

The presence of the divine in Greek religion is perceived with an emotional reaction, the *thambos*, a reverent fear of the divine. In addition to this fear, religion manifests itself as a broad, complex, and coherent symbolic edifice that grants space to thought, feeling, and worship at all levels and in all aspects. Within this framework, myth fulfils a function similar to that of ritual practices and configurations of the divine: myth, ritual, and plastic representation are the three forms of expression in which the Greek religious experience manifests itself verbally, gesturally, and graphically, each with its own language and specific needs (Vernant 1990, p. 29).

The literary adaptation of myths in Greek Antiquity could not be completely free, as writers knew that they were part of a tradition that they had to respect, beyond their personal vision. As Aristotle states in his *Poetics* (1453b7-25), they could do so with considerable creative freedom, but without undoing traditional plots or arguments.² The public expected to see their religious tradition represented.

The educational value of myth is greater than that of ritual, since myth is even more explicit, carrying knowledge within itself, which philosophy draws upon, absorbs, and translates using vocabulary and concepts that are unrelated to the world of the gods.

4. Greek Religion in Sophocles' *Oedipus*

Let us now see how Sophocles' *Oedipus* reflects all these characteristics of Greek religion that we have just described in general terms in Section 2. In Sophocles' *Oedipus*, which begins in medias res, plague and infertility are rampant, flora and fauna are affected, people are dying, and everyone is aware that these calamities are divine punishment.

The civil and political authority, King Oedipus, who defeated the sphinx in the past, is seen by the priestly power as the saviour of the city. As a first measure, Creon, Oedipus' brother-in-law, has been sent to the Oracle of Delphi, the centre of the world (Eliade and Couliano 2023, p. 183), to find out how to satisfy the god Apollo, who is scourging the city. As we can see, in the tragedy, the entire society is marked by the intervention of the gods in their lives, and it is only through them that health and social balance can be restored.

Creon is forcefully shown that the cause of the evils is moral in nature, that is, someone in the kingdom bears a stain, an impurity, for having murdered the former king and predecessor of Oedipus, Laius. This unexpiated murder affects the whole of society until justice is achieved and the murderer is banished from the kingdom. Oedipus, unaware that he is the murderer, curses the murderer and decrees his banishment, thus creating intense dramatic irony, as the audience knows what the hero does not and the tragic consequences that this will bring. In Sophocles' tragedies, "it is inappropriate thinking on the part of leaders which generates communal miasma" (Petrovic and Petrovic 2016, p. 176).

Teiresias, the kingdom's soothsayer, does not want to harm Oedipus, but after Oedipus' insistence, he ends up confessing what he knows about the incest and death of Laius and what awaits Oedipus for being the "impure scourge of that land". Oedipus recalls that a

drunkard revealed to him that he was not the son of the kings of Corinth and that is why he went to the oracle. Instead of answering him, the oracle prophesies incest and patricide, so Oedipus flees, trying to overcome the divine prophecies, that is, his *fate*. Already in the midst of the plague, after years of marriage and reign, Tiresias prophesies his curses and the horrific fate that awaits him. Oedipus, talking to Creon, realises that he killed Laius, and so he claims that it was his destiny to be united with his mother. The recognition and change in fortune of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* represent not only Oedipus' discovery of his own and his parents' tragic ignorance, but also the recognition of the prescience and the mysterious agency of Apollo (Halliwell 1998, p. 214).

The chorus, for its part, constantly speaks of piety towards the gods, also fulfilling a moralising function and expressing great commiseration for Oedipus' misfortune. In Cocteau's work, the chorus is replaced by a voice.

Oedipus finally learns that Jocasta gave him up to death because of the oracle and fully acknowledges his misfortune. Jocasta immediately commits suicide. Upon seeing her, Oedipus blinds himself because he does not want to see reality anymore and thus attempts to purge his mistakes and the misfortunes he has caused.

The royal family of Thebes makes the mistake of believing that they can defeat the will of the gods through personal strategies: Oedipus' parents, in order to escape the prophecy that their son would kill his father, try to kill him. Oedipus himself, to escape the prophecy of patricide and incest, flees Corinth, confirming the famous statement that we often find our destiny on the paths we choose to avoid it. After divine punishment, order is finally restored through the imposition of the will of the gods.

Determinism, destiny, and a certain moral innocence are apparent at first glance in the work in Oedipus, who is a victim of divine plans and whose desire to be virtuous and avoid evil is thwarted by his relentless fate.

The task of transmitting religiosity, fear of the gods, and belief in the inexorability of their prophecies is fulfilled in *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus' *hamartia*³ that is, his "fault", "crime", "sin", or even "mental error", a miscalculation that can be as serious and culpable as a moral error (Kitto 2007, p. 196), lies in believing that he can evade the oracle's designs by fleeing his city. However, when we mention the misfortunes that Oedipus has caused, we are faced with a dilemma: has Oedipus caused the misfortunes attributed to him?

As we mentioned, at first glance, Oedipus is a work where determinism—caused by fate, by divine judgments about the lives of men—permeates and imposes itself on everything. However, numerous scholars of Greek literature and culture do not see it quite so categorically.

Albin Lesky acknowledges the influence of supernatural powers on decisions, but attempts to rescue the autonomy of human beings, who form part of the decision through their voluntary initiative. This is the case with the theory of double motivation proposed by Lesky (1961). A higher need is imposed on the tragic hero, which drives him, but through his own character, he appropriates this need to the point of passionately desiring it. Thus, within this necessary decision, a margin of free will is introduced, without which the hero could not be held responsible. This theory would explain why tragic heroes are punished, because their free will participated in their decision, rather than being mere puppets of fate.

The same view is held in *Le génie grec dans la religion*, where religious solidarity within the family and the fatal inheritance of crime, while not expressly denied, are no longer accepted as the sole cause of misfortune, unlike in the work of Aeschylus. In Sophocles' work, only the gods and men remain in their absolute individuality. In no other tragic writer are personalities better drawn than in Sophocles. However, man is a plaything in the hands of the gods, and the poet professes both great faith and agnosticism in the face of a providence that sacrifices the individual to unintelligible designs (Gernet and Boulanger

1970, p. 312). In Sophocles, the hero—raised to divine dignity because of a free choice—is condemned to terrible tribulations, and in the end, man is great in his failure because, although evil came from his mistake, a voluntary acceptance of punishment translates into moral greatness and piety. Not only is he a hero for accepting his punishment, but “Oedipus is the hero because he wants to know the truth. His heroism is expressed not as his killing of Creon but by his insistence on carrying on the investigation” (Koper 2006, p. 95).

Likewise, for Kitto, the play *Oedipus Rex* should not be interpreted as a sombre determinism, nor should its characters be seen as puppets of higher powers; they act of their own accord. Sophocles is not trying to make us feel that an inexorable destiny or a malignant god is guiding the events. Kitto mentions specific actions carried out by Oedipus and other characters that are characteristic of their nature, such as defeating the sphinx through his intelligence, marrying the queen, killing his father because of his bad character, the shepherds deciding to come and tell him that he is now king of Corinth, or Jocasta committing suicide. These are natural consequences of people’s character and decisions, not divine actions. What Sophocles wants to show is that the human condition involves suffering and that is why not only Oedipus suffers, but everyone around him. Oedipus suffers more to a degree, but everyone suffers (Kitto 1961, pp. 137–38).

On the other hand, there are authors, such as Bruno Snell, who recognise that, although there is deliberation within these tragic characters, in the end it is also *Ananké* or *Μοῖρα*, that is, the expression of the will of the gods (Kitto 2007, p. 226), which translates into the fate of men, that is at work in their decision. The tragic man does not choose between two options, but rather “realises” that there is only one path. He does not decide according to his free will, but rather through the recognition of a religious necessity, from which the character cannot escape, and is therefore in himself a person forced to make that “decision”. There is a will, but not in the Thomistic sense, rather linked to a reverential fear of the divine and sacred powers that influence him internally. In short, there would be a decision *sans choix*, a responsibility independent of intentions (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 2001, pp. 46–48).

As we can see, critics have attempted to explain or “resolve” this conflict, which arises from the dynamics of free will and belief in fate. We consider it quite complex and risky to define this issue, given that there is a certain ambiguity in the treatment of this theme in tragedies. If we reflect, for example, on hereditary family curses, such as that of the Labdacids—the family to which Oedipus belongs—we can find examples that demonstrate that the behaviour of their descendants can be guided by free will, despite the curses. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Oedipus’ two daughters, Antigone and Ismene, are faced with a moral dilemma: to bury their brother Polynices—and thus fulfil their religious duties of piety—or to obey the human laws of their other brother and king, Eteocles, who has forbidden it. Antigone decides to be faithful to the will of the gods, which will cost her her life, while Ismene, moved by fear of death, obeys her brother Eteocles and thus preserves her life. This reverential fear of the divine, which Vernant presents as invincible, is not so in the case of Ismene.

5. Myths of Greek Religion in the Interwar Period

The 20th century saw a resurgence and widespread dissemination of literary works based on myths, given that these are open to multiple interpretations, including socio-political readings. Cocteau stands between tradition and modernity. In the 1930s, a new Classicism emerged in France alongside Boulevard theatre. Jean Cocteau emerged in this context, first with *Antigone* (1922) and *Oedipus Rex* (1927) and later with *La machine infernale*

(1934). These are works of rather moderate experimentation that offer us a new perspective on ancient myths (Grimm and Hartwig 2014, p. 333).

Myths are timeless stories that are retold and can be shaped to reveal internal tensions within a culture or to promote a particular vision (Konstan 2021, p. 49). For example, the fratricidal conflict in Sophocles' *Antigone* became a symbol of the confrontation between European nations in the First World War. As early as 1916, the pacifist article "À l'Antigone éternelle" (1916) was published, in which Romain Rolland used the figure of Antigone to appeal to European women, calling on them to exercise female resistance in pursuit of peace, as images of humanity and hope (Hertrampf 2024, p. 26). Marguerite Yourcenar also published her "Antigone ou le choix" in 1917, in which she portrayed Antigone as a Christian martyr. In the midst of the Second World War, Jean Anouilh (1942) published his own version of Sophocles' classic. Sartre, Giraudoux, and Gide, among others, joined the ranks of authors who rewrote classical myths, breathing new life into the most emblematic characters of tragedies: Antigone, Oedipus, and Electra, among others.

Now, we might ask ourselves why there was this 'literary boom' of myths. There are several hypotheses, which Niyonzima (2024, p. 56) summarises as follows: writers rewrote myths to reflect, from a distance, on the tragic situation at the front and its direct consequences in the immediate post-war period. Another hypothesis is that writers acted out of identification, that is, because of the feeling of experiencing a 'national tragedy' during the post-war period. The third hypothesis is based on the fact that writers wanted to avoid censorship and political persecution if their works were read as political and ideological resistance. The mythical disguise would act in this case as a smokescreen for political enemies, both national and foreign. It is likely that all three hypotheses are correct and that all factors influenced the writers when they decided to rewrite the myths. What is certain is that the interwar period inspired literary works that were deeply concerned with the historical moment, particularly with the unease about a probable future tragedy, which in fact came to pass with the Second World War.

5.1. Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale* (1934)

In this context, Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) expressed his tragic vision of the historical reality of his time through the reworking of classical myths, such as that of Antigone (1922) or Oedipus, which he would deal with in *La machine infernale* (1934), whose title alludes to fate as an infernal machine designed to destroy man, who is the victim of decisions and higher powers. In 1927, he had already written the libretto for Stravinsky's opera-oratorio, *Oedipus Rex*.

We have already mentioned that the horror of World War I led many writers of the interwar period to express their disappointment with reality and convey a sense of absurdity about life. Jean Cocteau chose to draw on ancient myths to experiment, introducing elements of psychoanalysis into his work and returning to one of the most fundamental philosophical questions of humanity: whether we have free will or whether destiny completely determines our lives. In 1962, the author wrote to the composer of the music for his *Oedipus Rex*, Maurice Thiriet, that "les mythes ne vivent que si on les recharge de sang neuf. Il est dangereux de les croire intouchables" (Cocteau 2003, p. 1673). With this quote, the author reveals his conception of myth, its capacity and need to be subjected to reinterpretation and recontextualisation, which keeps it productive, timeless and in continuous dialogue with the existential questions of mankind throughout the ages.

In the work in question, the author seems to give us a priori answer to the problem in the speech by *La voix* (a character who replaces the Greek chorus) that precedes Act I: "une de plus parfaites machines contruites par les dieux infernaux pour l'anéantissement mathématique d'un mortel" (Cocteau 2023, p. 35). At first glance, Cocteau places the

responsibility for the fate of men on forces external to him. In this sense, he seems to agree with the Greek view of fate, which no one can oppose. Below, we will delve deeper into the work to gain a better understanding of Cocteau's approach to this issue.

In Cocteau's version, the basic plot of *Oedipus* is retained, but certain modifications have been made, starting with the title of the work, *La machine infernale*, which gives prominence to the will of the gods and the determinism that afflicts the human condition. The infernal machine is *Μοῖρα*, that is, divine decisions, which control destiny and sometimes condemn man to suffering and misfortune.

Cocteau adds scenes that were not present in Sophocles' work, but only as analeptic narratives, for example, the encounter and triumph over the sphinx and the psychological details about the incestuous wedding with his mother. In *La machine infernale*, he does not respect Aristotle's unity of time, and 17 years pass before reaching the point where the classical tragedy begins. Cocteau creates details of a prehistory that is only implied in Sophocles' version. These scenes are, in contrast, represented in the French play and are heavily laden with Freudian analysis. In Cocteau's version, there is a notable influence of psychoanalysis, especially in the exploration of the female psyche, in the figures of the sphinx, and, above all, Jocasta, in her relationship with her son, in her attraction to young men, and also through the interpretation of dreams, as she dreams of her carnal union and the incestuous procreation that will take place. The Cocteau plays also introduce elements into the Oedipus story which seem inappropriate to the stature of Sophocles' play as well as the vulgar vernacular language of *La machine infernale* used by its self-centred characters (Bauschatz 1991, p. 165). In the play, from the very first act, we witness numerous scenes and symbols that foreshadow both Oedipus' patricide and Jocasta's incest and suicide.

The figure of the sphinx is also represented with a very marked female psychological profile. It is worth noting the importance of myths in the thinking of Jung and Freud, whose theories were at their height during those years. Furthermore, there was already a long tradition of reinterpreting myths in France, in the nineteenth-century art schools of Parnassianism and Symbolism. However, the publication of *L'interprétation des rêves* (1900) enriched it even further and linked psychological analysis of childhood with the legend of Oedipus. This aspect greatly increased the interest and popularity of this myth.

Let us return to the figure of the sphinx. Instead of the relentless being presented by Sophocles, Cocteau's version is a very feminine deity who wants to stop killing and instead love and be loved, and who refuses to kill Oedipus. She also suffers from jealousy of Jocasta when she learns that Oedipus wants to marry her. The sphinx reveals the riddle to him so that she does not have to kill him, but Cocteau's cynical Oedipus does not thank her and abandons her victorious. A drastic change can already be seen in the figure of the sphinx in relation to the deterministic conception, as she overcomes her own nature, goes beyond the role entrusted to her by the gods, and refuses to kill.

The characters Oedipus, Jocasta, and the Sphinx share weakness and a lack of heroic initiative. Oedipus is also childish and lacking in intellectual talent (Lieber 2023, p. 16).

5.2. Free Will in Jean Cocteau's *Oedipus*

One of the most notable changes introduced in Cocteau's rewriting is the personality of Oedipus, who bears little resemblance to the hero of the Greek tragedy. He does retain his titanism and strong will, but these lead him to failure. At this point, it is worth asking whether Oedipus' downfall in this version is due, as the title seems to suggest, to the inevitable fulfilment of the gods' plans, to the unforgiving nature of the "infernal machine", or to the free will of the characters.

Cocteau's Oedipus is a figure who builds his destiny through his decisions, many of which are reprehensible. The development of Oedipus' actions shows a freedom and a

will to achieve certain goals and, consequently, a responsibility in the figure of Oedipus. Although the character does not consciously wish to commit incest and patricide, it is the free will guided by the protagonist's hubris—laden with ambition and pride—that will lead him to the fulfilment of his destiny. His unscrupulous and reckless decision-making will bring numerous misfortunes upon himself, his family, and society as a whole, because evil has cosmic effects, not just personal ones. Oedipus is foolish, he does not accept advice or warnings, and he bears clear guilt for despising the wise and wanting to defeat the gods in their oracles. He is an opportunist, a cheat. He is ungrateful to the sphinx, who loves him and saves his life, a liar to his wife Jocasta, and rebellious, disrespectful, and ambitious for power. This Oedipus does not unravel the mystery of the sphinx through his intelligence, but through seduction, through the attraction he arouses in the goddess.

Furthermore, he is to some extent responsible for the incest, as he disregards warnings about the age difference between him and Jocasta and is repeatedly told that she could well be his mother, at least in terms of her age. But Oedipus presses on to seize the kingdom. He is the Oedipus of *hybris*, of excess, of arrogance. He is driven by three goals: to reign, to marry the queen, not out of love, but out of ambition, and an excessive thirst for adventure. Piety towards the gods and the advice of Tiresias are of no importance to this modern Oedipus.

This Oedipus has little in common with Sophocles' character, who is impetuous but noble and prudent and who is not clearly guilty of the crimes he is accused of due to a lack of intent, which for many exempts him from moral responsibility. Cocteau's Oedipus is a multidimensional figure with more complex psychological characteristics, more human, but less exemplary. Cocteau highlights the numerous possibilities available to Oedipus to avoid incest and its tragic consequences, such as Jocasta's suicide and his own self-inflicted blindness. This is not presented as part of the punishment of the gods, but as an act of personal pride, as Tiresias states: "Son orgueil ne le trompe pas. Il a voulu être le plus heureux des hommes, maintenant il veut être le plus malheureux" (Cocteau 2023, p. 151).

Jocasta also bears much of the responsibility for all the misfortunes that will befall her for ordering the murder of her son and for allowing herself to be erotically attracted to young men, not only Oedipus, but others as well. There is a voice inside her that tells her she should not be with such a young man, a voice she tries to silence, but which the soothsayer Tiresias and society remind her of with warnings and mockery because of the age difference. "Jocaste is [...] so dominated by her physical drives that she does not see any of the implications of her actions beyond the immediate" (Bauschatz 1991, p. 166).

In Act III, "La nuit de nocces", in the dialogue between Tiresias and Oedipus, the problem of evil is raised: why do the gods allow evil if they abhor and punish it? When Tiresias warns Oedipus that his marriage to Jocasta is accompanied only by dire omens, that the gods do not support this union, the mystery of the coexistence of free will and divine foreknowledge is raised, which allows evil even though it rejects it:

Œdipe: Parbleu! Je m'y attendais. Le contraire m'eût étonné. Ce n'est pas la première fois que les oracles s'acharnent contre moi et que mon audace les déjoue.

Tiresias: Croyez-vous qu'on puisse les déjouer?

Œdipe: J'en suis la preuve. Et même si mon mariage dérange les dieux, que faites-vous de vos promesses, de votre délivrance, de la mort du Sphinx! Et pourquoi les dieux m'ont-ils poussé jusqu'à cette chambre, si ces nocces leur déplaisent?

Tiresias: Prétendez-vous résoudre en une minute le problème du libre arbitre ? Hélas! Hélas! Le pouvoir vous grise.

(Cocteau 2023, p. 116)

Oedipus maintains that it is possible to defeat fate, while we look on with pity at his foolishness and the abyss into which he is falling, and Tiresias warns him that he is blinded by power. Cocteau's approach goes beyond the problem of determinism, focusing more on why the divine realm allows evil to exist when it could prevent it, thanks to its foreknowledge.

The play begins and ends symmetrically, with two ghostly apparitions. Cocteau writes a prologue in which the ghost of his father appears before the wedding, warning of the incest that Jocasta and Oedipus are about to commit without knowing it. The play ends with Oedipus going into exile with his daughter Antigone, and the maternal figure of Jocasta's ghost is added, who seems to redeem herself, renouncing her role as lover and wife and devoting herself solely to caring for her blind son in exile as a loving mother (Cestier 2013, p. 71). These parents, who had their son killed out of fear of the oracles, will be the ones who, from beyond the grave, will try to save or protect him, assuming their share of personal responsibility in the tragedy of their son Oedipus.

6. Conclusions

In Sophocles' tragedy, there is divine causality and human causality; the origin of actions lies both within and outside of man. The character is the agent, cause, and source of his actions, while at the same time being immersed in a force that surpasses him. Both causalities are mixed in tragedy but are not confused (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 2001, p. 68). There is constant ambiguity and tension between action and suffering, the intentional and the forced, the hero's inner spontaneity and the destiny set by the gods.

Sophocles' Oedipus stoically accepts the truth and his punishment, and his greatness is highlighted at the end of the play because he suffered greatly without being entirely at fault. The balance tips towards the idea that if his suffering had been the consequence of his sins, Oedipus would never have achieved the martyr's aura that mythology bestows upon him (Vara 1988, p. 338). Tragedy shows the weakness of man and the power of the gods, who in the end can accomplish what they desire through fate, which influences human actions. Thus, true tragedy arises from the tension between the dark and unsuspected powers to which man is exposed and his will, which combatively opposes them (Lesky 1984, p. 149).

In his rewriting of the myth, Cocteau chooses to change the image of Antiquity. The classicist image of Antiquity, dominated by harmony and proportion, is replaced by a modernised Antiquity, with numerous psychoanalytic allusions, oriented towards a neo-romanticism, which is reflected in its titanism, the search for freedom, and the sentimental inquiry of the characters. As for the possible determinism imposed by fate, Cocteau seems to reflect more of a Christian philosophy—in those years greatly influenced by Jacques Maritain—where man cries out in the midst of his anguish over the trials he is subjected to and over divine designs, yet accepting the part of responsibility that human free will implies.

In both works, Tiresias, perhaps representing the author's voice, rescues the figure of Oedipus at the end of the tragedy, in Sophocles because he is a victim of the fate imposed by the gods, but also because he fought to try to exercise his individual will and accepted his destiny with dignity. In Cocteau, Tiresias announces Oedipus' immortality through poetry and popular tradition, for whom Oedipus represents not Sophocles' exemplary man, the ideal of conduct, but the paradigm of modern man, who must accept, within the divine plan, his moral responsibility and his fallible condition.

As a final thought, we would like to point out that in the early days of Greek culture, there was no relationship between theology and morality. This was originally a human and social issue, but little by little, it was placed under the protection of the gods. In this way,

religion and morality began to coincide, when the gods became not only natural, social, and psychological powers, but also moral powers. Thus, myth became imbued with a profound religious and philosophical meaning and ceased to serve only as an explanation for inexplicable elements.

Since then, the myth, in the hands of classical and modern playwrights, has continued to be an attempt to scrutinise and respond to the mysteries of thought about human life and human soul.

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Notes

- ¹ Ac licet quidem terribile et miserabile ex apparatu fieri, licet vero etiam ex ipsa constitutione; id quod prius est et poetae melioris. oportet enim etiam sine visu fabulam sic constitutam esse, ut audiens res quae fiunt, et horreat et misereatur ex iis quae contingunt. in quas perturbationes cadet ille qui Oedipodis fabulam audiat. efficere autem hoc per apparatus est magis artificii expers, et sumptus requirit (Aristotelis 1974, pp. 173–75).
- ² Ac receptas quidem fabulas solvere non licet: dico autem ut Clytaemnestram occisam ab Oreste et Eriphylen ab Alcmaeone. ipsum vero invenire ac traditis recte uti oportet. idque quod dicimus se recte habere, apertius exponamus (Aristotelis 1974, pp. 175–77).
- ³ Reliquus igitur est inter hos interiectus. est autem talis, qui neque virtute praestat et iustitia, neque propter vitium et pravitatem mutatur in adversam fortunam, sed propter errorem aliquem, eorum qui sunt in magna existimatione et fortunae prosperitate, cuiusmodi Oedipus et Thyestes, et qui ex talibus familiis illustres viri sunt (Aristotelis 1974, p. 171).

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