

Research Project *The Platonisms of the Late antiquity*

The intellectual life of late antiquity is characterized by a strong concern with principles (*archai*): principles of reality, principles of the world, principles of knowledge. Regardless of how one groups intellectuals in late antiquity — into pagans and Christians, philosophers and theologians — they all speak about principles explicitly or implicitly and some of them actively seek to establish what the principles are (e.g., Plotinus, Porphyry, Origen, Damascius, Gnostics, Hermeticists, theurgists). They clearly deem the project of principles to be crucial for establishing how reality is structured, what the place of humans in the world is, what powers affect our lives, how free are we, how we can attain knowledge, and how we can attain happiness or salvation. The search for principles (understood as metaphysical or theological) is then an important issue both of itself and also for shaping ethics. The series of talks in the academic year 2025 of the research project *The Platonisms of the Late Antiquity* continue exploring, as in the previous year, this topic of principles in its broad application in the intellectual world of late antiquity and will examine questions such as how principles account for reality, how principles explain the interaction between the divine and the human world, and how human happiness and salvation is possible given the structure of reality.

Projet de recherche *Les Platonismes de l'Antiquité tardive*

La vie intellectuelle de la fin de l'Antiquité est caractérisée par un fort intérêt porté aux « principes » (*archai*) : principes de la réalité, principes du monde, principes de la connaissance. Quelle que soit la façon dont on regroupe les intellectuels de la fin de l'Antiquité – polythéistes ou chrétiens, philosophes ou théologiens –, tous parlent, explicitement ou implicitement, des principes. Certains cherchent même activement à déterminer ce que sont les principes (par ex., Origène, Plotin, Porphyre, Damascius, les gnostiques, les Hermétistes, les théurgistes). Cette recherche est pour eux capitale, afin d'établir la manière dont la réalité est structurée, de réfléchir à la place des êtres humains dans le monde et aux puissances qui affectent leur vie, de penser dans quelle mesure nous sommes libres, comment nous pouvons atteindre la connaissance, ainsi qu'obtenir le bonheur ou le salut. La recherche des principes (métaphysiques ou théologiques) est ainsi un thème important en lui-même et pour la formation éthique. Le programme des rencontres 2025 du projet de recherche *Les Platonismes de l'Antiquité tardive* propose de continuer d'explorer comme l'année précédente cette thématique des principes dans le monde intellectuel de la fin de l'Antiquité. Il examinera différentes questions, telles que : comment les principes disent la réalité, comment ils expliquent les relations entre les mondes divin et humain et dans quelle mesure le bonheur et le salut sont possibles pour les humains étant donné la structure de la réalité.

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Année académique 2025

Programme de recherche *Les Platonismes de l'Antiquité tardive*

Principles : definition, causality and ascent IV



Projet pluriannuel de recherches dirigé par
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Éric Crégheur
et Dylan Burns

**Accademia
Vivarium novum,
Frascati (Roma)
18-21 Mai 2025**

Comité d'organisation :
Luciana Soares Santoprete
(CNRS-LEM, Paris) et
Alvaro Bo (Zètesis, Accademia Vivarium novum - Frascati, Roma)



Sunday, 18 May 2025

8.30 Breakfast

9.30 Official welcome to Accademia *Vivarium novum*

Chair: Anna Van den Kerchove (IPT-LEM, CNRS, Paris)

10.00 Anca Vasiliu (CNRS – Centre Léon Robin, Paris)

L'intellect qui voit. La connaissance sans le langage selon Plotin (Enn. V, 3 [T.49])

Le caractère conditionnel de la lumière dans l'exercice de la vue ne détermine pas seulement la vision. Demeurant tout autant conditionnelle pour la pensée, la lumière, qui n'agit pas elle-même et qui n'est pas non plus causale, s'avère révéler, et peut-être constituer même, ce qui est commun à la vue, faculté de l'âme, et à l'intellection. Pour Plotin elle ne sert pas de terme de comparaison, comme pour Aristote dans *De anima* III où l'intellect qui peut tout produire, contrairement à celui qui peut tout engendrer, possède une manière d'être ou une disposition propre comparable à la lumière (ἐστὶν ὁ μὲν τοιοῦτος νοῦς τῷ πάντα γίνεσθαι, ὁ δὲ τῷ πάντα ποιεῖν, ὥς ἕξις τις, οἷον τὸ φῶς, 430a14-15). L'intellect n'engendrant pas et ne produisant rien non plus, selon Plotin, et la visibilité relevant pour lui exclusivement d'une faculté de l'âme, la lumière ne peut que s'y rapporter autrement, s'il se découvre qu'elle est déterminante pour la pensée comme pour la vue, et qu'elle n'est pas réductible à la seule fonction conditionnelle de la vision immanente. La lumière serait-elle alors de l'ordre d'un bien commun identifiable à l'*ousia* de l'âme et de l'œil, comme pour Platon, une *ousia* que Plotin aurait prêté également au *noûs* pour un acte particulier qui est celui de la connaissance de soi ?

11.00 Discussion

11.30 Coffee break

12.00 Manon Gibot (EPHE-PSL/LEM, Paris)

La guerre intime dans la quête de Dieu : définition, spatialisation et ascension du cœur chez Origène

Dans ses *Homélies sur Josué*, Origène met en lumière la conflictualité inhérente au cœur humain, y compris après le Baptême, moment qui devrait pourtant inaugurer la paix et l'engagement envers Dieu. Dans cette perspective, le vocabulaire militaire qu'il mobilise élabore une définition du cœur, conçu comme un champ de guerre permanent, où le fidèle est continuellement rappelé à la vigilance. Cette conflictualité apparaît alors comme un point de départ pour la spatialisation du cœur. À l'image de la Terre promise, le cœur – en tant que don de Dieu et donc causé par lui – nécessite une reconquête constante, dans ce qui s'apparente à un processus ascensionnel. Cette communication entend montrer que la guerre intérieure, parce qu'elle est première, ne relève pas de la seule métaphore, mais traduit la réalité structurante du cœur humain, inséparable d'une dynamique de transformation – seule voie d'accès à Dieu et au salut.

13.00 Discussion

13.30 Lunch

Chair: Dylan Burns (University of Amsterdam)

16.00 Michele Abbate (Università di Genova)

Origin and nature of Being in Proclus and Damascius: a comparison

The aim of my paper is to compare the Proclean conception regarding the origin and nature of Being with the one developed by Damascius in his masterpiece, *De Principiis*. In Proclus' metaphysical-theological perspective, Being, in its most primal and purest form, i.e. as ἐν ὄν and Monad of Being, is the product of the mixture of the two very primal Henads 'limit' (πέρας) and 'unlimited' (ἄπειρον or also ἀπειρία), deriving directly from the First Principle, the One-in-itself. In the light of the Platonic *Philebus*, Limit and Unlimited originate the 'mixed', the μικτόν, which Proclus identifies with Being-in-itself or the One-Being. Therefore, Being in its pre-eminent nature (πρώτως ὄν), i.e. in its most unitary and purest form, is generated by the two first principles after the One-in-itself. In this first level of Being the potentiality of ontological determination and plurality is necessarily implied, but not fully unfolded. Substantially different, on the other hand, is the theoretical perspective of Damascius, who identifies Being with the ἡνομένον, that is, "what is unified" in an original way. In Damascius, the unity of pure Being, i.e. prior to any form of ontological determination, seems to be in some way detached from a metaphysical foundation above it. The Unified, in a certain sense, includes in itself the contracted plurality of the totality of beings.

For Damascius, as for Proclus, the fundamental problem is that of establishing and preserving the unity-identity of being, while at the same time presupposing its potential multiplicity. In other words, the issue is to explain the multiplicity of being whilst maintaining its necessary unity, without which the difference between being as such and beings would be lost. Consequently, whereas in the Proclean conception the only way to ensure the original unity of being is to recognise a monadic produced by the two First Henads level and preceding the multiplicity of beings, in Damascius the concept of the Unified implies the notion of a unity that is devoid of distinction, but at the same time has within itself a reflection or appearance (ἐμφάνσις) of distinction. Therefore, like Proclus' One Being, Damascius' Unified constitutes the original and problematic dimension of being in its original unity prior to ontological difference, yet somehow implying potential plurality.

17.00 Discussion

17.30 Coffee break

18.00 **Nicola Spanu (Foro di studi avanzati "Gaetano Massa")**

Il primo principio negli Oracoli caldaici e nelle correnti coeve: gnostica, ermetica e dei primi cristiani

Questa relazione si focalizza sull'investigare la natura del primo principio negli *Oracoli Caldaici* e tradizioni ad essi coeve: gnostica, ermetica e cristiana antica. Gli *Oracoli Caldaici* erano una collezione di dichiarazioni oracolari in esametri messi per iscritto nel II secolo della nostra era anche se la tradizione orale a cui essi fanno riferimento è senza dubbio molto più antica. Più o meno nello stesso tempo in cui gli oracoli degli dei venivano messi per iscritto, altri sistemi filo-sofico-religiosi emergevano nel contesto culturale della società romana tardo antica: in questo articolo considereremo la tradizione gnostica, quella ermetica quale è riflessa dalla collezione di testi conosciuta come *Corpus Hermeticum* e cristiana antica, come rappresentante della quale verrà considerato Clemente di Alessandria. L'articolo si focalizzerà particolarmente su come queste tradizioni differenti ma correlate (dal momento che tutte si sono sviluppate a partire da un contesto culturale, religioso e filosofico greco) abbiano affrontato il problema di definire il primo principio in modi che lo rendessero comprensibile ad una persona di media cultura dell'epoca. Data l'ampiezza di tale tematica, l'articolo non presume di affrontarla in modo esaustivo ma almeno di gettare le fondamenta per una ricerca ulteriore su di essa nonché su altri ambiti ad essa correlati.

19.00 Discussion

21.00 Dinner

Monday, 19 May 2025

8.30-9.30 : Concert and breakfast

9.30 : Visit of the Villa

Chair: Luciana Gabriela Soares Santoprete (LEM - CNRS, Paris)

10.00 **Fabienne Jourdan (CNRS, UMR 8167, Orient & Méditerranée, Paris)**

Être, Bien et Penser chez Numénios : une analyse du fragment 27 F (fr. 19 dP). Et Plotin ?

Dans son dialogue *Sur le Bien*, Numénios veut parvenir à définir le Bien et à donner à le rencontrer concrètement. À cette fin, il utilise une dialectique génératrice de niveaux de la réalité. Elle permet de concevoir le Bien comme premier principe et de le distinguer notamment de celui que je nommerais « Le Bon », le demiurge qui met en œuvre la bonté du premier dans le monde sensible. Elle permet aussi de les concevoir comme deux intellects au mode de penser distinct ; le deuxième a deux activités :

- a) l'intellection proprement dite (νοῆν), qui correspond à la saisie et contemplation du Bien et qui est à l'origine de la détermination des formes,
- b) le raisonnement dianoétique, qui réalise la demiurgie, c'est-à-dire l'organisation des formes ; le premier intellect, quant à lui, n'intelligit pas.

Numénios l'identifie au $\varphi\rho\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$, un penser à l'état pur, privé d'objet, sans doute même de sujet. Il est le Bien et l'Être à la participation duquel les autres réalités doivent leur être et leur bonté. Ainsi peuvent-elles – pouvons-nous – rencontrer concrètement le Bien. Par une analyse du fragment 27 F (fr. 19 dP), l'exposé découvrira la manière dont Numénios parvient à cet enseignement particulièrement original et comment il l'étaie. Il en décèlera ensuite les enjeux : la distinction du premier intellect numénien d'avec le moteur immobile qui se pense lui-même d'Aristote ; sa distinction d'avec un intellect « médioplatonicien » qui penserait les formes ; les différentes articulations de l'intelligible associées à la conception de ces deux intellects. Une ouverture à la comparaison avec Plotin sera proposée à la discussion commune.

11.00 Discussion

11.30 Coffee break

12.00 **Enrico Volpe (Istituto Italiano per gli studi filosofici/
Università di Salerno)**

Numenius (and Plotinus) on the First God and the Second God as Principles

Many scholars underlined the ontological differences between Numenius first and second God. In fact, we know that the first God is perfect and immutable, while the second is to some extent more involved in the generation of the world. In Numenius' fragments we find the term «archē» according to a technical use only in fr. 16 des Places (=24F) in which Numenius talks about a principle of essence (the Good) opposed to a principle of genesis (the second). To what extent, so, does these two Gods both principles? My talk aims to investigate on the role of cause of the first and the second God in order to understand in what sense Numenius talks about them as principles and how he uses this term only once. In addition, I intend to compare Numenius' view with that of Plotinus in order to show what are the elements in common between the two authors and in which respect did Plotinus go beyond Numenius.

13.00 Discussion

13.30 Lunch

Chair: George Karamanolis (University of Wien)

16.00 **Mariano Troiano (Universidad nacional de La Rioja - Conicet -
Universidad nacional de Cuyo)**

Infinite sweetness: Gnostic Valentinian response to the emergence of multiplicity

In *Treatise 11* (En. V, 2) Plotinus summarises what has been discussed previously on how the multiplicity of being proceeds from the One (*Treatises 7, 9 and 10*). The text affirms that the One superabounds and produces the Intellect at the beginning of all that exists. This fundamental question of the passage from the perfect transcendence to the imperfect reality of the cosmos receives in the *Tripartite Tractate* (NH I, 5) an answer that tries to agree Christian concepts with Platonic principles. Indeed, in 55,32-33 we read that the Father wishes to be known by 'superabundance of his sweetness'. The key concept of 'sweetness' is repeated several times at the origin of the passage from the one to the many both in the *Tripartite Tractate* and in the *Gospel of Truth* (NH I, 3). That is why in this paper we propose to analyse the use of this concept in both texts, looking for similarities with Plotinus' texts that may clarify its role in the valentinian process of emanation.

17.00 Discussion

17.30 Coffee break



18.00 **Wendy Elgersma Helleman (University of Jos/University of
Toronto)**

Marius Victorinus on divine power

As a preliminary exploration of Victorinus' understanding of divine power, this article recognizes its significance for his development of a trinitarian theology through the analogy with the Neoplatonic (horizontal) noetic triad: being, life, and mind (*esse, vivere, intellegere*); these he recognizes as a trio of powers, aligned respectively with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Victorinus uses a traditional definition of power as the causal capacity to effect change, but his flexible approach is evident in the variety of interchangeable terms (*potentia, virtus, vis, or potestas*) used to express power. With Tertullian, Victorinus affirms the Trinity as a single power, because a single divine substantia is shared among the three; this assures each of the three as equal and identically divine. He goes beyond Tertullian by affirming each as a distinct power, each having its own power of self-movement, self-generation, and self-determination. The noetic analogy is extended by implementing Middle Platonist (Numenian) principles of mutual implication and predominance. These themes present the heart of his argument for a single divine *substantia* (οὐσία), while maintaining three powers as ὁμοουσία. While Victorinus' language and arguments for co-inherence and joint activities overlap considerably with those of the Cappadocians, his basic concern differs radically from theirs, for they sought to establish the unity of divine nature (through joint action). Recognizing that defense of the ὁμοούσιον by the Western church was understood in terms of Sabellian confusion of the three, Victorinus accented a trio of powers to establish clear distinctions.

19.00 Discussion

21.00 Dinner

8.30 Breakfast

Chair: Luciana Gabriela Soares Santoprete (LEM - CNRS, Paris)

10.00 **Claudia Lo Casto (Università degli Studi di Salerno)**

Le modalità di ascesa al Principio in Plotino

Plotino affronta il tema dell'ascesa al Principio in due celebri *Trattati*, VI 9 [9] e VI 7 [38], descrivendo le modalità di attuazione del processo di unificazione dell'Anima con l'Uno, reso possibile attraverso una vera e propria conversione (ἐπιστρέφειν) alla sua autentica origine. L'ascesa dell'Anima al Principio è descritta nei termini di un cammino che comprende differenti momenti, richiami secondo una scala gerarchica di intensità. Scopo di questo contributo è quello di delineare i caratteri e le modalità di questa esperienza e di analizzare, inoltre, il linguaggio utilizzato da Plotino per descriverla.

11.00 Discussion

11.30 Coffee break

12.00 **Flora Vourch (CNRS – Centre Léon Robin, Paris)**

Le beau comme principe : démiurgie et suspension du sensible chez Plotin lecteur de Platon

Le *kosmos noētos* des *Ennéades* est au fondement du tout sensible et il est en même temps, singulièrement, le lieu du beau. Quand Platon faisait de la beauté une Forme du topos noētos, par ailleurs jamais décrit par lui comme *kosmos*, Plotin l'identifie donc avec l'intelligible lui-même, et y décèle le principe et la source du sensible, soit l'étant réel et véritable comme tel. Les deux dimensions qu'engage le caractère principiel, la causalité et l'ascension, se déclinent ainsi dans les *Ennéades* à l'aune des visages que peut revêtir le beau dans les *Dialogues* – qualité que le discours du *Timée* reconnaît au ciel pour déterminer la nature de son modèle, ou encore horizon de l'*ērōs* dans le *Banquet*. Il s'agira d'analyser successivement ces deux aspects, en s'attachant à montrer l'écart pris par Plotin d'avec Platon et les modalités de son opération : production à partir du beau de notre monde sensible en tant qu'il est beau, suspension au beau de ce même monde en tant qu'il n'est jamais qu'image.

13.00 Discussion

13.30 Lunch

Chair: George Karamanolis (University of Wien)

16.00 **Mauricio Marsola (Unifesp, São Paulo)**

Le principe de l'économie des principes chez Plotin

L'un des arguments présentés par Plotin dans le traité *Contre les gnostiques* est le principe selon lequel il faut réduire les principes au minimum, contre une multiplication des entités intelligibles soutenue par les gnostiques. On trouve ce type de raisonnement dans d'autres contextes chez Plotin et il nous permet aussi de penser comment éviter l'objection aristotélicienne d'une duplication inutile du monde intelligible et maintenir le statut authentique de ce qui est un principe et de sa fonction métaphysique.

17.00 Discussion

17.30 Coffee break

18.00 **Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (Florida State University)**

What does the first principle of reality produce and what does it generate?

To produce (ποιεῖν) and to generate (γεννᾶν) are treated interchangeably in the scholarship on the first principle of reality. For something to be the first principle of reality, it must produce or generate that which is after it. But are they in-deed interchangeable? And can we use them so? This investigation will examine three case scenarios in three consecutive generations of philosophers in late antiquity. For Nicomachus of Gerasa at the beginning of the second century CE, the One is the absolutely simple and indivisible principle from which all numbers and, by extension, all reality come to exist. Less than a century later, for Plotinus, the One is also the absolutely simple and indivisible principle 'beyond existence' from which everything there is derives. Less than a half of century later, for Iamblichus too, the One is the absolutely simple and indivisible principle 'beyond existence and discursivity' from which reality comes to existence. Behind the monolithic first principle in Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic metaphysics, the ontological boundaries between number (ἀριθμός) and substance (οὐσία) seem to be actively drawn and redrawn. In Nicomachus' *Introductio arithmetica*, forms of ποιεῖν tend to denote the mathematical operations of numbers (e.g., 1.9.5; 1.10.9) and figures (e.g., 2.6.3; 2.12.2), while forms of γεννᾶν, the other than mathematical discussion of numbers and figures (e.g., 1.16.4; 1.22.6). Nicomachus' distinction between mathematical and meta-mathematical treatment of mathematical objects is not conclusive, however. Its delineation comes to the fore in Plotinus. Notably, he discusses the origin of number from the One and the Indefinite Dyad before he examines the origin of Intellect as the second principle of reality in *Enneads* 5.4 [7].2 and 5.1 [10].5 and 7. What is

8.30 Breakfast

Chair : George Karamanolis (University of Wien)

9.30 Álvaro Bo (Accademia Vivarium novum)

The mathematical syntax of the world: Proclus and the elementable structure of principles

Proclus is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest ancient systematizers of science: to the axiomatically ordered *Elementa* of Euclid the Diadochus added two other «elementations», namely *physica* and *theologica*. In this manner, Proclus completed the elemental arrangement of the three contemplative sciences: physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. Thus, it can be asserted without much hesitation that Proclus held in high esteem the logical arrangement of the elementations. But why so? The goal of my contribution is to provide the philosophical reasons for the momentous place that the logico-mathematical structures of analysis-synthesis played in Proclus' philosophy and his understanding of the notion of «principle» and «element». I shall illustrate how and why this ancient mathematical methodology underwent an ontological reading in Proclus' philosophy. In Proclus' view, the two epistemic and logical moments of analysis (back to the principles) and synthesis (from the discovery of the principle to their consequences) possess their metaphysical correlates in the process of ἐπιστροφή and πρόοδος – both pivotal notions to the Neoplatonic worldview. I will show how, according to Proclus, the elementation is the sort of discourse that most faithfully resembles the structure of the world and, thus, the most appropriate for the scientific discourse about first principles.

10.30 Discussion

11.30 George Karamanolis (University of Wien)

Conclusions

13.30 Lunch

15.30 Departure

more, in the latter, he refers to the One specifically as “the producer of number” (ὁ τὸν ἀριθμὸν ποιῶν), while he exclusively and consistently examines the role of number in the intelligible reality as ontogenic or generative (e.g., 5.2 [11].1; 6.6 [34].9). Plotinus distinguishes between the origin of number and the origin of Intellect within Nicomachus' all-inclusive One, as the first principle of both mathematics and metaphysics. He coins the concept of “number as substance” (ἀριθμὸς ὡς οὐσία, 5.1 [10].5) or “substantial number” (ὁ οὐσιώδης ἀριθμός, 6.6 [34].9) and considers the production of number from the first principle of reality prior and thus necessary for the generation of Intellect from it. For Plotinus, the One as the first principle of reality is different from the Monad as the first principle of mathematics (6.9 [9].5). His distinction is not lost on Iamblichus. For him, Plotinus' ontological priority of number to Intellect does not fit clearly in the distinction between the first and the second principle of reality. Is meta-mathematical number an intermediary between them? To accommodate both his Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic interests, Iamblichus coins the Unified (τὸ ἡνωμένον, in *Tim.* fr. 7) to denote the ontogenic One underlying the existence of reality and the unified ones (ἐνάδες) as the generative prototypes of everything there is. What starts as a joint venture between mathematics and metaphysics to uncover the source and structure of numbers, figures, and reality, ends as a hierarchically layered cascade of ontogenic entities the knowledge of which, in Iamblichus, is graspable by mathematics only in a preparatory way (*DCMS* 27.10) and fully accessible by theurgy. This delineation allows him to remain faithful to the conceptual repertoire of mathematics in his commentary on Nicomachus' *Introductio arithmetica*. For he delegates the ontogenic One, as the generative principle of reality, to its proper place in the highest echelons of reality. The first principle of reality, then, can be said to produce only number, but to generate reality. Nicomachus, Plotinus, and Iamblichus learn incrementally to disambiguate the mathematical and meta-mathematical use of ‘to produce’ and ‘to generate’ and so should we.

19.00 Discussion

21.00 Dinner