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Chapter 6

*Constructing Authority: a Re-examination of Some Controversial Issues in the Theology of Numenius**

Alexandra Michalewski

In a recent article, George Boys-Stones¹ offered a stimulating definition of the Imperial Platonist's conception of authority. According to him, contrary to the members of the other Hellenistic schools, the Middle Platonists do not aim to acquire a sum of propositional knowledge to be preserved within the school. Plato's authority was for them not that of a founder of a school, but of that of a man who had seen the intelligible Forms and discovered a truth to which all subsequent Platonists aspired. The essential question is therefore that of the passage from the grasping of a non-propositional truth to discursive knowledge. According to Boys-Stones, this conception of authority goes hand-in-hand with a certain epistemological perspective, the traces of which we can find in the fragments of Numenius, most notably in how he thinks of the relation between the second and the third God (fr. 11 des Places). The perspective of this paper is slightly different. We will first recall the way in which Numenius retrospectively constructs a lineage of authority in order to support his triadic theology. We will then examine how this architecture is later critiqued by Proclus, who places Numenius in a lineage of exegetes who betrayed the spirit of Plato's thought and, in doing so, provides a new field of epistemic authority.

The history of the transmission of Platonic doctrines is, according to Numenius, a story of betrayal which, having begun in the ancient Academy, never stopped spreading. This interpretation is known thanks to Eusebius of Caesarea,² who in Numenius finds confirmation of many of his own convictions: paganism is marked by dissent and the best things in Hellenism themselves derive from previous sources, the Greeks having simply looted a more ancient religious heritage. Eusebius readily attributes to Numenius a formula which later came to be associated with Numenius: 'For what is Plato but Moses speaking Attic Greek?'³ Eusebius' excerpts quoted in the *Preparation for*

* I would like to thank the editors of this volume, as well as G. Karamanolis for his accurate remarks during a previous presentation of this paper in Vienna, and G. Reydam-Schils, F. Jourdan, J. Opsomer and M.-A. Gavray for their reading of the first draft of this paper. The English translation has greatly benefited from the help of S. Fortier.

¹ Boys-Stones 2018b.

² On the sources available at the Caesarea library and Eusebian citation standards, I refer, for a *status quaestionis*, to Morlet 2015.

³ Num. fr. 8.13. All fragments are cited following des Places 1973. Unless otherwise noted, I am following the translation proposed BS. This definition of Plato as Moses speaking Attic Greek will become popular during the Renaissance, only to later be made the object of severe criticism by J. Brucker. On this history, see Laks 2010. I refer also to Whittaker 1984: VII 200-201, who indicates that 'one cannot exclude the possibility that Numenius was also using the Septuagint designation to indicate the namelessness and incomprehensibility of God.'

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the Gospelaeparatio evangelica were carefully chosen by Eusebius to buttress his apologetic project:⁴ on the one hand, they aim to show that the truth of Platonism – which, for him, is the pagan doctrine which best agrees with Christianity – has its roots in previous revelations (transmitted by sages such as Moses and Pythagoras) and, on the other hand, they also aim to track milestones in the history of the reception of those revelations. Eusebius also finds support for his general argument in Numenius' pamphlet *On the Dissension between the Academics and Plato*.⁵ According to Numenius, one of the worst changes which Platonic doctrine has undergone is that which the scepticism of the new Academy has inflicted upon it. In *Praep. evang.* 14.4, Eusebius reveals how Numenius worked so as to distance Plato as well as his teacher, Socrates, from the interpretations given by the Academics, creating the image of Socrates the theologian, a disciple of the religious teachings of Pythagoras. While what is at stake, for Numenius, is to show the fundamental error of the neo-Academic dissidents, for Eusebius it is a matter of highlighting how much Plato and Socrates had distanced themselves from traditional religion – and hence, indirectly, how Plato had struck a secret agreement with Mosaic Revelation. The excerpts chosen by Eusebius bring to light Numenius the theologian, who sees in Plato a source of authority which in turn derives from previous and more legitimate sources which, from where he stood, were perfectly reconcilable with Christian dogma.

This paper, which is composed of two parts, will be organized as follows. After having explained the background against which Numenius' position arises, we will then examine how the theology he fashioned was later received. First off, with the aid of some Eusebian excerpts, we will examine the issue of the construction of Socrates' theological authority by Numenius. We will show how Numenius, in order to justify his own triadic theological architecture, establishes a history of Platonism which rests on a genealogy of successive figures of authority: Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates, of whom Numenius presents himself as the legitimate heir. This triadic theology, as we shall see in the second part of this article, was later strongly criticised by Proclus when presenting his own interpretation of the figure of the demiurge. In this regard, we should make the following distinction: in the Neoplatonic commentaries, one must distinguish between sources that have *revealed* the truth – such as Plato, but also the Orphic tradition or the Chaldean Oracles – and the figures of exegetical authority, that is, authors who have more or less *approached and understood* these revealed truths. Thus, concerning the interpretation of the demiurge of the *Timaeus*, Proclus acknowledges two figures of exegetical authority, who are not at the same level: Syrianus, Proclus' master and the highest exegetical authority, and then Plotinus, the first to propose a

⁴ On Eusebius as excerptor, see Jourdan 2015.

⁵ On this point, see Karamanolis 2014: 179-80.

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philosophical interpretation of the demiurge. Indeed, Proclus both simplifies the elements of Numenian theology and makes them fit into a history of the interpretations of the nature of the demiurge which culminates with his teacher, Syrianus, who follows a path paved by Plotinus. If, according to Proclus, it is Plotinus who really marks the beginning of the history of the philosophical interpretation of the demiurge of the *Timaeus*, it is because he views this figure within the context of a metaphysical architecture based on a theological reading of the second part of the *Parmenides*. For Proclus this dialogue is the key to all Platonic theology: the One is not only the first principle, devoid of any multiplicity, but it is above all a principle beyond all analogy, unable to form a series with what derives from it. Thus, in *in Ti.* 1.303.27-306.15, Proclus offers a privileged example of the construction of Platonic authority: using as his reference the theology inspired by the *Parmenides*, he manages to make Numenius an author who, far from having inspired Plotinus (as some of his contemporaries maintained),⁶ is actually an exegete to be grouped with Atticus, who establishes no difference between the demiurge and the Good.

1. Socrates the theologian

In his treatise *On the Dissention between the Academics and Plato*, Numenius establishes a line of transmission of authority which runs from Pythagoras to Plato via Socrates. This exegetical gesture testifies to a prodigious intellectual effort. Indeed, in a certain sense, Plato's dependence on Pythagoras is not a completely unusual thing in genealogies of Platonism in the Imperial age;⁷ however, the presence among these genealogies of Socrates – a central figure in academic *epochē* – is rather surprising. A symbol of the one who *tends towards* wisdom – reminding us that wisdom about divine realities is the object of a quest which is ever-renewed, rather than an assured possession – Socrates urges us to protect ourselves against all epistemological dogmatism. Besides, the association between Socrates and Pythagoras brings specific issues into play. As P. Donini⁸ has shown, the definition of Socrates as a theologian is the result of a long process of re-appropriation of the image of Socrates within a Pythagorising Platonism. Thus, we see it at work e.g. in Apuleius, who finds confirmation of the truth of Socrates' experience in the doctrines of the Pythagoreans, according to which it is possible to 'see a demon'.⁹ In the following excerpt reported by Eusebius,

⁶ Porphyry, *VP* 17.1-3.

⁷ See Dillon 1996²: 367.

⁸ On this history, from the Socrates we find in Plutarch's *Adversus Colotem* – which revives the association between Socrates and the *epochē* established by Arcesilaus – to his progressive adaptation to the context of Pythagorising Platonism, see Donini 2003 and Bonazzi 2006: 241-4.

⁹ Apuleius, *De deo Soc.* 20.

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Numenius goes even further, providing a portrait of Socrates as a theologian who professed the existence of three Gods, and made speeches suited to the nature of each one.

Socrates posited three Gods, and discussed them in a style appropriate to each. Those who heard him did not understand, and thought that he was saying it all without order, directed by the winds of chance as they blew here and there at random. (Num. fr. 24.52-6 = 1F BS)

Socrates' disciples did not understand the principle according to which to each divine level there corresponds a specific type of discourse. Also, they fragmented his theology, incapable as they were of seeing the big picture, i.e. of ascending to the unity of its true sources. Of all of his students, only Plato was able to do so, because he knew the Pythagorean origin of the Socratic discourse.

But Plato followed Pythagoras (Ὁ δὲ Πλάτων πυθαγορίσας) and knew that that was precisely where Socrates got it all from, and that he knew what he was saying. (Num. fr. 24.57-9 = 1F BS)

But whereas Pythagoras' direct disciples remained faithful to their master's teachings, Plato's disciples (like Socrates')¹⁰ only managed to stray from them, partly because of their incomprehension, and partly because they were driven by a spirit of rivalry and contention – this passage having been chosen by Eusebius to highlight, beyond the case of Plato's heritage, a typical example of dissent among the diadochi of pagan schools. By reducing the multifaceted aspects of the Platonic heritage in the Academy to a series of disputes caused by the lack of knowledge of Plato's true core doctrines, Numenius builds the image of an exclusively Pythagorean Plato. Reading Plato while seeing him as a repository of Pythagoras' teachings – as Numenius himself does, thus justifying his approach – is the only correct method:¹¹ this method is the very same one which Plato employed to grasp the unity and coherence of Socrates' words, which Socrates' other disciples failed to grasp. Also, Numenius' project consists in separating (*chōrizein*) Plato from his successors, and taking him as he is, i.e., in light of his Pythagorean source:

We should apply our thought elsewhere and, as we set out to distinguish him [Plato] from Aristotle and Zeno, so now, with the help of god, we shall distinguish him from the Academy, and let him be in his own terms, a Pythagorean. As things stand, he has been torn apart in a frenzy more crazed than any Pentheus deserved, and suffers if considered as a collection of limbs – although, taken as a whole, he never changes back and forth with respect to himself considered as a whole. (Num. fr. 24.67-73 = 1F BS)

¹⁰ Mansfeld 1992: 298 sees in these lines confirmation of the fact that, for Numenius, Pythagoras remains the primary authority, even above Plato: 'Plato and Pythagoras are almost put on a par but Pythagoras still comes out the more important person.'

¹¹ Frede 1987: 1044-5.

Compared to his heirs, who seek to ‘tear him apart’, Plato remains as impassible and unchangeable as the intelligible itself with respect to the material world. To grasp the intelligible in its truth, one must separate it from what has been added to it and from what prevents us from understanding it in its purity.¹² This operation of separation is an indispensable step to achieving what Numenius considers to be authentic Pythagoreanism: thus, e.g., concerning the theory of cosmological principles and the question of the relation between the Dyad (matter) and the One, Numenius stands in stark opposition to the exegetes who misunderstood the Pythagorean doctrine, conceiving a relationship of derivation between the two.¹³ To these champions of derivation he opposes a dualism of principles, which he detects in book 10 of the *Laws*, where Plato, according to him, theorised the existence of two ‘world-souls’, one beneficent and one maleficent.¹⁴

Building a genealogy which makes Socrates and Plato two heirs of Pythagoras also allows Numenius to postulate a certain definition of Platonic identity: leaving aside the novelties and exegetical blemishes inflicted upon Plato by the Academics, to be Platonic is to ascend to the primary source of Plato’s doctrines, which Numenius seeks to restore in all its purity. As we have seen, the exegetical decision to consider the core of Socratism to reside in theology serves a polemical goal, namely to appropriate the image of Socrates painted by the neo-Academics. In the polemical perspective which Numenius adopts in his treatise against the Academics, this gesture aims at nothing less than purely and simply excluding the Hellenistic Academy from the Platonic tradition.¹⁵ Fragment 23 offers additional clarifications on Socrates’ theology and its presentation by Plato. This text is the sole excerpt from the lost treatise *The Secrets in Plato*, where Numenius – for the first time in Antiquity – detects a Platonic criticism of traditional religions in the *Euthyphro*:¹⁶ a criticism which Plato disguises by attributing the prevailing conceptions about the Gods to Euthyphro, a mediocre character. This strategy, consisting in opposing the beliefs of the city without showing any direct disagreement, is – according to Numenius – typical of Plato, who was caught between his desire not to renounce the truth and his desire not to meet the same fate as his teacher, Socrates. He thus hid his writings behind a veil of obscurity.¹⁷ Nevertheless, this

¹² O’Meara 1989: 12: ‘This assimilation suggests that the changeability and disputatious behaviour of Plato’s followers is testimony to their error, and that the unchanging integrity of Plato’s doctrine is a sign of its truth, a truth which, despite the distortions inflicted on it in the history of the Academy, remains intact and unaffected, just as the Platonic Forms transcend and are independent of the fragmentary images of them reflected in matter.’

¹³ Calc. *In Ti.* 295-7 (= Num. fr. 52). On other aspects of Numenius’ project aiming to restore Plato’s interpretation, which he thought matched his true Pythagoreanism, differing from that of the Academics and that of certain Pythagoreans or neo-Pythagoreans, see Jourdan 2017-2018.

¹⁴ Pl. *Leg.* 10.987a-c. Plato’s text does not talk about ‘two world-souls’; on this issue, I refer to Brisson 1974: 299-300, and to Zambon 2002: 205-7.

¹⁵ Bonazzi 2006: 241. This exegetical strategy, which consists in separating Plato from Aristotle and the Academics, is directed not only towards the Academics but also towards the conciliating project of someone such as Antiochus, as G. Reydams-Schils has pointed out to me.

¹⁶ Van Nuffelen 2011: 74-5.

¹⁷ Num. fr. 23.12-14.

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voluntary obscurity had severe consequences, in part causing the *diastasis* which spread among all his heirs. Indeed, in the *Euthyphro*, while feigning respect for Athenian religious traditions, Plato actually criticises them systematically, indirectly placing them in opposition to his true interpretation of the nature of the Gods. That is where he brings Socrates into play as his spokesperson: Plato's master has no trouble dealing with the arguments proposed by Euthyphro, who is a hopeless theologian.¹⁸

By evoking a Pythagorising theology by Socrates, founded upon the existence of three Gods, Numenius justifies *a posteriori* his own theology, for which he finds confirmation in Plato's texts – as well as in texts attributed to Plato, such as the 2nd *Letter*.¹⁹ Indeed, according to Numenius, Plato was the only one to truly understand Socrates' tripartite theology and to transcribe it allusively in the *Euthyphro*. Now, to interpret Platonic writings in such a manner, Numenius must partly reinvent, as it were, the oral teachings of Plato and, through them, those of his teacher, Socrates. Indeed, as F. Jourdan has shown, Numenius' strategy consists not merely in relying on the oral tradition, but in turning this tradition into a kind of 'pretext to justify Plato's Pythagoreanism'. In other words, in order to establish the truth of his own theological triad, Numenius develops a version of what might have been the content of the unwritten tradition based on its primary authoritative source, the original word of Pythagoras.²⁰ Through an impeccable rhetorical construction, Numenius draws a sort of portrait of the extremes with respect to which Plato appears to constitute a stylistic middle ground, born out of the mix between Socrates and Pythagoras: between Pythagoras' hieratic dignity (which is *semnos*) and Socrates' demotic cheerfulness. This image of Plato as the mean between two opposites also manifests itself in his art of 'chiaroscuro', insofar as Plato deliberately fosters a relative obscurity.²¹

As a man who struck a mean between Pythagoras and Socrates, he reduced the solemnity (τὸ σεμνὸν) of the one to make it humane, and elevated the wit and playfulness of the other from the level of irony to dignity and weight. He made this mixture of Pythagoras with Socrates, and proved himself more accessible than the one and more dignified than the other. (τοῦ μὲν δημοτικώτερος, τοῦ δὲ σεμνότερος ὄφθη) (Num. fr. 24.73-79 = 1F BS)

Thus, the authority attributed to Socrates by Numenius derives from a careful construction aiming to establish the former within a line of doctrinal and theological transmission which goes from

¹⁸ Num. fr. 23.15.

¹⁹ As Jourdan 2017-2018 points out. It should be noted that this pseudo-epigraph text was considered an authentic Platonic work by Numenius, as well as by the Neoplatonic tradition.

²⁰ Jourdan 2017-2018: 164.

²¹ On the subject of Platonic obscurity in Numenius, see Mansfeld 1992: 205. Petrucci 2018: 57-9, presents a comparative analysis of how Plutarch, Numenius and Taurus, respectively, dealt with Plato's obscurity, in relation to the issue of the generation of the world in the *Timaeus*. According to him, Atticus' plea in favour of Plato's clarity is a consciously polemical and falsely naive reaction to the interpretative subtleties developed by Taurus on the question of the different meanings of the term *geneton*.

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Pythagoras to Plato: Plato is not the first source of authority, but rather derives his authority from that of Pythagoreas.²² These instances themselves are taken as reference points by Numenius to confirm his own analyses. Before concluding this section dedicated to Numenius' construction of authority, I would like to address a further point regarding the organisation of his triadic theology. In a passage from the treatise *On the Good*, preserved by Eusebius, Numenius defines the three Gods in this way :

The first God, being in himself, is simple (ἀπλοῦς), and being together with himself throughout can never be divided. The God who is the second and third, however, is one (εἷς). (Num. fr. 11.11-14 = 6V BS)

This passage has occasioned numerous discussions in the secondary literature.²³ While I shall not dwell on it, since it does not directly concern the topic at hand, I would mention that Numenius, in this passage, establishes a distinction between the first God in his absolute simplicity, and the other, the second God, who doubles himself. The evocation of this hierarchy of three distinct Gods presented by Numenius, as the legacy of authoritative sources, could serve Eusebius' purpose: to find traces in some pagan exegetes of a dim prefiguration of the trinitarian doctrine.²⁴

What I would like to do now is to show how Numenian theology – at least as far as it is possible to reconstruct it – is in turn presented by Proclus in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*. We are indeed confronted with the following paradox: on the one hand Proclus, apart from a few quotations in Eusebius, is an essential source of our knowledge of the theology of Numenius, while, on the other hand, Proclus is at the origin of the *damnatio memoriae* – because of his radical dualism in ethics and cosmology and of his rejection of Aristotelian doctrines – to which Numenius was condemned in later Neoplatonism, and from which he would not soon recover.²⁵ Unlike Eusebius, Proclus does not subordinate Plato's authority to that of someone else. Proclus, interestingly enough, does not present exactly the same triadic organisation of Numenian theology: he does not take into account the unity of the second and third Gods and instead stresses what he sees as Numenius' conflation of the first God and the demiurge. Proclus interprets divine hierarchies through the lens of Plotinian theology. In the framework of a philosophical history of interpretations of the demiurge, Proclus offers a quick presentation of Numenian theology which he fiercely criticises in order to better highlight, by contrast, the authoritative figure from which a rigorous history of interpretations of the demiurge can truly begin, namely Plotinus.

²² Moreover, as Karamanolis 2014: 179 has noticed, 'in some respect Eusebius is similar to Numenius, in that the latter ascribes more value to Pythagoras than to Plato, as Eusebius does to the Scriptures.'

²³ I would refer the reader to the fundamental study Frede 1987. For a discussion of the problems posed by this fragment, see Michalewski 2014: 93-6.

²⁴ Karamanolis, 'Numenius', Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, online.

²⁵ For a discussion of the reception of Numenian theology and Proclus' work seeking to undermine what Boys-Stones has called a certain 'pan-Numenianism' running from Amelius to Iamblichus, see Athanassiadi 2018: 203-5.

2. *The demiurge in Numenian theology*

A reconstruction of Numenius' theological doctrine is hard to achieve, given the fragmentary and partially indirect state in which his doctrine has reached us. Going into the details of this reconstruction would lead me far beyond the scope of this contribution:²⁶ rather, I would like simply to recall certain elements textually reported by Eusebius before examining the choices made by Proclus in Numenius' doctrines.

There is a first God, exempt from all productive activity (*ἀργός*),²⁷ and even from all intellectual duality.²⁸ In the Numenian excerpts selected by Eusebius, we found evidence of a distinction between the first God and the demiurge linked to the production of the world: a distinction which Eusebius himself uses in a Christian context, when he distinguishes the figure of God the Father from that of God the creator.²⁹ The second God is himself divided into two different figures: one only exercising intellectual functions, the other being the demiurge of the sensible realm, who has the task of subjecting matter to the intelligible order.³⁰ This hierarchical distinction allows Numenius to spare the first intellect the burden of acting like an artisan with respect to the matter of the world, the supreme God not being able to act in the manner of a mere craftsman.³¹ Proclus, while acknowledging that Numenius establishes this distinction between the first and the second God, highlights that this distinction is *in fine* ineffective, because he does not take into account that the first principle must be located beyond being and intellect. In *in Ti.* 1.303.27-306.16, Proclus refers to a selection of Middle Platonic testimonies³² extolling, by contrast, the excellence of Plotinus, whom he turns into the first link of the truly philosophical history³³ of the interpretation

²⁶ On this difficult point I refer to Opsomer 2006a.

²⁷ Num. fr. 12.13. On the use of the adjective *ἀργός* in this fragment, see Flamand 1992: 158 and Staab 2009: 76-81, who carefully investigates the Pythagorean nature of this distinction between the first God, who is *ἀργός*, and the second, who is involved in the production of the world.

²⁸ Num. fr. 22. On this question and the meaning of *proschresis*, see Frede 1987: 1062 and Michalewski 2012: 36-7. More recently Calabi 2017 has studied the Numenian distinction between the first and the second God through the prism of the image of the planter and the sower in fr. 13. For a detailed study of the textual problems posed by this fragment, see Whittaker 1984: VIII.

²⁹ For a more detailed analysis of this point, and of the reception of Numenian theology in the Patristic tradition, I refer to Mathieu 2007: 259-61. As Whittaker 1984: VIII 153 points out, in the context of the late second century, 'this Platonic debate on the acceptability of the notion of divine paternity is an essential presupposition of the Arian controversy. It was precisely the view of Arius that only metaphorically can God be described as Father.'

³⁰ Num. fr. 12.2-4. Beyond the question of divine levels and of the Numenian hierarchy, Petrucci 2018: 114-15 examines the question of Plutarch's demiurgy (as God's ordering of irrational matter) and, from a broader perspective, the Epicurean criticism of the origin of the order of the world.

³¹ On this question, I refer to Opsomer 2005a. See also Zambon 2002: 221-2; Dillon 1996²: 366-72; Boys-Stones 2018a: chap. VI.3.4.

³² The Proclean selection and the interpretation of Numenius provided by the Neoplatonic commentator is studied by Tarrant 2004: 184-5, in a different perspective from the one proposed here. Tarrant highlights Proclus' biases in order to show that he undoubtedly had no first-hand access to Numenius' texts, but was probably using Porphyry's testimony as his starting point.

³³ Procl. *in Ti.* 305.16-17.

of the image of the demiurge. Reading Plato according to an interpretative perspective proposed by his authoritative teacher Syrianus, Proclus presents a summary of Numenius' theses in *in Ti.* 1.303.27-304.22, which, taken in the general doxographic presentation of *in Ti.* 1.303.27 to 1.305.16, ends up achieving a paradoxical reversal: even though Numenius conceives of the first principle as being unified and isolated from the sensible world, as an author he should be grouped not so much with Plotinus as with Atticus, who brings together the demiurge and the Good into a single entity. What justifies such proximity is the fact that all Middle Platonic theologies share the same fundamental mistake: a misunderstanding of the nature of the first principle, which is always thought of as an entity 'in relation to' something, i.e., an entity which we can coordinate in a series.³⁴

This passage is found within the framework of the commentary on *Timaeus* 28c3-5. Before dealing with the *lexis*, i.e., the examination of the meaning of the terms employed by Plato in this section of the text, Proclus sets out by reminding us of the numerous difficulties posed by the identification of the figure of the demiurge and the articulation of the terms 'Father' and 'Maker' which, according to his reading, do not refer to two distinct entities, but to two ways of exercising causality.³⁵ The passage which we are tackling here is found immediately after the *lexis* and opens the very long section on *theōria*, which itself rests on the architecture of a whole structured on multiple levels: a kind of 'prehistory' of the interpretations of the demiurge, corresponding to the Middle Platonic readings, the philosophical history of which begins with Plotinus and follows a non-linear development. The true interpretation of the nature of the demiurge manifests itself in stages and finds its culmination in Syrianus' presentation. Within this history, Platonic thinkers before Plotinus serve as supporting actors, so to speak. Proclus chooses three of them: Numenius, Harpocration, and Atticus. These authors are not discussed in chronological order, but rather in a progression which illustrates in detail the consequences of the conceptions which make the first principle an intellect or an intelligible reality. Atticus is presented as the one who commits the quintessential Middle Platonic mistake of confusing the demiurge with the Good. In this three-stage progression, starting from Numenius and ending with Atticus, Harpocration is seen to be familiar with – and to return to – the theses of these two great exegetes, combining their different aspects. It thus seems as though, for Proclus, only one intermediate author, Harpocration, is enough to make Numenius and Atticus' proximity understood. In a nutshell, Proclus returns to that which, in Numenius, can corroborate a doxographical presentation of the nature of the demiurge within the context of the commentary on *Timaeus* 28c3-5 – even if it is not certain that Numenius had properly

³⁴ Procl. *in Ti.* 304.6-7.

³⁵ Procl. *in Ti.* 300.8-13. On the inversion of the Platonic formula of *Ti.* 28c3 (ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα, 'Maker and Father') by Numenius, see Ferrari 2014.

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commented on this passage of the *Timaeus*.³⁶ He briefly indicates that Numenius distinguishes between three Gods: the first called *patēr*, the second *poiētes*, and the third *poiēma*.³⁷

Numenius celebrates three Gods. The first he calls ‘Father’, the second he calls ‘Maker’, the third he calls ‘Product’, for in his view the cosmos is the third God. As a result, according to him the Demiurge is double, the first God and the second, while what is produced by him is the third God. (Procl., in *Ti.* 303.27-304.3, trans. Share in Runia & Share 2008)³⁸

The identification of a third God with the world is an aspect which is not of significant interest to Proclus: instead, it is mostly his interpretation of the double epithet of *Tim.* 28c3-5 which is subject to criticism. The reasoning is very terse, as is shown by the almost immediate use of the conjunction ὥστε: Proclus does not bother to justify his logical reasoning or to clarify certain details. Here is his argument: ‘Father’ and ‘Maker’ are two epithets which both apply to the demiurge of the *Timaeus*. Numenius interpreted this doubling of the terms as referring to two distinct entities, the ‘Father’ and the ‘Maker’.³⁹ While Numenius is not wrong in distinguishing different divine levels, he carries out this task incorrectly. In distinguishing the ‘Maker’ from the ‘Father’, he needlessly doubles the figure of the demiurge and completely misses the real nature of the first principle, the One, which is itself the origin of the fatherly function of derived principles. With this erroneous distinction that separates the Father from the Maker, Numenius considers each of these entities as being one demiurge. This is where his main mistake lies: in attributing a common characteristic to the first God and to the maker of the sensible world. Furthermore, there is evidence of this procedure in the excerpts reported by Eusebius.⁴⁰ In *Praep. evang.* 11.22, Eusebius shows how Numenius, starting from an analysis of book 6 of the *Republic*, conceives divine hierarchies in an analogous way: just as there is a demiurge responsible for becoming, there is a ‘demiurge of being’.

³⁶ Cf. Dillon 1991: 144. Tarrant 2000: 85 suggests that it is likely that Numenius had not presented his exegesis in his actual commentaries, which would explain the fact that the later commentators only sparsely mention it. According to Tarrant, Proclus essentially presents the Numenian theses through the lens of what Porphyry had grasped – that is, in his interpretation of the prologue of the *Timaeus* and the Atlantis story.

³⁷ For a discussion of the identification of the world with the third God, which is perhaps related to the fact that Plato, in the *Timaeus* (92c7), calls the world a *theos aisthētos*, I refer to the analyses by Opsomer 2006a: 270. This scholar points out that, in all likelihood, the world is not called a God in reference to its material dimension, but rather with respect to its order (an order which may be identified with the soul of the world). In particular, he discusses Festugière’s (1954: 124) interpretation according to which it is the world as it exists in the demiurge’s mind which is a God.

³⁸ „Νουμήνιος μὲν γὰρ τρεῖς ἀνυμνήσας θεοῦς πατέρα μὲν καλεῖ τὸν πρῶτον, ποιητὴν δὲ τὸν δεύτερον, ποίημα δὲ τὸν τρίτον· ὁ γὰρ κόσμος κατ’ αὐτὸν ὁ τρίτος ἐστὶ θεός· ὥστε ὁ κατ’ αὐτὸν δημιουργὸς διττός, ὃ τε πρῶτος θεὸς καὶ ὁ δεύτερος, τὸ δὲ δημιουργούμενον ὁ τρίτος.

³⁹ This doubling does not agree with previous interpretations, e.g., Plutarch’s (*Quaest. Plat.* 2.1001A4-B6), for whom these two terms refer to two distinct aspects of divine demiurgy. For him, the production of the world, which is a living thing, is irreducible to a simple artisanal fabrication: this is the reason why God is simultaneously the producer and the father of the world.

⁴⁰ On this point, see Bonazzi 2004 and Opsomer 2005a.

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And if the demiurge of *becoming* is good, well of course the demiurge of being will be the good-itself, an innate feature of being. (Num. fr. 16.8-10, my translation)⁴¹

Proclus develops a whole different reading of the *Republic* in connection to the second part of the *Parmenides*, according to which the Good is beyond any and all relation and any and all analogy. What he highlights is the fact that, by calling the first God ‘Father’, Numenius bestows upon him a trait which belongs to the demiurge. In doing so, he engenders confusion between the first God and the demiurge and relegates the first principle to an inferior level, making the Good a cause, so to speak, comparable to another demiurgical cause, which considerably weakens its transcendence.⁴² Thus, it is not right to call the first principle ‘Father’ for two reasons: (1) the fatherly principle is posterior to the One and (2) ‘Father and Maker’ are not two distinct realities, but two names for the same demiurge.⁴³ Numenius is wrong to confuse the two levels, dissociating the Father from the producer. However, as Proclus remarks, he is not so much to blame when he uses this vocabulary in relation to the demiurge as when he presents the divine hierarchies with the aid of unsuitable terminology:

(...) for it is better to speak in this way rather than to say in his theatrical manner: grandfather, child, grandchild. (Procl. *in Ti.* 1.304.3-5, trans. Share in Runia & Share 2008)⁴⁴

M. Bonazzi has advanced the hypothesis that the term ἔγγονος could mean that, in explaining the divine hierarchies, Numenius had not only the *Timaeus* in mind, but also the *Republic* (506d7-507a5), where Socrates defines the sun as the ἔγγονος of the Good.⁴⁵ To this hypothesis another one can be added without contradiction. According to A. Longo, the use of divine names could be the trace of an allegorical reading of the Hesiodic myth of Ouranos – which would come from Numenius’ Pythagorean affiliations – in which Ouranos is the grandfather, Kronos his son, and Zeus the grandson.⁴⁶ Numenius would have given these God-principles the same family ties as those established in the Hesiodic myth.

⁴¹ Εἴπερ δὲ ὁ δημιουργὸς ὁ τῆς γενέσεώς ἐστιν ἀγαθός, ἢ που ἔσται καὶ ὁ τῆς οὐσίας δημιουργὸς αὐτοάγαθον, σύμφυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ. On this point, see Reydamas-Schils 2007: 253-5, who examines the parallels between the Numenian hierarchies and Calcidian theology.

⁴² Opsomer 2006a: 269-70.

⁴³ Procl. *in Ti.* 1.304.13-22.

⁴⁴ ἄμεινον γὰρ οὕτω λέγειν, ἢ ὡς ἐκεῖνος λέγει προστραγωδῶν, πάππον, ἔγγονον, ἀπόγονον.

⁴⁵ Bonazzi 2017-218: 132-3; Tarrant 2004: 184-5.

⁴⁶ Longo 2017: 171-6. Hadot 1981: 124 rightly remarks that Numenius is following the advice given about this Hesiodic myth by Plato in the *Republic*: either to keep silent about it, or to reserve its interpretation to a few initiates. Only an allegorical reading of this myth reveals the theological meaning of divine filiations, obscured by the crudeness of the Hesiodic narrative. For a detailed explanation of the Plotinian interpretation of this myth, according to which Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus are related to the three hypostases, see Hadot 1981 and Pépin 1995.

Numenius' criticism allows Proclus to introduce the interpretations of Harpocraton – a Platonic author about whom we are ill-informed.⁴⁷ Proclus attributes to Harpocraton a view very similar to Numenius', in whose footsteps he follows: he also accepts three Gods, he duplicates the demiurge (1.304.25-26), and he develops an allegorical exegesis of Hesiodic theogony.⁴⁸ His way of duplicating is, however, slightly different because he duplicates each one of the Gods, giving each a double name: he calls the first God 'Ouranos and Kronos', the second 'Zeus and Zen', the third 'Heaven (οὐρανός) and Cosmos'. Later, says Proclus (1.304.28), Harpocraton changed his mind (μεταβαλὼν) in his interpretation. The verb μεταβάλλω is typical of Proclus' vocabulary, where it is used to highlight a contradiction found in an exegete. We find it, e.g., a few pages later, in *in Ti.* 1.393.1, with regard to Atticus: after having initially stated that it is in the very nature of the divine principle to be productive (1.392.28-30), Atticus then changes his view, declaring that God can exist without producing anything. Harpocraton too changed his mind, for after having called the first God 'Ouranos and Kronos', he called him 'Zeus and King of the intelligible realm'. The first God would therefore be named 'Ouranos and Kronos' as well as 'Zeus', whereas before 'Zeus' was only one of the names of the second God. Harpocraton thus establishes, from Proclus' point of view, a dangerous confusion between the first and the second God by using the name 'Zeus' indifferently for both. Now, this confusion adds to a first confusion linked to the name οὐρανός itself, which serves both as a proper noun, as in the case of the first God, and as a common noun (the cosmos, the world), in the case of the third God. Thus, Proclus can argue that Harpocraton indifferently names the first God with names which also suit the second and third Gods, and he ironically asks himself whether Harpocraton himself would had been satisfied with this disastrous classification. Actually, it is very unlikely that Harpocraton contradicted himself in the same exegetical passage. On the other hand, it is more likely that Proclus, relying on Porphyry, proceeded to provide a reconstruction by summarising Harpocraton's views – and especially by assembling different exegeses developed by this author in different contexts in order to immediately point to a contradiction.⁴⁹ Indeed, if we read the Proclean presentation, we find that from Numenius to Harpocraton things worsen, so to speak: Numenius thinks of the first principle as a demiurge, which means that he uses an inferior category to think of a superior principle, and thus mixes up

⁴⁷ In addition to his *Lexicon*, Harpocraton had written a commentary on Plato's works in twenty-four volumes. For more details, see Whittaker 1984: XXIV and 2000; Dillon 1991: XIV; Gioè 2002; Petrucci 2014: 334; Lakman 2017: 122-7; and recently Ferrari 2018. Following Whittaker 1984, who brought attention to the opening lines of a summary of Psellus that mention Harpocraton, Rashed 2016: IV 1 has recently edited and translated the text in its entirety, which he suggests is a scholium on Proclus' lost commentary on the *Phaedrus*. In this text, we find an indication that Harpocraton was a source to which the geometer Serenus referred in order to understand Platonic thought, and more specifically, that Harpocraton held that human souls change into animal souls as a punishment for their misdeeds, a hypothesis which Proclus rejected.

⁴⁸ On this point, see Gioè 2002: 483-4 and Longo 2017: 174-6.

⁴⁹ Dillon 1991: XIV 144.

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distinct registers. Harpocraton makes an even more serious mistake, for he no longer respects even Numenius' hierarchies and confuses all three levels of divinity.

This passage has sparked numerous discussions in the secondary literature. Two main options have been proposed. According to J. Dillon, Harpocraton is highly reliant on Numenius with regard to the interpretation of divine hierarchies, where he opposes Atticus – whom he follows, however, on the question of the real genesis of the universe.⁵⁰ More recently, G. Boys-Stones has adopted the converse perspective, proposing that Harpocraton's theses gain meaning if we consider the general structure of the metaphysics of Atticus, his teacher, who gives a renewed interpretation of the divine hierarchies of *Cratylus* 395e-396c.⁵¹ My own interpretation does not conflict with these two, but rather suggests that we shift our perspective, as it were. Instead of trying to bring Harpocraton closer to either Numenius or Atticus, I would like to focus on Proclus' choice to assign him a middle ground between those two masters. Indeed, it seems to me that in presenting the three exegetes in a progression which is not chronological, Proclus gives Harpocraton a particular role: to mark a transition between Numenius and Atticus. From Proclus' point of view, insofar as the demiurge is concerned, the Middle Platonists all belong to a period which precedes truly philosophical interpretation. This granted, Numenius and Atticus both developed one of the two sides of the same fundamental mistake. The former distinguishes the first God from the demiurge but brings the two together by assigning them demiurgic functions. The latter reunites them into one single entity but is later forced to establish complicated and aporetic distinctions between the two different levels.⁵²

Atticus is mentioned last, despite his being Harpocraton's teacher.⁵³ That is probably because Atticus represents, from Proclus' point of view, a kind of radicalisation of Numenius' and Harpocraton's theses.⁵⁴ Contrary to the other two philosophers, he only admits one single demiurgic figure but, just like them, he strips the first principle of its transcendence, in a way, for he identifies the demiurge with the first principle. By pushing these theses to their extreme, Atticus serves as a foil to Plotinus who, for the first time, distinguishes very neatly the first principle from all other derivative realities: the One, the first principle, is beyond being, beyond intellect, and is completely different from all that derives from it. Atticus makes a fundamental mistake: the demiurge is surely called 'good' by Plato but being good (*agathos*) is not equivalent to being *the*

⁵⁰ Dillon 1991: 143.

⁵¹ Boys-Stones 2011.

⁵² Procl. *in Ti.* 1.305.11-16.

⁵³ As noted by Baltes 1993 :180-1, Harpocraton was an erudite and prolific author, one who was attached to the *lexis* of the text, just like his master Atticus. His exegeses took the form of *aporai kai luseis*. According to a scholium on Procl. *In R.* 2.10.6ff., Harpocraton and Atticus interpreted the word γενητόν in *Ti.* 28b7 as indicating the generation of the world κατὰ χρόνον.

⁵⁴ Lernould 2001: 256.

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Good (*to agathon*)⁵⁵ – that simply means that it participates of the Good. What all these mistaken interpretations have in common is the fact that they make the first God a reality which stands in relation to something other than itself. That ends up causing confusion between the first principle and the demiurgic level. According to Proclus, the demiurge corresponds to the activity of the intellectual intellect, which itself derives from an infinitely superior power.⁵⁶ Proclus' chief achievement in this doxographic passage is that he manages to reconstruct an exegetical framework which allows him to associate Numenius' and Atticus' theories by postulating only a single intermediary between them, namely Harpocraton.

Plotinus, who is mentioned immediately after, is presented as a figure who marks a break and contrast: Proclus only highlights the points of disagreement between the philosopher and his predecessors.⁵⁷ Now, according to Proclus, the break introduced by Plotinus is at the same time the beginning of a properly philosophical history of the exegesis of the Platonic demiurge, culminating with Syrianus. By establishing the foundations of a metaphysical structure inspired by a theological reading of the second part of the *Parmenides*, Plotinus inaugurates a philosophical tradition to which Proclus himself belongs. It is from this viewpoint that a more detailed exegesis of specific points in the Platonic text is later provided. Insofar as he has clearly dissociated the demiurge from the One, which lies radically beyond being and intellect, Plotinus represents the first figure to have authoritatively analysed *Timaeus* 28c. At this point in the commentary, Proclus does not mention the difference between his own conception of the demiurge (who corresponds to the lowest component of the first Intellectual triad) and that of Plotinus, who does not establish such sophisticated hierarchies in the intelligible world. For Proclus, the important thing is that Plotinus places the demiurge in the intelligible realm, with no possible confusion with the One. Here, certain nuances are to be ignored, for it is a matter of underlining the difference between two moments in the history of the interpretation of the Platonic demiurge. According to Proclus, Plotinus – just like Numenius before him – theorises the existence of a 'double demiurge'.⁵⁸ But, unlike the Middle Platonic exegete, he proposes a correct interpretation of this: one demiurge remains in the intelligible, while the other governs the universe. Proclus' version is rather surprising. First off, in his treatises, Plotinus never talks about a 'double demiurge'. We only find – in *Enn.* 4.4(28).10.1 – mention of a 'double ordering principle' (τὸ κοσμοῦν διττόν): the intellect and the world-soul. While Plotinus, so to speak, empties the demiurge of all artisanal functions, he keeps the reference to the term 'demiurge' all the same – out of loyalty to Plato's text – which he identifies as the

⁵⁵ This distinction is presented by Numenius in fr. 20.4-7 (= Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 11.22).

⁵⁶ Trouillard 1958.

⁵⁷ Proclus ignores the fact that Plotinus also calls the One a 'father' – for instance in *Enn.* 5.1(10).8.4.

⁵⁸ Procl. *in Ti.* 1.305.17: ὁ φιλόσοφος διττόν μὲν ὑποτίθεται τὸν δημιουργόν.

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unmoved divine intellect that produces an image of itself all while remaining in itself.⁵⁹ Reserving the substantive *dēmiourgos* for the intellect, he nevertheless attributes to the soul (and to nature) the exercise of a *dēmiourgia* which consists in applying the forms to the sensibles. Proclus thus condenses and modifies Plotinus' views by attributing the theory of a *dēmiourgos dittos* to him.⁶⁰ The doubling of the demiurge is something that is achieved rather by Numenius, who talks about the internal division of the second God.⁶¹ Yet, this theory is not preserved by Proclus, who attributes to Numenius another form of doubling, which he criticises: he blames him not for having split the second God, but for having unduly transferred certain features of the demiurge to the first principle. To a certain extent, this fundamental error, according to Proclus, is a typical Middle Platonic mistake. In his view, Plotinus was the first to interpret Platonic philosophy as a whole, and its hierarchies of principles, in the light of the second part of the *Parmenides*; as such, he marks the beginning of the true philosophical interpretation, which culminates with Syrianus. Indeed, Plotinus was the first to clearly distinguish the intellectual level – that of the demiurge – from the One which, being absolutely first, is beyond all levels which derive from it. It is by leaning on these sources of authority that Proclus can, in retrospect, compose this Middle Platonic triptych, bringing together Numenius, Harpocration and Atticus.

3. Conclusion

Numenius is an author whose work only survives in a few fragments, which have reached us through a complex process of indirect transmission: Eusebius, through the excerpts he selects, provides a particular perspective on Numenius' words, which are framed within the general context of the apologetic arguments of the *Praeparatio evangelica*. In these excerpts, Numenius is pictured as an author who established a relationship between different sources of authority, with the aim of updating the definition of Platonic identity as resting on a system of fidelity to a certain teaching supposedly derived from Pythagoras – and quite distinct from the successive changes introduced by the Academic diadochi. What is striking in the passages of Numenius preserved by Eusebius is that Numenius posits three figures of authority: Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, which are perfectly compatible, since they each express in their own way one and the same truth. Presenting Socrates as

⁵⁹ For more in-depth developments on this question, linked to the abandoning of the artificialist model in cosmology and to the new interpretation, offered by Plotinus, of the causality of the intellect and of the Forms, I shall refer to Michalewski 2014: 185-97.

⁶⁰ For more details on the Proclean reading of Plotinus' supposed 'double demiurge', see Opsomer 2005b: 79-89 and 2006: 271-3. He draws our attention to the fact that here, for contextual argumentative reasons, Proclus does not mention the difference between his own conception of the demiurge (which corresponds to the third of the three intellectual Gods) and that of Plotinus, which does not establish a hierarchy in the intelligible, the important thing for Proclus being here that Plotinus places the demiurge in the intelligible, with no possible confusion with the One.

⁶¹ See Dillon 1996²: 367-72.

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a Pythagorean theologian, Numenius sets himself in relation to that authority in order to support his own theological triad, which in turn serves Eusebius' apologetical purpose. According to Proclus, this triadic theology leads to an erroneous interpretation of both the first principle and the demiurge. Instead of this wrong reading, Proclus presents his own interpretation of the demiurge, based on the exegetical authority of Plotinus and Syrianus. To be sure, Numenius and Proclus conceive the authority of Plato in quite different ways. However, both introduce, alongside a primary and fundamental source of authority, lineages of loyal exegetes on one hand and of unfaithful heirs on the other.

Bestowing authority on a source means establishing a selection and system aimed at bringing one's arguments in line with the source that is being invoked. While Numenius uses the authority of Socrates and Pythagoras to present himself as a real and legitimate heir to Plato, Proclus, for his part, uses the exegetical authority of Plotinus and Syrianus to extend to Numenius a criticism directed at other Middle Platonists. This procedure is evident in the doxographical presentation of *in Ti.* 1.303.27-305.16. If we compare the passage of Numenius' treatise *On the Good* (fr. 11) and this testimony of Proclus, it is clear that the divine triplicity is not presented in the same manner. In fragment 11, we get a close connection between the second and the third God, whereas Proclus emphasizes the close connection between the first and the second God,⁶² which better serves his specific polemical aim in this context. Proclus – who in all likelihood did not have first-hand access to Numenius' writing, but worked on Porphyrian material – reformulates elements of Numenius' allegorical theology in order to develop a criticism intended to show the weakness of the Middle Platonic interpretations of the demiurge. From Proclus' point of view, all Middle Platonists misinterpreted the nature of the demiurge and its true ontological status, even if this common error was formulated in different ways. By contrast, this criticism brings out the value of the interpretation proposed by Plotinus, who, by using the hypotheses from the second part of the *Parmenides* to think about divine hierarchies, marks the beginning of the properly philosophical history of the exegeses of the Platonic demiurge and retrospectively appears to be an authoritative source on this question.

⁶² I would like to thank Reydams-Schils for her suggestions on this point. The interpretation of Proclus, which is obviously controversial, finds, however, some confirmation in Numenius' texts, such as fr. 16, which establishes an analogy between the demiurge of being and the demiurge of becoming.

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