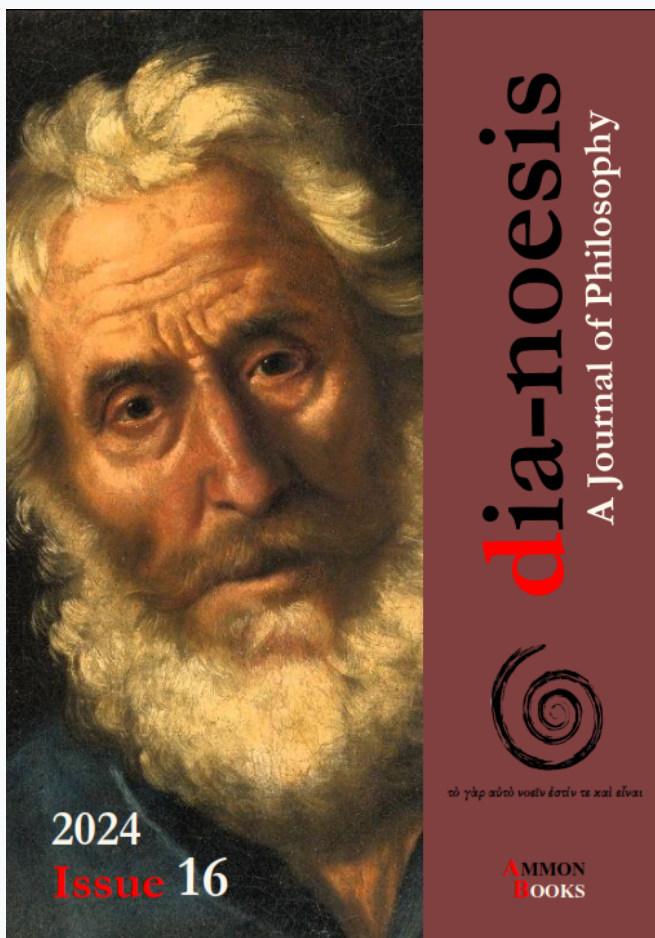


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## Syrianus' critique of Aristotelian antiplatonism: general remarks

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### Abstract

Focusing on the field of the History of Philosophy and specifically on the topic about the debate between realism and nominalism, in this article we attempt to investigate the passage of the critical commentary of Syrianus, the Neoplatonist philosopher, on the M, 1079A19-33 of Aristotle's *Metaphysica*. Through this commentary, we have the chance to see how the Neoplatonic School of the fifth century approached the "ideological opponent" of the founder of the Academy, whose theories aims to preserve integral. Syrianus' passage is significantly interesting, since it focuses on how Aristotle attempted to exercise critique on the Platonic theory of the "Ideas". Through his comments, we face a Platonic reading of the Aristotelian critique, since the Neoplatonist commentator, following the approach of Plotinus and Iamblichus, moves in the context of ontological monism. Our article is structured by four sections, in which we pay attention on the consequences of his theoretical approach on the fields of Metaphysics, Cosmology and, partially, Epistemology, as well as how realism is metaphysically founded. The greatest conclusion that we draw is that he is fully conversant with the philosophical tradition and that he presents an excellent eclectic performance.

**Keywords:** Syrianus, Plato, Aristotle, realism, nominalism, universal, (thing) of secondary origin

## Introduction

We could argue that the research and teaching presence of Syrianus in the late period of the Platonic Academy, i.e. the Neoplatonic School, is connected with one of the most radical compositions in the History of Philosophy, in which the fruitful eclecticism -in which a not linear encyclopedism is included- reaches the peak of the theoretical “paroxysm”. We are now in the fifth century AD, during which the Academy was going through one of its most “noble” periods, with schoolmasters (Plutarch, Syrianus, Proclus, and Damascius, who directed it until 529) who gave it unparalleled glory. And one of the factors which enhanced this glory was the systematic teaching of Aristotle’s works and their explicit or implicit inclusion in the body of Neoplatonic research. One of the Aristotelian treatises that acquired a truly privileged field of presence in the Neoplatonic theory was the *Metaphysics*, which was systematically commented by Syrianus, who delivered a clear picture of the attitude of the representatives of his School towards their “ideological” opponent and the tradition which he himself shaped. Syrianus, the teacher of Proclus and his fascinating theories, undertakes an attempt of high risks but also quite attractive. On the one hand, he has to keep the Platonic tradition intact and, on the other, to make an as far as possible objective presentation of a philosopher who was a delight with his inexhaustible, theoretical and methodological, systematic tones.<sup>1</sup>

One of the fundamental issues to which the extensive *Metaphysics* is indebted for its enduring fame is the criticism of Plato’s theory of the “Ideas” by Aristotle, to such an extent that the philosophical adventure was impressively fertilized in the depth of historical time. The way in which Syrianus approaches this critique is clearly Platonic, but with a highly decisive parameter, which requires a thorough not only

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<sup>1</sup> For the philosophical achievements of Syiranus, see for example the great study by Longo Ang., 2005. Also, Longo Ang., 2009; Luna C., 2007: 121-133; Terezis Ch., 2017.

analysis but also interpretation, which by extension contribute to a clearly different worldview compared to that of Plato's. Specifically, He does not move along the axis of ontological dualism, on the basis of which Plato founded the theory, but in the light of the monism, which was introduced by Plotinus. This is a distinction which has crucial consequences for the powers of *Metaphysics* and for the way in which Cosmology is constituted, with implications even for the branch of Gnoseology. In this article there will be some general interpretative approaches concerning the terms of foundation and the implications of monism according to Syrianus. The main framework of our research, however, is defined by how one should critically study a commentary which has a temporal distance from the text that it refers to.

Therefore, although we take as an occasion the commentary on some passages of the *Metaphysics* by Syrianus our main purpose is to detect and evaluate his methodology and its theoretical foundations. Regardless of the quality of his comments, his attempt has been influenced by the eight centuries which intervene between himself and the text of his reference. It should be noted that what is stated in Syrianus' text is inscribed in a broader context. We will, however, remain in it –apart from certain highly demanding topics–, since it has an autonomous theoretical specificity and is basically a summary. It is also worth mentioning that this period, which was quite one of a kind regarding its performances, is included in the only surviving work of Syrianus. Thus, although this article will attempt to shed light on an aspect –important for the delimitations of Ontology and Gnoseology– of the realism-nominalism controversy, it can be also placed in the branch of the History of Philosophy, for it explores a crucial period of thought. In the fifth century A.D., not only Neoplatonism but also Christianity evolve impressively, which presents not only clear similarities but also unbridgeable differences.

## I. Delimitation of the metaphysical archetypal definition of physical beings

So, of central interest, both for the content and development of the theory of “Ideas” and for the relevant controversy between the Lyceum and the Academy, is the chapter in which Syrianus treats –albeit in his own concise way, in contrast to Proclus– the following passage from *Metaphysica*: *Ἔτι κατὰ μὲν τὴν ὑπόληψιν καθ’ ἣν εἶναι τὰς ιδέας οὐ μόνον τῶν οὐσιῶν ἔσονται εἶδη ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν (τὸ γὰρ νόημα ἐν οὐ μόνον περὶ τὰς οὐσίας ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ μὴ οὐσιῶν ἐστί, καὶ ἐπιστῆμαι οὐ μόνον τῆς οὐσίας εἰσὶ· συμβαίνει δὲ καὶ ἄλλα μυρία τοιαῦτα)· κατὰ δὲ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον καὶ τὰς δόξας τὰς περὶ αὐτῶν, εἰ ἔστι μεθεκτὰ τὰ εἶδη, τῶν οὐσιῶν ἀναγκαῖον ιδέας εἶναι μόνον· οὐ γὰρ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς μετέχονται ἀλλὰ δεῖ ταύτη ἐκάστου μετέχειν ἢ μὴ καθ’ ὑποκειμένου λέγονται (...) ὥστε ἔσται οὐσία τὰ εἶδη· ταῦτα δ’ ἐνταῦθα οὐσίαν σημαίνει κάκει· ἢ τί ἔσται τὸ εἶναι φάναι τι παρὰ ταῦτα, τὸ ἐν ἐπὶ πολλῶν;* (M’, 1079A19-33).<sup>2</sup> The schoolmaster of the Academy observes

<sup>2</sup> The above passage belongs to the fourth chapter of book M, which has as its theoretical aim to present certain aspects of Plato’s theory of the “Ideas” and to criticize their content. Basically, we have a repetition of what is contained in Book A (990b-991a8), with the main focus on the reflection concerning the justification of the separate character of the “Ideas” in relation to physical bodies, with Aristotle defending their immanent character from the outset. In this passage, Aristotle notes the following: a) by accepting that the Platonists accept that there are “Ideas” as unities in a plurality of objects whose knowledge is possible, they must necessarily accept that not only substances but many other things have such archetypes. His reasoning is based on the fact that a meaning can unify not only substances but also objects or states of affairs that are not substances. The extension would be that science should not be denied its causes solely by substances. b) But if the “Ideas” are inherent in themselves, it follows by implication that there are only “Ideas” of substances. In addition, according to the Platonists’ reasoning, “Ideas” are not possessed in a symbolic sense. That is to say, the participation is taken to occur on condition that the archetypes in question are understood as separate from those subjects which they could categorically identify. c) In Aristotelian application: if an object participates in the self-double, then it will have a share in the eternal by accident. And the rationale is inscribed in the fact that the property of eternal is not

first of all that Aristotle expressed the above question in a very comprehensive way, with the ironic attitude possibly creeping into the wording. He even points out that already in his earlier reflections, he, as well as Aristotle in the passage 987a ff., had dealt with the ontological question concerning which beings have "Ideas" and which do not.<sup>3</sup> We would

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essential to any individual physical double but is symbolic. So, the "Ideas" are substance. d) The term "substance", at least conceptually, can be used for both the physical and the metaphysical world. e) It is not meaningful or ontologically grounded to claim that what we call unity over the many is separate from the many itself. By his extreme point Aristotle attempts to shake the foundations of Platonic metaphysical realism. But his reasoning is also interesting for the individual stages through which he passes, which we will attempt to highlight in the light of the readings of Syrianus. However, the fact that his point refers to the Platonic dialogue *Parmenides* is beyond the obvious. However, this Aristotelian quotation presents certain reading difficulties. Already Robin, 1908, has approached the question with extreme systematicity, making use of the commentary sources, especially Alexander's, and the literature up to his time. Cf. pp. 627-634, from which we quote the following note on Aristotle's relevant positions on the "substance", including the relation of unity-fullness, which do not belong to the horizon of acceptance of the Neoplatonists: «Si la substance n'a pas la même signification ici-bas et dans la sphère transcendante, l'unité d'une multiplicité n'a plus rien de commun avec la multiplicité à part de laquelle elle est dite exister, ce qui rend incompréhensible la substantialisation de cette unité sous le nom d'Idée» (p. 631). In view of the neoplatonists: (a) they have made the multitude an internal mode of existence of the metaphysical world, in order to ensure the constitution of the multitude of the natural world; (b) the metaphysical multitude does not remove the self-evident metaphysical unity; (c) the term "substance" is used for both worlds, but with a different meaning from each other, so that any discussion on the subject must pass through the principle of analogy and the ambiguities which it defines. The ontological otherness between them does not therefore remove the creation of the physical from the metaphysical world, under the conditions set by the latter. And we must not forget to emphasize the possibilities which non-inelastic and non-one-dimensional monism provides.

<sup>3</sup> This question will also be found in Proclus, in his commentary to Plato's *Parmenides*, 784.16-25: *Τετάρων ὄντων ἐν ταῖς περὶ Ἰδεῶν ζητήσεσι προβλημάτων, πρῶτου μὲν, εἰ ἔστι τὰ εἶδη, δευτέρου δὲ τίνων ἔστι καὶ τίνων οὐκ ἔστι τὰ εἶδη, τρίτου δὲ ὅποια δὴ τίνα ἔστι τὰ εἶδη καὶ τίς ἡ ιδιότης αὐτῶν, τετάρτου δὲ, πῶς μετέχεται ὑπὸ τῶν τῆδε καὶ τίς ὁ τρόπος τῆς μεθέξεως.* "There are four problems involved in discussions about the Ideas. First, are there Ideas? For what could anyone say about

note in this connection that the answer to this question would also give the ontological question an evaluative content, since the determination by metaphysical archetypes refers to integrities, of whatever degree it would certainly be possible to secure in the physical universe. And if such integrities are not observed on a universal scale, it follows by implication that there are physical states which do not possess central content but a circumstantial or secondary or even complementary. For historical reasons, it is worth recalling that this question had already been raised in the Platonic dialogue *Parmenides*, the intellectual bastion of the Neoplatonic School.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Syrianus mentions that in the elaboration of his treatises, details were included regarding substances as “universals”, e.g. of man and the horse, whether there are states which perfect - apparently in

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them unless their existence has been previously agreed upon? Second, of what things are there Ideas and of what things not? (There are many differences of opinion on this point also.) Third, what sort of realities are Ideas, and what is their peculiar property? And fourth, how do things in this world participate in them and what is the manner of this participation?” (Morrow G., 1987: 156-157). This is the preliminary research question of the third book of this treatise. Syrianus has posed the question a little earlier than the passage we will be working on: *Πολλῶν ὄντων περὶ τὰς ἰδέας προβλημάτων τέτταρά ἐστιν τὰ πλείστης ἄξια σπουδῆς, εἰ εἰσὶ καὶ τίνες εἰσὶ καὶ ὅποια καὶ διὰ τι· δεύτερον τίνων εἰσὶν οἱ Ἰδέαι· τρίτον τίνα τὰ μετέχοντα τῶν Ἰδεῶν, πότερον τὰ γενητὰ μόνα ἢ καὶ τὰ ἀίδια· τέταρτον δὲ, πῶς μετέχει τῶν Ἰδεῶν τὰ μετέχοντα* (*Εἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά*, 108.31-109.4). “While there are many problems connected with the Forms, there are four which are most worthy of attention; first, whether they exist; What they are; what sort of things they are; and why they are (I take all these to be actually one single problem; for they all centre on the question of their actual existence); secondly, of what things there are Forms; thirdly, what things participate in Forms, whether they are generated things only or also eternal things; and if the latter, whether all eternal things or only some; and if some, whether only those eternal things that are corporeal, as for instance the heavenly bodies, or also some of the incorporeal entities; and fourthly, how the participants in the Forms participate in them” (Dillon J. - O’Meara D. (trans.) 2014, 68). Cf. Steel C., 1984: 4. Regardless of the particular directions chosen, however, this is a question that spans the whole of the Platonic tradition and constitutes the main detail of the meeting of the two worlds.

<sup>4</sup> *Parmenides*, 130c-d.

qualitative terms and with teleology not being excluded, at least microcosmically - substances, such as virtue (Practical Reason) and science (Theoretical Reason), as well as whether a certain property is present or occurs afterwards - whichever approach is chosen being of central interest for ontological questions - in souls, in bodies and in physical states in general. And the category of these properties includes similarity, equality and magnitude. It is understood, of course, that virtue and science cannot be expressed by the mode in which a horse exists, while the other three –those referring mainly to external or organic characteristics– are conjoined.

Commenting on the above, we have to observe first of all that similarity and equality define relations and comparisons (clearly not tangible per se and not reflected through strictly focused analytical propositions in the sense of their obligatory reduction to a third thing), while magnitude defines an objective and directly representational tangible situation, subject to measurements, both in terms of the «τόδε τι» in question and comparatively. In fact, in the course of their examination, it would emerge how similarity and equality can function in terms of size in fields of relations and comparisons between the various material bodies, both of which are factors that are also inscribed in the metrical readings. At least naturally-empirically, we have to note that the magnitude of any body is of such a texture that it provides conditions for comparisons with any other size. But of course provided that the necessary tools are available and that there is awareness of how they are used and applied, with the mental processing of representational data being a safe reinforcement. But since these are three not insignificant properties as to the mode of existence and functioning of beings, we are called upon to open for discussion whether they are indeed external accidents and whether, by implication, as such alone they are not inherently present in the sensible beings. In fact, it could not easily be denied that similarity and equality are exclusively forms of supervision, present in human consciousness and capable of constituting the fact of knowledge. Neoplatonically –but also Christianly–

however, such a version does not exclude their existence in the organism of individual hypostases, as mainly representational modes fundamental to comparisons. Such an approach, however, would lead to a "brutal" realism if it were exclusive to any research process. But the passivity of human mental processes is far from the theoretical organogram of the Neoplatonic School. And here again an inviolable condition for any discussion undertaken will be that, apart from whether or not realism is fully acceptable, we are faced with a strictly structured monistic system, not a dualistic one. This detail requires a highly extended theoretical intervention, since monism explicitly excludes any version of a pre-existing unformed matter. In the regime here, matter by definition constitutes an a posteriori product, but it contains all the creative forces-energies of the metaphysical world from which it comes, and actually in terms of order, or the aesthetically remarkable.

In addition, the above remark is necessary in order to give the real meaning to the verb «*παραγίγνεται*» ("to be produced"), which is not of comfortable translational passage according to the surrounding textual data. But an additional difficult, as well as fascinating, question will immediately arise. In particular, if the properties in question have the potential for universal –or at least in a broad ontic field–intervention, then we would have the legitimacy to argue that they are in a peculiar way "universals" and that by their generalizable property add validity to realism, not of course in order to emerge –in a neoplatonic context it is self-evident– but in order to make it great and unmanageable. In the meantime, however, as present or as added to each being in a particular way and, therefore, as existing modes, they serve nominalism, but without providing it with conditions for it to prevail, except for individual and particularly limited autonomies, which even in a more general ontological inscription would be in danger of being abolished. We would dare to observe the following: certain powers are granted to nominalism, but in order to make it instrumental. A theme thus emerges which was to plague philosophical reflection at

least until the late Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, another concern comes to the fore, clearly generalizable in terms of the applications to which it refers: in what sense of common substrates, for any category or property, do both man and a celestial body have size? The answer will turn directly to the fact that any being in the physical universe has that size which approximates to its existential-functional code, to the way in which its organic parts as a body are composed together and constitute a particular extension. If this detail is not carefully approached, not only are solutions to the ontological question of the immanence and the mode of existence of nature not easily possible, but also the very formulation of those relevant specialized questions which would aim at delimited formulations with regard to the branches of Gnoseology and formal Logic, which permanently stimulated the theoretical reflexes of the representatives of the Neoplatonic School.

But the following is also worthy of attention: under which ontological condition would the three properties mentioned above take place? And from where and with what purpose? In a physical (including human) body, it is impossible that it is a condition of occasional or future presence-function, since as a formed body it has its particular size and is comparable from the outset. And here monism comes to deposit its powers. At the starting point, then, of the creation of the physical universe we can make a case for a pure matter, in whose existence the aforementioned properties would function as such. And this in the sense that they contribute, each one in its own way, to the fact that a part of matter as an extended chora undergoes such processes in each case, with the consequence that it is transformed into a particular body. But it is precisely here that the question which will be

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<sup>5</sup> On the realism-nominalism controversy, see for example an excellent special issue in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1992 (No. 1) entitled "Les Universaux". This issue also includes a study by Boulnois, 1992: 3-33, from which we read the following about Aristotle: «Pour Aristote, l'universel est en effet de l'ordre du discours. Il est simplement le témoignage de l'extrême économie du langage: un même mot peut être prédiqué d'un pluralité de choses... (4)». On the above positions Syrianus will unleash his arrows of subversion.

related to the choice of the world-theoretical paradigm will return: monism or dualism? By being a clear monist, therefore, Syrianus will obviously choose the solution of intrinsic, a priori properties of matter capable of causing what we have mentioned above. We believe that the discussion of the constitutional status of the accidents must necessarily pass through the distinction between matter and bodies, while the explicit assessment that the monism adopted here, as being of Neoplatonic origin, is of non-negotiable metaphysical foundation would be a fact. Therefore, the accidents are not accidental, but are inscribed in a systematic plan. In addition, however, through all the aforementioned, the aim of preventing pantheism, one of the non-negotiable options of Neoplatonism, which is not subject to discussion, will be pronounced. The aforementioned properties can therefore legitimately be characterized as accidental under an already factual model: in the sense that they reflect, in applied idioms, the existent properties of matter as modes of presence not only of themselves but also of matter as in an active state of being in that tends towards a specific form. Under this premise, however, the answer that possesses preeminent legitimacy seems to be the following: a body is constituted with such a size that it is inscribed in the comparative perspectives of similarity and equality. But the skeptical discourse will take a further step. That is to say, no doubt similarity can be comfortably established. But is equality placed in such a possibility? Almost excluding it as a comparative performance and ascertainment upon bodies, it would probably be applied in other details: in the equality of distances, of the velocity of orbital cycles, of attractions and repulsions, or in presences by analogy within one and the same cosmic field, operating under the same laws for all its parts.

## **II. Recourse to the starting points of Neoplatonism**

Carrying the issue back to earlier periods of Neoplatonism, Syrianus mentions that according to Iamblichus (the leading

representative of Syrian Neoplatonic eclecticism), the accidents are found only in bodies, apparently on the grounds that they are subject to changes and modalities, or that bodies need certain accidents to complete their formation. We would note, then, that it follows by implication that souls, which in their very nature have an unchangeable character, are not acceptable to accidents, at least as far as their a priori core is concerned. As such, therefore, the accidents, and precisely as appearing exclusively in bodies, must arise from causes which are not metaphysical. And this task is undertaken by the “natural reasons”. This is a crucial point with regard to the functions of the two worlds and to the productive-archetypal transition—in which we believe that teleological plan is also included—from the metaphysical to the physical. But it is further clarified that Iamblichus characterizes these causes as «διωρισμένης», a notion which obviously leads to the conclusion that these are interventions which express a programmatic plan with specific recipients and emanating bounded characteristics, suggestive of teleological plan. It is even worth noting that it is a verbal participle of present perfect, which of course also receives the status of a noun, and thus refers to a constitutive process which has already taken place and is still taking place at the current moment of any occurrences, and will also function as an open condition of possibility for anything further.

Also, Syrianus mentions that Plotinus had moved in the same direction, who had argued that we cannot place in the “Intellect” —the second reality of his system— the “Form” of whiteness. The cause of the exclusion is due to the fact that it is a quality which is found in particular physical bodies, that is, in its general presence in various ways according to the particular state or entity, and is subject to sensory experience. And obviously whiteness, like the other qualities of the same category, would be understood, according to the broader reasoning, as secondary and, therefore, not as decisive of the

fact of existence itself.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, we cannot generally rule out the possibility that a coloring may arise through a highly specific dialectical encounter between an organism and the environmental conditions in which it is created and develops, so that we can discuss the condition of natural adaptation. Under an open view, then, we would suppose that in the “Intellect” there may be the “Form” of color but certainly not of individual colors. The reason for which Syrianus refers to this remark of Plotinus is obvious: to deconstruct the Aristotelian syllogism on the existence of “Ideas” even of non-physical substances, in Aristotle’s attempt, possibly, to bring out the consequences which the Platonic theory of archetypes brings about.

Commenting on the above reasoning schemes we have to note that the observation of Iamblichus –and its acceptance, as proved, by Syrianus– leads to two other remarks: a) the source of the accidents –at least the direct one– does not derive from the archetypal “Ideas”, which, as metaphysical, have an integral ontological content and form only established states, either essential or of essential properties in terms of their interventionist-functional immanence, or their establishment in a system subordinate to temporal becoming. b) Natural reasons –which are derived from the “Ideas”, apparently on the basis of their specifically targeted combinations– are not sources of unchanging ontic conditions but of those which are changeable and vary according to particular ontic conditions. Reference is obviously made here to the inexhaustible relativism of a case, which, at least in the view of Plato and many of his descendants, leads not to systematic knowledge but to mere opinion, i.e. to “doxa”. There is a transition from the ontological realism of authentic contents to the ontic nominalism of the specific changeable. But the fact that the natural discourses represent, by analogy of course, at the level of becoming the way in which the archetypal “Ideas” have manifested themselves through their combinations, is of central importance for determining the

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 2.6.3, 1-6; 4.7.9, 19-21. For a historical-systematic reading of the broader context to which all these belong, cf. Courtine J. Fr., 2003: 167-211.

constitutive position and function of the accidents themselves. And it is indeed generally accepted that the accidents are subject to the changeability caused by the physical becoming or even contribute to its provocation precisely as such. In any case, it is impossible for them to be present and to appear meaningless as regards the "behaviours" of beings.

It is therefore a matter that requires special attention, since it raises challenging questions as to how we can move from the circumstantial to the realization of teleology, to a limited extent of course. The only answer that could reasonably be formulated would be that it is expected that in the course of time the deficit conditions will gradually diminish, with the consequence that the ontic fields will take on a systematic content. But could the accidents constitute factors which come to assimilate man to the more general natural conditions and through such a situation to the archetypal "Ideas"? Is there a broad plan that is extended through the details? As early as the fourth century B.C., Speusippus, as the emblematic exponent of the new scientific spirit, would have agreed with such a version. And of course these would be simulations which would repeal neither particularities nor the particular ways in which time would be secured for the better. However no matter how challenging all these are, they are placed in a parameter that is fully binding: on what grounds would we rule out that what comes from natural reasons –which, it should be noted, do not cease to be the projections of integral metaphysical archetypes– will not have a positive effect? Therefore, this is precisely where the advantage of the whole syllogism lies, since maximalist world-theoretical generalizations are not imposed and thus natural objects - apart from the teleological orientation - are also approached on the basis of the real and ascertainable conditions in which they develop.

All these have epistemological consequences, since, where the accidents prevail, final predicates or even reductions are not easy. Iamblichus therefore comes up with a flexible solution to cosmological questions, which offers particular advantages for a detailed understanding of the modes-modalities of the natural world as its functions, and not only

of its ontological texture or the teleology by which it is governed in the manner of the Neoplatonic theoretical regime.<sup>7</sup> The scientific tone does not abandon its transgressions and aims, despite whatever hermeneutical and world-theoretical choices are being made. Under an open critical reading, then, we would note that natural reasons are capable of being subsumed into certain categorical schemes on the basis of representational experiences, but from this point onwards, that is, towards the “Ideas”, Gnoseology follows with respect to its reflections the adopted world-theoretical schemes. Sensible data no longer exist, with the consequence that in other thematic fields Syrianus makes extensive use of the Platonic theory of recollection, with the above data serving as initial irritating challenges. And here we can complete our previous reasoning: given that within consciousness there are unities of integral concepts, why we would exclude the unities of integral phenomena, whenever they arise?

It is, moreover, crucial that Iamblichus points out the relevance-distinction between the “Ideas” and the natural reasons concerning the communication of the two worlds in terms of its general characteristics. He puts it forward in such a way that it does not lead to a version of an absolute separation and isolation between them. We could even argue, implicitly as a result of the broader context, that the “Ideas” are manifested energetically –in this text reference is made to “powers”–, that is, not in their essence, which mainly expresses their per se state. In a process which is neither cognitively determinable nor ascertainable through tangible sensory experience, the “Ideas” cause the development of natural reasons in such a way that they constitute the mundane eternal cores –which reflect by analogy the metaphysical unity– which will feed processes for the formation of matter –and certainly not only by occasional accidents– which manifests continuously through the new sensible bodies. As a result of the resulting products, we could argue that natural reasons have the possibility of being flexibly present at various levels, each in a particular way, a

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. for instance, *Εἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά*, 116.5-118.28.

detail which is, however, also linked to an aesthetic harmony, which is not limited into standardization.

But what is the broader point being made beyond the focus on processes? Iamblichus, remaining consistent with the Platonic tradition, sets as a theoretical goal to keep the presence of “Ideas” intact and separate from sensible beings. Thus, their transcendence remains intact. Ingeniously, then, Syrianus uses him in order to invalidate the opposite orientation of Aristotle, who is puzzled about how the separateness and, by extension, transcendence of the “Ideas” could be justified. It is at this point that the Neoplatonic School’s famous theory of the intermediates, which here function as intermediating between the two worlds, is reinforced, with Proclus extending it later impressively. Therefore, the productive-archetypal role of these metaphysical-archetypal realities, in actually infinite varieties, is assured by natural reasons. In more detail, the above define that while the “Ideas” provide those ontological states which are necessary for the existence-functioning of beings – such as, for example, life and motion as among the most capital ones–, how these states will manifest themselves on a case-by-case basis depends on how the natural reasons activate their intervening productivity in each individual field of the universe, apparently as legislative principles of regularities, as introductory configurations and functionalisms.<sup>8</sup> We could even, again in an open way, argue that natural reasons, although belonging to the natural world, possess properties of the metaphysical world.

By transferring the question with the appropriate specializations to human beings, we will acquire conditions for a broader understanding of what is discussed here, which will of course present an inexhaustible variety. We therefore choose, with the broader contexts from Syrianus’ writings as a starting point, to note the following, which are articulated under a type of cumulus: a) The archetypal “Ideas” add to

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. for instance, *Εἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά*, 84.20-86.37, where we read: *Δῆλον ὅτι τὸ ἐν τινι οὐ διαίρεται ἄνευ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου, ὅταν ὡς ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ἐν τινι λέγεται* (86.26-27). The whole passage can be characterized as the definition of the metaphysics of immanence.

rational beings, which are human beings, the possibility of contemplation and science. b) Therefore, contemplation and science are common characteristics exclusively of all rational beings. c) Every human being contemplates in a particular way and engages in research in a particular science. d) But each particular way of contemplation, regardless of its reference, is not reduced to an archetypal “Idea”, from which it would derive its characteristics. The same is true of any scientific pursuit. That is, there are no “Ideas” of unrepeatable research activities. Therefore: a) Every rational being contemplates because it participates in the universal property of contemplation –which the corresponding “Idea” contains archetypically–, while it also engages in a particular science, precisely because it participates in the universal scientific possibility - which the corresponding “Idea” secures in an archetypal way.<sup>9</sup>

The relevance here between realism and nominalism is clear and not in the form of compromises. It is a specialized manifestation of the universal. It thus becomes clear that the human personality is valorized, in that it activates – in an unrepeatable way - through its initiatives a divine gift which exists within it. And in this regard, Syrianus will draw his outlets from the theory of recollection, to which he even does not attribute a standardized-inflexible content, inspiring Proclus in this process as well. Summarizing what we have examined, we formulate the following synthetic assessment: the particular ways of manifestation of contemplation and scientific thought constitute projections of the inner accidents, which a man acquires the conditions for bringing forth not only because he is archetypically descended from the “self-human” but also because he has become a concrete living substance by natural reasons. However, critical thinking again poses concerns: do the “Ideas” of contemplation and science exist in the “self-human”? By logical deduction we are led to

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. for instance, *Εἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικὰ*, 88.13-91.9, where there is a systematic discussion on the relation of the scientifically energetic mind to being and becoming, which is inscribed in how Gnoseology undertakes to formulate its correspondences with Ontology

the conclusion that they are contained, since it is not possible for such archetypes to be provided by natural reasons. But in order for every man to express himself thoughtfully and scientifically, he must have been constituted by natural reasons. The revaluation of nature is therefore explicit.

### **III. Ontological and epistemological foundations of the “later-born”**

In fact, by extending the positions of Iamblichus and Plotinus, the head of the Academy, so that they can be combined with the disciplines of Gnoseology and formal Logic<sup>10</sup>, mentions that the one meaning of –any– many beings or states does not necessarily mean that there will be an “Idea” of its objective content, because then by implication there would be “Ideas” of the many states by nature. In order to deconstruct the Aristotelian critique, arguments are ontologized in their foundations. What happens, then, in internal succession in the above, is the following, determined by the deductive articulation: of those beings or states of which there are “Ideas”, there are also universal reasons –as conceptual categorical schemes–, without, however, being able to argue the opposite. Thus, realism is pervasive in the case in which the above premise is applicable and can subsequently acquire the functions of the conceptual.<sup>11</sup> The ontological and epistemological approaches here certainly presuppose an acceptance as to which “Ideas” exist and which do not, a distinction which also has a normative content as to the mode of being, since the presence of “Ideas” is exclusively associated with integrity. Thus, Ontology is often associated with the principles of the Practical reason in a generalized version, with mutual interpretative outlets between them, but with the same ontology permanently maintaining its integrity. Therefore, any diversion that occurs is outside the competence of the Ontology.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Terezis Ch., 2023.

<sup>11</sup> For a very thorough reading of the above issue, cf. De Libera Al., 2005: 211-264.

However, attention is also required to consider whether there are situations of non-deflection which are not in accordance with the principles set out in the Ontology. In which branch are they included? The research and interpretive key here too is the reference to the sciences: *Οὐ μὴν οὐδ' ὅσων εἰσὶν ἐπιστῆμαι αἱ μὴ κυρίως λεγόμεναι, τούτων ἀπάντων ἐστὶν εἶδη* (114.12-13). The distinction between «κυρίως» and «μὴ κυρίως» sciences is interesting from an epistemological point of view. In all likelihood, the «κυρίως» will first refer to the evaluative content of the objects of reference in terms of their ontological integrity and then carry over to the scientific process of reading them itself. But the term «ἐπιστήμη» is not removed, and we appreciate that the occasional «μὴ κυρίως» version refers to a specialized product of the intervention of natural reasons. If, for example, the discussion is about the science of Biology, we would note that it is not in the absolute sense of the term «κυρίως», but it is not «μὴ κυρίως» either. It is precisely Science –of which there is an “Idea”– that is «κυρίως»; Biology is «κυρίως» by participation or in specialised sense, while Biology’s references to individual changing phenomena of the natural environment are «μὴ κυρίως».<sup>12</sup> Moreover, we

<sup>12</sup> A little earlier Syrianus has stated the following: *Εἰ περὶ ὄντα αἱ ἐπιστῆμαι, ἔστι τὰ καθόλου· τῶν γὰρ καθόλου αἱ ἐπιστῆμαι· ὡς εἶναι τὸν συλλογισμόν ἐν τρίτῳ σχήματι· τὰ ἐπιστητὰ καθόλου, τὰ ἐπιστητὰ ὄντα, τινὰ καθόλου ὄντα· οὐ γὰρ πάντα τὰ καθόλου, οὐ γὰρ δὴ καὶ τὰ ὑστερογενῆ ἢ τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἀτόμοις. Ἄτοπον δὲ οὐδὲν πάντα τὰ ἐπιστητὰ ὄντα εἶναι, εἰ τὰ κυρίως ἐπιστητὰ λαμβάνοιτο, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὰ ἰατρικὰ ἢ τεκτονικά· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιστῆμαι κυρίως αὐταί, μόναι δὲ δικαίως οὕτως ἂν προσαγορεύοιτο αἱ περὶ τὰ αἰδία καὶ καθ' αὐτὰ ὄντα καὶ ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως διακείμενα πραγματευόμεναι* (*Εἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά*, 110.9-16). “if the sciences are concerned with real objects, universal entities (*ta katholou*) exist; For the sciences are concerned with universals. This, then, is a syllogism in the third figure: the objects of knowledge are universal; the objects of knowledge are real objects; so therefore, there are some existent universals. For not all universals exist – not, for instance, the ‘laterborn’, nor those that inhere in individuals. But there is nothing strange in the claim that all objects of knowledge are real, if one takes that to refer to the objects of the proper (*kuriôs*) sciences, not, for instance, the objects of medicine, or carpentry; for these are not sciences in the proper sense, but one might justly term such only those which concern themselves with objects which are eternal and exist by themselves and are always in the

should not exclude from our discussion that individual scientific branches of Biology are also developing. By extension, the same could be argued for the virtues of Practical Reason. For example, the “Idea” of justice is accepted as a “universal” scientifically «*κυρίως*» approachable, while there are particular ways of its personal manifestation which do not fall, at least to an absolute degree, within the «*κυρίως*».

In the next step of reasoning, Syrianus, having as a starting point that the “Ideas” as a whole have authentic objective content, characterizes them as substances, i.e. he takes them as ontologically integral. But these substances do not manifest themselves in the physical universe –or are not perceived by physical beings– in their per se state. They exist as modes of possession and, multi-branching manifestation by the individual recipients of the archetypal gifts, that is, through the utilization of immanence. We would note, then, that the “Idea” of substance is certainly granted to the whole of beings, yet each produced being perceives and manifests it on the basis of its particularity. That is to say, it is not substance in every participating being, or at least it is not substance in comparison with that which is perceived in its archetypal function. And at this point a highly crucial clarification is provided: self-science and self-justice are substances, but the corresponding states of Theoretical and Practical Reason immanent in human interiority in particular

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same state (J. Dillon J. - O’Meara D. (trans.), 2014: 70). This is a crucial passage indeed, which makes a highly elaborate demarcation between “universals” and “later-born” with the former referring to ontological foundations and the latter to cognitive elaborations based on “atoms”. We could easily argue that an emblematic definition of realism is formulated here, with the subordination of nominalism. However, the syllogism is also interesting for the following reason: it highlights the correlation between “universals” and “beings”. We would note, applying the fields of the syllogism, that there are “universals” which are not “beings” and such could be, for example, justice or virtue in general. But Syrianus does not dwell on this discussion. By refining authentic Platonism to its peaks, he notes that, in the literal sense of the term, science is that which refers to the eternal beings. What is generally described in terms of scientific specialization is not included in the constellation of science in the very literal sense of the word.

are not substances but dispositions. Therefore, and under a more generalized view, each being cannot be characterized as the absolute expression of a metaphysical substance-Idea, but as that being which projects it –as well as certain others in which it participates and possesses– with its particular characteristics and the modes of its presence, of its being permanently subject to becoming. In this ontic condition we can talk about a property, that is, a way of receiving-possessing-manifesting an “Idea”-metaphysical substance. It should be noted, moreover, that “disposition” constitutes an internal tendency, which, however, in the broader context, refers to a substrate which has undergone a diligent treatment and claims to become a way of life with normative foundations. It is not excluded, however, that in this context, too, attention is drawn to recollection, which, even if unquestioningly, will shape the relevant case-by-case tendencies. Of course, it is not strongly validated whether the Neoplatonic scholar takes recollection in the same way as Plato. By being a consistent monist and a far away from pantheism, it is more likely that he takes recollection on the terms set by divine immanence. At birth man, like primitive man, contains in the form of psychic reasons what the divine world has granted in general and to himself. By means of specific processes he is gradually led to self-knowledge, which leads him to the identification of the divine projections-imanences within himself.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> We will not go into matters of recollection but will simply quote the following: *Οὐ γὰρ ἄλλων τινῶν αἱ μαθήσεις ἀναμνήσεις ἢ τῶν μέσων εἰδῶν, ταυτὸν δὲ εἰπεῖν τῶν ἐστώτων καθόλου λόγων, οὐ τῶν ὑστερογενῶν ἀλλὰ τῶν κατ’ οὐσίαν προϋπαρχόντων ταῖς ψυχαῖς, ὅφ’ ὧν καὶ οἱ τῆς φύσεως ἐμπνεόμενοι λόγοι καὶ ποδηγητούμενοι τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα δημιουργεῖν δύνανται (Εἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά, 82.25-9).* “For what we learn are nothing else but recollections of the median level of forms, which is the same as to say the eternally-existent general reason-principles, not the ‘later-born’ (*husterogenêis*)<sup>22</sup> concepts but rather those pre-existing essentially (*kat’ ousian*) in our souls, being inspired and guided by which those reasonprinciples in nature are enabled to create individual things (Dillon J. - O’Meara D. (trans.), 2014: 33-34).

#### IV. Realism reveals its binding intentions

The next observation of Syrianus is, mainly in terms of their cosmological perspective, of capital importance for the relationship between realism and nominalism. He mentions that archetypal “Ideas” as substances do not acquire their substance because they exist in individual object-bodies. That is, he does not accept that there is a particular substrate (subject) which would contribute, by virtue of its internal potentialities or energy fields, to the objective existence of these substances. Therefore, he puts Aristotelian nominalism into the margin by definition. He absolutely adopts (metaphysical and evolving into intra- and intercosmic) realism, according to which the “Ideas” are from the outset authentic realities and determine the mode of existence of individual bodies, through the mediation of natural reasons, of course.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, they give hypostasis but do not receive. Both he and later Proclus developed in an emblematic way the theory of “forms-in-matter”, perhaps the most expressive of the metaphysics of immanence. According to its content, the forms-in-matter do not owe their existence to matter, but are themselves the sources of its existence in their ultimate direct presence. In other terms, matter exists

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<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that Syrianus has already made announcements regarding the necessary forthcoming reflections: *Ἀνάγκη μεταβαίνειν ἐφ’ ἐτέρας φύσεις, αἱ διαιωνίως καὶ ἀκινήτως καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ εἶδος τὰ πάντα κόσμου καὶ τάξεως πληροῦσαι τὴν αἰτίαν τῶν γιγνομένων ἐν ἑαυτοῖς περιέχουσιν, ἐλάττους μὲν ἀριθμῶ τῶν ἐγκοσμίων οὐσαι τῶν πραγμάτων, ἅτε τῷ ἐνὶ γεινῶσαι καὶ προσεχῶς ἀπὸ τῆς μονάδος προελθοῦσαι, δυνάμει δὲ ἀφράστῳ τὴν τε τοῦ σύμπαντος χρόνου καὶ τὴν τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ φουομένων ἀπειρίαν περιλαμβάνουσαι κατὰ τινα ὑπεροχὴν ἐξηρημένην αὐτῶν καὶ ἀσύντακτον (Εἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά, 108.17-24). “We must transfer our attention to other natures, which, filling all things as they do, eternally and unmovingly and by reason of their very being, with order and structure, embrace within themselves the cause of what comes to be, being less in number than encosmic things, inasmuch as they are closer neighbours of the One and proceed immediately from the monad, but by reason of their ineffable power contain the unlimitedness of the whole of time and those things which come to be within it, by reason of a superiority to them which is separable and unconnected” (Dillon J. - O’Meara D. (trans.), 2014: 68).*

precisely because it is the product of the combination of “Forms”, which manifests itself in infinite ways.<sup>15</sup>

### Extensions

What we have elaborated can lead us to the following assessments of Syrianus’ research - methodological performance:

a) He appears to have an advanced grasp of the historical depth of the theories he is working on and to make textual choices that will support them. It should be noted that throughout his Commentary he does not reflect in terms of an inflexible linear or quotational encyclopaedism, but rather a synthetic one, with eclecticism being evident.

b) In order to preserve with a firm argumentation the tradition of Platonism on Metaphysics and on Cosmology, he does not remain in the Aristotelian text which he comments on, but refers to others, so that in an explicit or implicit way, he leads the reader to the conclusion that Aristotle does not

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. for instance, Syrianus, *Eἰς τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικὰ* 12.4-8 and 119.33-120.2: *Τὰ μὲν ἔνυλα εἶδη ἀχώριστα ἐστὶ τῶν ὑποκειμένων· ἀλλ’ οὐχ οὕτως αἱ ἰδέαι οὐσίαι ἐλέγοντο τῶν πραγμάτων, ἀλλ’ ὅτι κατ’ αὐτὰς καὶ δι’ αὐτὰς καὶ ὑπ’ οὐτῶν τὰ τῆδε τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἔχει· ὥστε ἀνάγκη αὐτὰς εἶναι χωριστάς τῆς γενέσεως.* “The forms-in-matter, certainly, are inseparable from their substrata; but it is not in this manner that the Forms were stated to be essences (*ousiai*) of things, but because things in this realm possess their existence in accordance with them and through them and by their agency; so necessarily they are separate from the realm of generation (Dillon J. - O’Meara D. (trans.), 2014: 82-83). We think it is obvious that this verse is a “key” to what is discussed in our study. In fact, it is not impossible that Syrianus uses the term “Eide” to refer to Aristotle and the term “Idea” to refer to Plato. Cf. Proclus, *In Timaeus C*, 24.31-25.17 and E, 285.27-286.1. On a broader reading it would be required that the following statement by Aristotle be included in the discussion: *Λέγω δὲ οὐσίαν ἄνευ ὕλης τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* (*Metaphysica*, 1032b14), whereas immediately before it is noted: *εἶδος δὲ λέγω τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἐκάστου καὶ τὴν πρώτην οὐσίαν* (ibid., 1032b1-2). Book Z is crucial to the whole discussion, but the relevant commentary by Syrianus has not survived.

correctly grasp the theory of "universals". He even shows him to be led into contradictions by the fact that he does not inscribe Plato's syllogisms in their actual structures, with the consequence that he distorts them as to the relation of the two worlds.

c) Despite the fact that he clearly moves along the axis of ontological monism, he is particularly ingenious with regard to the way in which he also elaborates the theory of dualistic realities, with the result that he appears unparalleled in his validation of realism.

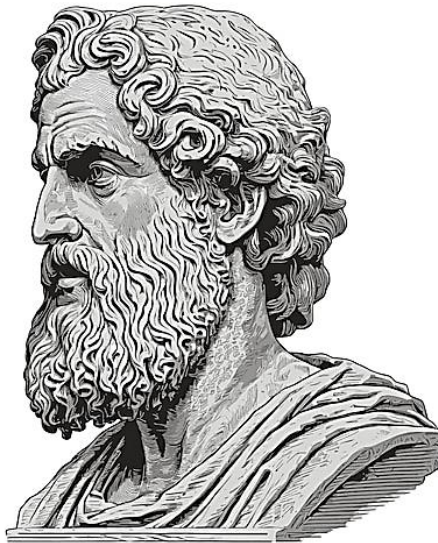
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