

Reconciling Plato's and Aristotle's Cosmologies. Attempts at Harmonization in Simplicius

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I. An Eternal Problem

For every patient reader, the cosmologies described in Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *On the Heavens*, respectively, differ in many respects: generation of the world versus its eternity, intelligent design instead of natural order, the position and movement of the earth, the status and composition of matter, the definition of heaviness, the superiority of what is unnatural over what is natural. Aristotle refers to the *Timaeus* repeatedly, so as to distance himself explicitly from Plato and to distinguish his own description of heaven and the world from Plato's.¹ In this context, when a commentator assumes the premise of a fundamental harmony between two such opposed philosophical systems, how does he deal with and, more importantly, resolve these discrepancies?²

In this paper, I shall address a particular aspect of the disharmony, more precisely how it is interpreted and resolved by Simplicius in his commentary on Aristotle's *On the Heavens*: the question about the being and temporality of the *κόσμος*.³ Plato's and Aristotle's positions appear to be contrary on this point, since the former, in the *Timaeus*, insists on the creation of the world

1 *De cael.* I 10.280 a 28–32; II 13.293 b 30–32; III 1.299 b 31–300 a 3; III 2.300 b 16–25; III 8.306 b 18–19; IV 2.308 b 3–8.

2 On harmony as a methodological principle in Neoplatonism, see G. E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry* (Oxford Philosophical Monographs), Oxford 2006, 243–330 and I. Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Plato and Aristotle* (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 18), Leiden 2015.

3 Another interesting case study is given by the nature of the simple bodies and the objections raised by Aristotle against the composition of matter according to Plato, Democritus and the Pythagoreans. Simplicius enters into the details of the controversy, taking over some arguments from Proclus. However, the extensiveness of this issue (Simplicius lists, dissects and refutes fifteen objections) prohibits me from giving a full analysis here (Simp., *In De cael.* 636, 1–672, 23). It will be sufficient to note that his methodological principles are identical to those used elsewhere – in particular, the idea that Aristotle only criticizes a purely superficial reading of Plato's text.

by the Demiurge, whereas the latter, in his *On the Heavens*, asserts the eternity of the heavens.⁴ Far from being a triviality, this difference will lead Simplicius to develop hermeneutical strategies designed to restore the harmony between his authorities.

From our perspective, the question about the eternity of the world offers a fruitful case study, insofar as it forces Simplicius to mobilize all the strategies he usually uses in this commentary to restore the harmony between Plato and Aristotle. Also I shall lead here a parallel investigation on two separate fronts. First, I will identify the methodological principles implemented through the attempt at harmonising, so as to contribute to our understanding of Simplicius' way of exegesis. Then, I will investigate the conceptual effect, regarding cosmology, reached by this attempt. In other words, I will explore how Simplicius' interpretative tools lead him to produce some new philosophical theses.

II. Proclus on Generation

Simplicius' position about the eternity of the world is part of a long and controversial history, opposing several points of view.⁵ Therefore, to gauge its originality, it could be useful to examine first a former attempt at conciliation, drawn from Proclus' Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*. If Proclus believes that Aristotle globally imitates Plato in natural philosophy, he notes that, from similar premises, the first shows heaven to be *ungenerated* (ἀγένητος), the second to be *generated* (γενητός).⁶ However, far from being satisfied with the disagreement, he questions its reality by considering both positions and by identifying two reasons why the *Timaeus* mentions the gen-

4 *Tim.* 28 A-29 C; *De cael.* I 3.269 b 13–270 b 4.

5 As noted by F. Ferrari, *Esegesi, commento e sistema nel medioplatonismo*, in: A. Neschke-Hentschke (ed.), *Argumenta in Dialogos Platonis. Teil 1: Platoninterpretation und ihre Hermeneutik von der Antike bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts. Akten des internationalen Symposions vom 27.–29. April 2006 im Instituto Svizzero di Roma (Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana 31)*, Basel 2010, 52, the problem and its first solution seem to originate in Xenocrates. Cf. H. Dörrie – M. Baltes, *Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus. Platonische Physik (im antiken Verständnis) II. Bausteine 125–150: Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar (Der Platonismus in der Antike Bd. 5)*, Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt 1998, 138–145 and 426–535.

6 Procl., *In Tim.* I 237, 18–238, 5 (on *Tim.* 28 A-C). Proclus finds in Plotinus II 1 (40) 2 the five following statements: “(1) Simple movement is the movement of a simple body. (2) A simple body has a determinate natural simple movement. (3) There are two simple movements. (4) A contrary has only one contrary. (5) What has no contrary cannot be destroyed by anything.”

eration of the world: the need for an *external cause* and the *bond with time*. Therefore, in what sense should *generation* be understood?

According to Proclus, the *Timaeus* considers the way the world could have a beginning *though lasting forever*, rather than its inclusion in being or becoming (Procl., *In Tim.* 276, 19–30; see *Tim.* 28 B 7). When questioning the generation of the heavens, it is less important to understand its mode of being than its origin. In view of its composite and perceptible nature, the world cannot possess either an essence or an activity remaining in unity, because composition involves both *generation*, i.e. the coming to be of a compound from a simple reality; and the action of an *external cause*, that produces the compound.⁷ The question of *coming to be* and of the *origin* has obviously nothing to do with a temporal beginning. It rather examines the *principle* of the coming to be and the *cause* of becoming. In this sense, it fits with the second reason for Proclus to say that a reality is *generated*:⁸ The world would be a generated reality *because it has a determinate origin* (rather than every form of coming to be). However, as the world constitutes the most perfect corporeal being, its external origin must produce the completion he always holds in itself. Also that can be the only external principle *par excellence* that Proclus identifies with the *final cause*, the only principle able to confer existence to the world (Procl., *In Tim.* I 285, 30–286, 3). Therefore, the world has an ἀρχή in the first meaning, that of the *final cause*: the *Good*.

As for the temporality of this *genesis*, Proclus holds that the world is generated *in the totality of time*, for, as Plato says (*Tim.* 38 B), the *genesis* of the infinite time is *contemporary* and *coextensive* with the generation of the world. The latter cannot have been generated *at any moment of time*, since there was no *moment*, in the strict sense, *before its coming to be*. Thus this particular becoming cannot have come into being in any part of time, only in the whole and infinite time (Procl., *In Tim.* I 281, 14–20). In other words, if the world has its being in time, its limits coincide with the limits of time, *not being included or limited by time*. For this reason, the world has an ἀρχή in a second sense: It has a beginning that results from its *being in becoming*, which is not a temporal beginning, because it extends over the entire length of time.

By themselves, neither of these conditions is sufficient to argue that the world is γενητός (I 290, 17–25). On the one hand, causality concerns realities

7 Procl., *In Tim.* I 276, 19–30. On this point, Proclus explicitly agrees with Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus (Procl., *In Tim.* I 277, 8–13). The history of these interpretations has been studied by A. Lernould, *Physique et Théologie. Lecture du Timée de Platon par Proclus* (Problématiques philosophiques. Philosophie ancienne), Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2001, 219–246.

8 Procl., *In Tim.* I 279, 30–280, 20. The four meanings are: (1) What has a beginning in time; (2) what comes from a cause; (3) what is a compound; (4) what has the nature of the generated being.

that radically exclude becoming as well: If the eternal Being has a cause too, the One, it would be absurd to consider it as being generated or as becoming. On the other hand, the co-extensiveness of the world and time does not imply generation yet. Therefore, Proclus adds a reason arising from these two conditions: The world has become or is generated, as it both *always comes into being* (ἀεὶ γιγνόμενον) and *is already achieved* (γεγενημένον). Since its generation extends over the entire length of infinite time, it is in a state of indefinite completion, meaning that its perpetual beginning also includes its completion. Therefore, it *always becomes identical to itself*, but *never is*. Paraphrasing Aristotle, Proclus holds that the world, unlike the bodies down on earth, *is indefinitely being completed*.⁹ It becomes and has come into being, *absolutely*, to the extent that its being both comes from an external cause and is inseparable from time.

What can we conclude vis-à-vis Aristotle? Considering this mode of *γενητός*, the world must be said to be both *perishable* and *imperishable*, but *in different respects* (I 293, 14–20). On the one hand, it seems to be *imperishable* in the temporal sense, since it will never disappear within the limits of time, as, according to Plato, it coincides with time, and as, according to Aristotle, it is indefinitely being completed. On the other hand, it seems to be *perishable*, since every *γενητός* involves corruption: As a corporeal being, it is unable to preserve itself. Thence the persistence and continuity of its being require *an external moving cause*, which ensures its infinite capacity to last, whether it be the Father of the *Timaeus* or the first and unmoved cause of Aristotle.¹⁰ Therefore, Plato and Aristotle can agree that the world is both *generated* and *ungenerated*, but *in different respects*.

If the opposition between Plato and Aristotle results only from the *λέξις*, rather than from the *θεωρία*, from a difference of words rather than of meaning, is there any nuance remaining? Proclus mentions three, without any attempt to solve them.

Firstly, “Plato says that the being of heaven is coextensive with the whole time, while Aristotle simply poses this essence as ‘always being’.”¹¹ Plato holds that there is an essential union between heaven and time, while Aris-

9 Procl., *In Tim.* I 282, 13–22. Cf. *Meteor.* I 2.339 a 26: ἀεὶ ἐν τέλει. Proclus then holds seven objections (286, 20–289, 5) against those who, from an Aristotelian inspiration, think that Plato denies the *everlastingness* of the world (according to A.-J. Festugière, Proclus: Commentaire sur le Timée (Bibliothèque des textes philosophiques), 5 tomes, Paris 1966–1968, he is talking about Plutarch and Atticus; see II, 134, n. 1).

10 Procl., *In Tim.* I 294, 8–28. Proclus seems to refer to *Met.* Α 7.1072 a 21–25.

11 Procl., *In Tim.* I 294, 29–295, 1: Πλάτων [*Tim.* 38 B] μὲν τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῷ παντὶ χρόνῳ συμπαρατείνεσθαι φησιν, Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ ἀεὶ οὖσαν ἀπλῶς ὑποτίθεται. Proclus refers to *De cael.* I 9.279 a 25–30.

tote assigns temporal eternity to heaven, without relating (in return) heaven with time. Consequently, the opposition is between *coming to be in the infinite time* and *being always subsistent*, which reveals Aristotle's inconsistency. Since, because of its corporeality, the world has a finite existence, whereas eternity is infinite, the world cannot *be* but must *continuously become* from an infinite power. Therefore, Aristotle is compelled to admit that the world is becoming, *in the sense that it becomes infinite concomitantly with time*. If Proclus restores the truth of Plato's thesis, he does it at the expense of Aristotle, by imposing on him a logical constraint.

Secondly, if they agree on the *numerical unity of the world*, Aristotle finds it in *being*, Plato in *becoming* (I 295, 13–18). Indeed, Plato assigns an active cause (ποιητική αἰτία) to the world, which is *logically* prior, without depriving it of its everlastingness, because time is always necessarily bound with heaven. The latter can thus be in time, that is to say, *becoming the same over the infinite length of time*, because it has a being *bound to time*. In contrast, Aristotle must say that the world *is* the same, in the present time that characterizes being. However, considering his definition of time as a *number of the movement*, time necessarily comes with change and it cannot be associated with numerical identity. Therefore, Proclus argues that Aristotle's thesis on time prevents him from admitting both that the world has an active cause (i.e. is generated) and that it is *numerically* identical, as *being in time* implies *changing*.

Thirdly, Proclus argues that Aristotle systematically devaluates the attributes assigned to the first principles vis-à-vis Plato: what Plato gives to the *One*, Aristotle attributes to the *Intellect*; what Plato gives to the *demiurgic Intellect*, Aristotle attributes to *heaven* and the *heavenly gods*; and what Plato gives to the *essence of heaven*, Aristotle attributes to *circular motion*. Proclus believes that Aristotle forsakes theological principles and focuses, *more than one should*, on physical demonstrations. Therefore, unlike Plato, he loses the mode of generation proper to everlastingness, which avoids linking *ungenerated* and *imperishable*, *generated* and *perishable* (I 295, 19–14). In this regard, Aristotle missed in what sense the generation of the universe is specific, and how it is intimately bound with time.

Proclus' analysis basically relies on a *principle of causality*, which provides the framework already at work for determining the σκοπός: Basically, the opposition between Plato and Aristotle can be led back to a different use of causality. In the *Timaeus*, Plato clearly studies the science of nature *as a whole*. He wants to reach causes, particularly the divine and separate causes of the world.¹² Thence he uses all types of cause and, trying to identify the principles

12 Procl., *In Tim.* I 1, 4–20; 2, 2–8 and 2, 30–4, 5. See I 217, 18–27. On the *Timaeus'* σκοπός as Proclus understood it, Lernould (see note 7) 27–38. See C. Steel, *Why Should We Prefer*

of nature, distinguishes what is final from what is accessory. Aristotle, for his part, “extended his teaching beyond the due measure”, insisting on many details far removed from the principles and the first causes. Moreover, through his explanations, he preferred material causes to formal ones (I 7, 8–16).

If for Plato the world has an active cause by which it comes to be, its ἀρχή (its beginning and principle), i.e. the cause of its generation which also provides its perfection and completion, is a *final cause*: the Good. For Aristotle, in contrast, the world seems to have only a moving cause. It is imperishable because it depends on a *producing cause* – an *unmoved moving action*. The opposition between Plato and Aristotle basically results from a different use of *finality* and *efficiency*. For the former, the world must both be born and tend to a *sovereign principle*, the Good. For the latter, the world is always affected by an eternal movement, which is unstoppable.

In a word, Proclus does not propose a genuine attempt at reconciling Plato’s *Timaeus* and Aristotle’s *On the Heavens*. If, in reading the *Timaeus*, he happens to use Aristotelian elements, he rather insists on the difference between their levels of discourse: Plato studies nature from a *theological* perspective, whereas Aristotle adopts a *physical* point of view.¹³ And this seems to have led him sometimes down wrong paths. Therefore, the harmony between these authors cannot exceed the obvious meaning of their texts and the list of the discrepancies they reveal.

III. The σκοπός of the *Timaeus* according to Simplicius

Simplicius is far from casting Proclus’ reading completely aside. Nevertheless, regarding their understandings of Plato’s and Aristotle’s cosmologies, their first and main difference concerns the σκοπός they assign to the *De caelo* and to the *Timaeus*, respectively. But assigning a different purpose to the book on which they comment necessarily affects the perspective they adopt vis-à-vis the book on which they do not directly comment. Indeed, reading Simplicius, the opposition arises immediately (Simp., *In De cael.* 3, 16–27):

Plato’s *Timaeus* to Aristotle’s *Physics*? Proclus’ Critique of Aristotle’s Causal Explanation of the Physical World, in: R. W. Sharples – A. Sheppard (edd.), *Ancient Approaches to Plato’s Timaeus* (Supplement to the Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies vol. 78), London 2003, 175 and 180–183, about the different conceptions of causality.

13 Proclus reminds that, unlike Aristotle, Plato did not mention that the world was perishable, because of its religious scruples and of its respect toward the world (Procl., *In Tim.* I 293, 6–9).

[Aristotle] clearly does not explain the world in this treatise as Plato did in the *Timaeus*, where he treated both of the principles of natural objects, matter and form, motion and time, and of the general composition of the world, and gave a particular account both of the heavenly bodies and of those below the moon, in the latter case occupying himself both with atmospheric phenomena and with the minerals, plants, and animals on the earth up to and including the composition of man and of his parts.

Here, however, very little is said about the world as a whole, and only such things as it has in common with the heaven, i.e. that it is eternal, limited in size, and single, and that it has these features because the heaven is eternal, limited and single. But if anyone wishes to inspect Aristotle's theory of the world, it must be said that he presents his account of the world in all of his physical treatises taken together.¹⁴

Ἐπειτα ὅτι οὐ φαίνεται περὶ τοῦ κόσμου διδάσκων ἐν τούτοις, ὥσπερ ὁ Πλάτων ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ τάς τε ἀρχὰς τῶν φυσικῶν, ὕλην τε καὶ εἶδος καὶ κίνησιν καὶ χρόνον, καὶ τὴν κοινὴν σύστασιν τοῦ κόσμου παραδέδωκε καὶ ἴδια περὶ τε τῶν οὐρανίων καὶ περὶ τῶν ὑπὸ σελήνην ἐδίδαξε καὶ τούτων τὰ τε μετέωρα πολυπραγμονεῖ καὶ τὰ ἐν γῆ μέταλλα καὶ φυτὰ καὶ ζῷα καὶ μέχρι τῆς ἀνθρώπου συστάσεως καὶ τῶν μορίων αὐτοῦ· ἐνταῦθα δὲ ἐλάχιστα περὶ τοῦ κόσμου παντὸς εἴρηται καὶ ταῦτα, ὅσα κοινὰ πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἦν αὐτῷ, ὅτι αἰδιος καὶ πεπερασμένος τῷ μεγέθει καὶ εἷς, καὶ ταῦτα διὰ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἔχων, ὅτι αἰδιος οὗτος καὶ πεπερασμένος καὶ εἷς. ἀλλ' εἰ βούλοιτό τις τὴν περὶ κόσμου θεωρίαν τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους ὁρᾶν, ἐν πάσαις αὐτὸν ἅμα ταῖς φυσικαῖς ἑαυτοῦ πραγματείαις τὸν περὶ κόσμου λόγον ἀποδεδωκέναι ῥητέον.

Like Proclus, Simplicius emphasises the contrast between the *comprehensive* perspective of the *Timaeus*, which deals with the world *as a whole*, and the *restricted* perspective of the *De caelo*, which is limited to an understanding of the heavens and the elements within.¹⁵ But, since he admits the existence of a *progressive program*, he can justify Aristotle's decision to limit his treatise to a single topic and to divide his physical doctrine into several works by arguing that Aristotle intended to produce knowledge in *an increasing order of difficulty*, instead of delivering the most sophisticated doctrine in

14 Tr. R. J. Hankinson, Simplicius: On Aristotle On the Heavens 1.1–4 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), London 2002.

15 Simp., *In De cael.* 5, 35–6, 7 and 551, 2–4. As noted by G. Guldentops, Plato's *Timaeus* in Simplicius' *In De caelo*. A Confrontation with Alexander, in: T. Leinkauf – C. Steel (edd.), *Platons Timaios als Grundtext der Kosmologie in Spätantike, Mittelalter und Renaissance*. Plato's *Timaeus* and the Foundations of Cosmology in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy 34,1), Leuven 2005, 199, Simplicius does not determine precisely the σκοπός of the *Timaeus*, but mainly its general scope.

the most sophisticated fashion at once – as Plato did because he wrote for seasoned philosophers.¹⁶ With this perspective, Simplicius immediately positions *De caelo* at a lower level of teaching than the *Timaeus*, insofar as it would be designed for a less informed audience, rather than reproaching it, as Proclus did, to expand on some points *beyond due measure*. Instead of charging Aristotle for abounding into undue details, he appeals for *benevolence* and *pedagogical caution*. This leads to a more charitable hermeneutic toward Aristotle's text.

This also explains why the emphasis on causality disappears from the analysis of the *De caelo*: Because he limits the issue to a part of the world, Aristotle does not need to raise the question to the perspective of the higher causes and principles, from which the whole could be deduced and described. He rather produces an analysis of a single level – the highest – and of its properties and components. In this sense, *De caelo* appears as a *propaedeutic* to reading the *Timaeus*, because the former describes on an *analytical mode* what the latter brings together in a *synthetic form*. In other words, if causality seems necessary to understand how the universe as a whole can be produced (as in the *Timaeus*), it becomes secondary when we are to describe the individual beings themselves, rather than their gradual appearance.

Such distinct perspectives explain why the forms of harmonization differ according to Proclus or Simplicius. Depending on the point of view, the *συμφωνία* receives diverse accentuations and appears to be more or less harmonious.

IV. Eternity or Generation

In the beginning of his commentary on the *De caelo* (I 2–3), Simplicius engages in a controversy with Philoponus, namely about whether the world is eternal or generated. While his opponent pretends to agree with Plato *against* Aristotle, Simplicius keeps affirming the concord between these authorities.¹⁷ Ac-

16 Contra Steel (see note 12) 175–176, who asserts that, wanting to explain the world, late commentators preferred the physical argumentation of Aristotle instead of the metaphorical language of Plato. Regarding Simplicius, this preference only applies to the educational context of his Commentary, since he keeps repeating that Plato expressed the truth more accurately than Aristotle, whom he must use in order to help his reader, newborn in philosophy, to understand natural philosophy. In other words, the *Timaeus* does not constitute in his view “a primitive antecedent of Aristotle's more developed and articulated views on nature”, but it is *the most complete expression of natural philosophy*.

17 Simp., *In De cael.* 80, 24–81, 3; 84, 11–15; 85, 31–86, 28; 91, 7–20. Philoponus had written a *Contra Aristotelem*, mainly known through the testimony of Simplicius. P. Hoffmann, *Sur quelques aspects de la polémique de Simplicius contre Jean Philopon: de l'invec-*

ording to him, when Aristotle emphasises the *eternity* of heaven and its *transcendence* from the sublunary bodies, he adopts a position contrary to Plato *only in appearance*, designed to avoid the “gigantic rebellion of impious persons” (Simp., *In De cael.* 86, 3–4) – such as that conducted by Philoponus.

To dispel the apparent opposition and to reveal the fundamental agreement between Aristotle and Plato, Simplicius uses three kinds of arguments: argument *from truth* or *metaphysical* argument, argument *by educational progress* or *literal* argument, argument *by interpretative method* or *exegetical argument*. In Simplicius' mind, each argument is sufficient to prove the agreement. However, their juxtaposition, intertwining, and repeated use help to reinforce the harmony. Therefore, how do they contribute, respectively, to the general thesis?

V. Exposing the Procession

In order to resolve Philoponus' misunderstanding, Simplicius interrupts his commentary of I 3.270 a 12–22, where Aristotle holds that heaven is ungenerated and indestructible, and he begins to *digress* so as to restore harmony with Plato. This *digression* is unique in the *In De cael.* If, like other digressions, even long ones devoted to refuting Philoponus' objections,¹⁸ this one appears in a controversial context, it is unusual because it pursues the positive purpose of exposing the Neoplatonic doctrine, i.e. of becoming perfectly clear by stating the truth itself (instead of opposing to Philoponus' arguments). Indeed, to solve the alleged contradiction between Plato and Aristotle, Simplicius needs to explain what the terms they use respectively mean *within the framework of the general theory*, so as to determine which ones Aristotle denies here to heaven, and to understand the real difference (if any) between Aristotle's and Plato's positions:

Accordingly we should now recall what he said there [*Ph.* I 7] and, after having first distinguished the meanings of ‘comes to be’, we should clari-

tive à la réaffirmation de la transcendance du Ciel, in: I. Hadot (ed.), *Simplicius. Sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie. Actes du colloque international de Paris (28 Sept.–1 Oct. 1985)* (Peripatoi. Philologisch-historische Studien zum Aristotelismus Bd. 15), Berlin–New York 1987, 183–221 has perfectly analysed the rhetorical aspects of the controversy, but also an issue of disagreement, the composition of heaven. Cf. H. Baltussen, *Philosophy and Exegesis in Simplicius. The Methodology of a Commentator*, London 2008, 176–188.

18 Other examples can be found in Simp., *In De cael.* 21, 32–38, 5 (on Xenarchus, then on Philoponus); 42, 17–49, 25; 55, 25–59, 23 (on Xenarchus, then on Philoponus); 66, 4–91, 20.

fy in which sense Aristotle is now making his argument and in which one he denies that heaven comes to be so that we may learn in what senses Plato says the universe comes to be and Aristotle says that it does not without contradicting one another.¹⁹

Χρῆ τῶν ἐκεῖ λεγομένων ὑπομνήσαι, πρότερον δὲ διελόμενον τὰ τοῦ γινόμενου σημαινόμενα, ἐπὶ τίνος νῦν ποιεῖται τὸν λόγον ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης καὶ ποῖον γινόμενον ἀποφάσκει τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, διασαφήσαι, ἴνα καὶ μάθωμεν, πῶς ὁ μὲν Πλάτων γενητὸν λέγει τὸ πᾶν, ὁ δὲ Ἀριστοτέλης ἀγένητον, οὐκ ἐναντιούμενοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους (Simp., *In De cael.* 92, 27–32).

However, Simplicius will not propose a semantic division and list the possible meanings of the term (as Proclus did). He chooses to begin with the *doctrine of principles* so as to reveal, by exposing the mechanism of procession, how one should understand *the generation of heaven from what precedes*.

The first meaning of *γενητόν* stated by Simplicius is the *general* meaning (*κοινῶς*), namely *what receives its existence from some cause*, since every production (or generation) comes from a producer (or generator).²⁰ The *commonality of the meaning* here does not result from its general frequency in ordinary language, as it was apparently the case in Proclus, but rather from its *generality*, that is to say from its occurrence in more numerous realities. According to this, only a single entity can be said *ungenerated*, i.e. the *first cause of everything*, what is “both one and absolutely simple”. Simplicius invokes the authority of the *Phaedrus* on this point: *A first principle cannot come to be* (245 D 1–3). The remainder, however, proceeds from it and participates in its unity (*In De cael.* 92, 34–93, 5). Following this meaning, *being generated* appears to be synonymous with *being a plural reality*, whereas the One itself does not even participate in plurality, but generates it.

Then comes a digression, taken from divine men (*In De cael.* 93, 11–15), which lays out the procession from the One to heaven. This detour through the theological truth is obviously required in an introductory commentary about cosmological truths. It focuses on two features of procession: causality and temporality. On the one hand, each level is defined according to its *proper cause* and to *what it itself causes*, so as to reveal the gradual advent of plurality and partition. On the other hand, each step matches with a form of plurality: the *whole and simultaneous One*, the *always eternal being*, the *always temporal self-mover*.

19 Tr. I. Mueller, Simplicius: On Aristotle On the Heavens 1.3–4 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), London 2011.

20 Simp., *In De cael.* 92, 33–34: τὸ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ὑπόστασιν ἀπὸ τίνος αἰτίου δεχόμενον. Cf. *Cael.* I 11. As noted in n. 8, that is the second meaning listed by Proclus.

	Cause of	Temporality
One	Plurality	Simultaneity
Being	Existence	Eternity
Self-mover	Extension	Temporality

In describing the whole process, Simplicius emphasises the *continuity* of its causal successions. Each step occurs *προσεχῶς* (Simp., *In De cael.* 93, 9; 94, 1–2), and then *εὐθύς* (94, 12; 29; 95, 10). In other words, the entire procession is associated with *immediacy*. Thus, referring the generation of heaven to the mechanism of procession highlights its fundamentally non-diachronic dimension. Nonetheless, the use of two distinct adverbs already reflects a difference in the mode of being and temporality. The former, *προσεχῶς*, denotes *immediacy in eternity*, the continuity which characterises the way out of Being and of what immediately follows. The latter, *εὐθύς*, rather qualifies the *immediacy in levels where temporality and extension occur*. Indeed, the immediacy of procession does not prevent realities from being eternal, while others belong to time. Temporality cannot, however, apply to the process itself. Otherwise it would affect some realities, which by nature are not subject to time. In this respect, the generation of the self-mover and of the heaven is necessarily outside time.

The first procession reveals a first form of *generation*. It comes from the One and processes forth in the unified plurality – the first being, which remains in the One. It can be said to be *generated* in the narrow sense that *it proceeds from the One*. However, even if it is derived from a principle, it is *itself* a principle. Also, *as the first principle of beings*, it must be said to be *non-generated*. Generation and temporality will only appear at the level of the self-mover. This latter constitutes the first body and the first plurality outside unity, composed rather than unified, because time and place reveal internal differences within it.

But rather, as time flows, it is different at different times, so that it also does not receive its generation from its cause as a whole simultaneously (since if it did it too would be Being), but it receives its generation piece by piece in the way that it can.²¹

Ἄλλ' ἄλλοτε ἄλλο τοῦ χρόνου ῥέοντος· ὥστε οὐδὲ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰτίου γένεσιν ἅμα ὅλην ὑποδέχεται· ἦν γὰρ ἂν ὄν καὶ τοῦτο· ἀλλὰ κατὰ μέρος ὡς δυνατόν (Simp., *In De cael.* 94, 20–22).

21 Tr. Mueller (see note 19).

So as a result and because it is composite and is not what it is as a simultaneous whole but has its being in coming to be, what has parts is what comes to be in the strict sense as distinguished from what *is* in the strict sense, namely what gets its being from itself and is simultaneously as a whole what it is.²²

Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὖν καὶ ὅτι σύνθετον καὶ ὅτι μὴ ὅλον ἅμα ἐστίν, ὅπερ ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ γίνεσθαι τὸ εἶναι ἔχει, τοῦτο κυρίως ἤδη γενητόν ἐστιν ὡς πρὸς τὸ κυρίως ὄν ἀντιδιηρημένον, ὃ καὶ τὸ εἶναι παρ' ἑαυτοῦ ἔχει καὶ ἅμα ὅλον ἐστὶ τοῦτο, ὅπερ ἐστὶ (Simp., *In De cael.* 95, 6–9).

With the appearance of the body comes a second meaning of *generation*: to receive one's reality in becoming and temporality. Far from remaining the same in being and identity, the body undergoes a permanent change toward its previous state. This alteration is accompanied by a *temporality* that rules and measures its steps, in the same way as place orders the parts of its extend- edness and subsistence. Therefore, it is *generated in the strict sense* (τὸ κυρίως γενητόν; Simp., *In De cael.* 95, 17), to the extent that it does not only result from a producing cause, as Being does at the immediate higher level, but that its cause also matches *spatiotemporal becoming*, since the essential property of what is generated corresponds to the need of gradually actualising its power.

Heaven occupies this level, because it is the first corporeal thing after Being (95, 24–26). In this regard, it is the most beautiful image in relation to the best paradigm (the intelligible order). By virtue of its infinite progress, it imitates the infinite power of what precedes, which is contained in unity, and it receives its completeness and simultaneity only so far as it is able, that is, in *succession* and *partition*. Its mode is not that of the *always of eternity* (τὸ αἰώνιον αἰεί), but that of the *always of time* (τὸ χρονικὸν αἰεί; 95, 21): an always that is partitioned and measured.

It remains to understand the nature of its movement. Due to its similarity to the identity of Being, it undergoes an *unchanging change* (ἀμεταβλήτως), a change within similarity that is close to a stay in identity, and an *unmoved movement* (ἀκινήτως), a local movement that does not go out of its place – a circular motion, closer to rest than to movement because its parts alone are moving, while the body itself remains in the same place. However, it transcends the movement from not being to being, and from being to not being – otherwise its unmoved cause should have moved in a certain way *to actualise it at some time* (95, 24–96, 12). In other words, it is not subject to what is usually called (καλεῖν ἔθος) *generation* and *destruction*, that is to say

22 Tr. Mueller (see note 19).

generation in a third meaning. Finally, it is also not generated in a last meaning, assuming that it would observe growth and diminution, although it undergoes some alteration (96, 12–20).²³ Indeed, all these changes, whether they be substantial or qualitative, only appear in its own products (*moved realities that are not self-movers*).

After these statements, Simplicius finally outlines *why* and *how* change occurs *within the sublunary world* (96, 25–102, 31). Firstly, he intends to *strengthen his own ideas and those of his readers*:²⁴ He wants to be exhaustive because of his didactic purpose, so as to prove that heaven *does not* undergo generation *as sublunary bodies do*. Secondly, he demonstrates the absurdity of a generation or a destruction that would not go from one contrary to the other, i.e. a generation that does proceed from what does not exist in any way and a destruction that does end in what does not exist in any way. In doing so, he denies the notion of generation similar to what Christians invoke, such as Philoponus – a creation *ex nihilo* or a destruction *ad nihilum*.

With these various meanings of γενητόν he draws from the truth itself, Simplicius asks which one Aristotle denies to heaven that Plato, however, assigns to the κόσμος and heaven. He reminds the reader that Aristotle always follows *what is evident to everybody* (τὰ πᾶσι πρόδηλα; 103, 18–21), that is, *what is most common to us* and speaks to everyone. “Now it is clear that Aristotle calls only one thing coming to be: the change in time from not being into being, a change which is always followed by perishing.”²⁵ Unsurprisingly, he talks about the latter kind of generation, i.e. the temporally located change, which occurs in what participates in every form of generation and necessarily undergoes corruption. However, since this kind of generation only appears *in the sublunary world*, it cannot apply to heaven itself. Plato, who also knows this kind of generation, adopts the perspective of *what is most common by itself*, to the extent that it applies to the largest number of realities. In this sense, heaven undergoes generation, because it has self-substantiating being as its cause and principle.²⁶ Consequently, the

23 Simplicius here reviews the meanings of *generation* analysed by Aristotle in *De cael.* I 3.

24 Simp., *In De cael.* 102, 15–16.

25 Simp., *In De cael.* 103, 5–6 (tr. Mueller [see note 19]): ὁ μὲν οὖν Ἀριστοτέλης ὅτι γένησιν ταύτην μόνην καλεῖ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι εἰς τὸ εἶναι κατὰ χρόνον μεταβολήν, ἣν πάντως φθορὰ διαδέχεται, δῆλον μὲν.

26 Simp., *In De cael.* 103, 28–104, 2 (tr. Mueller [see note 19]): “However, Plato also knows the other kind of coming to be in which what has moved down into corporeal extension and is not further able to give itself existence but is only given existence by some other cause is said to come to be as distinguished from that which genuinely is and which is its immediate cause. For it is necessary that what comes to be and gets its existence from

disagreement is due neither to ignorance, nor to different perspectives on the truth. The nuance between Plato and Aristotle results only from the focus they respectively place on one aspect of the problem, i.e. from the view they adopt towards the heaven and *κόσμος* in order to analyse their being.

VI. Criticism as a Confirmation

On several occasions, Simplicius argues that Aristotle does not contradict the ideas of Plato themselves, but only a *superficial reading* of the *Timaeus*.²⁷ His objections are limited to countering an *apparent* meaning of the text: As a careful teacher, he pays attention to readers who have only a superficial understanding of his philosophy, because they are *not yet* able to rise to a higher level of meaning and, therefore, miss the truth of some old (*τοῖς ἐπιπολαιότερον τῶν παλαιῶν λόγων ἀκροωμένοις*) and figurative arguments (*μυθικῶς*; Simp., *In De cael.* 296, 8–9). Thence, he outlines and refutes an interpretation of Plato’s text based on the *ordinary usage* of words, with which his readers are familiar, rather than an interpretation based on *technical* or *archaic* usages. For example, when he denies the geometrical composition of elements in the *Timaeus*, because it is limited to purely mathematical structures and thereby unable to compose three-dimensional bodies, i.e. physical bodies, his objection targets the literal reading, which reduces the triangle to its geometrical nature (i.e. flat and two-dimensional).²⁸ Thus he refutes a reading based only on the *ordinary* meaning of what is a triangle, while leaving intact the truth of Plato’s thesis about triangles with *physical* properties.

Subtleties of this kind can confuse even a commentator as aware as Alexander of Aphrodisias. Despite the overall quality of his exegesis, he sometimes fails to understand that Aristotle targets only *some superficial imports* of Plato’s text. So he comes to criticise Plato’s very *ideas* instead of their first and apparent meaning (377, 20–34).²⁹ However, according to Simplicius, to remove verbal discrepancies involves leading a careful exegesis of *Plato’s text as well*, insofar as, far from refuting Plato himself, Aristotle’s criticism would

elsewhere get its existence from Being, which is self-substantiating; otherwise one proceeds to infinity, always positing one thing which comes to be prior to another.”

27 Simp., *In De cael.* 296, 6–12; 301, 8–12; 352, 27–29; 377, 20–27; 518, 21–30; 563, 26–564, 3; 640, 27–32; 712, 31–731, 7.

28 Simp., *In De cael.* 563, 26–564, 3; 640, 27–641, 5.

29 Alexander is indeed another case of superficial reader. Because his understanding of Plato’s text is inferior, he happens to believe that Aristotle refutes Plato, when they are in a state of perfect agreement (*In De cael.* 297, 1–7).

only target a possible misreading of him. In other words, to understand Plato's text properly, one must rise to a higher level of meaning, where Plato and Aristotle are basically in agreement.

Regarding the question about the generation of the world, in what sense does Aristotle only *seem* to refute Plato? What is the superficial meaning that Aristotle targets? In the *Timaeus* (41 A-D), "the Demiurge apparently seems to say, that the world [his product], although dissoluble, mortal and destructible in its own nature, will not be destroyed."³⁰ In addition, Aristotle objects by emphasizing that it is obviously impossible for something that is, *in its own nature*, destructible, to *never* be destroyed. In this case, it would always be both destructible and indestructible, which is impossible.³¹ In Simplicius' opinion, the objection implies to make three points clear, which form the three dimensions of the issue raised by Aristotle: the nature, origin, and temporality of the κόσμος. 1) What is the nature of the κόσμος and in what sense does it involve perishing? 2) Where does the κόσμος come from and how does its origin influence its permanence? 3) What temporality belongs to this kind of being?

Simplicius' answer goes through a close exegesis of this passage of the *Timaeus*. The text, fully quoted by Simplicius, has a special status, since it not only contains Plato's words, but also *the very divine truth expressed by the Demiurge himself*. Hence the need to quote it *in extenso*, since Plato acts as a *prophet* for the highest authority.³² These are the first words of the speech:

Gods, of gods whereof I am the creator and of works the father, those which are my own handiwork are indissoluble save with my will. Now everything which is bound is dissoluble, but to will to dissolve what is well harmonised and in good condition is the work of someone bad. Therefore, also, since you have been generated you are not completely immortal or indissoluble, but you will not be dissolved or meet a fate of death since with my will you have attained a greater and more authoritative bond than those with which you were bound together when you were born.³³

Θεοὶ θεῶν, ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς πατὴρ τε ἔργων, ἅλτα ἐμοῦ γε ἐθέλοντος. τὸ μὲν οὖν δὴ δεθὲν πᾶν λυτόν, τό γε μὴν καλῶς ἄρμοσθὲν καὶ ἔχον εὖ λύειν ἐθέλειν κακοῦ· διὸ καὶ ἐπέπερ γεγένησθε, ἀθάνατοι μὲν οὐκ ἔστε οὐδὲ ἄλυτοι

30 Simp., *In De cael.* 351, 18–20: κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον δοκεῖ λέγεσθαι, ὅτι λυτὸς καὶ θνητὸς ὢν ὁ κόσμος τῇ ἑαυτοῦ φύσει καὶ φθαρτὸς ὅμως οὐ φθείρεται.

31 *De cael.* I 12.283 a 24–29. Simp., *In De cael.* 351, 20–352, 2.

32 Simp., *In De cael.* 105, 32–106, 6. The quotation goes through 106, 6–25.

33 Tr. Mueller (see note 19).

τὸ πᾶμπαν, οὐ μὴν λυθήσεσθέ γε οὐδὲ τεύξεσθε θανάτου μοίρας τῆς ἐμῆς βουλήσεως μείζονος ἔτι δεσμοῦ καὶ κυριωτέρου τυχόντες ἐκείνων, οἷς, ὅτε ἐγίνεσθε, ξυνεδεῖσθε.³⁴

This text demonstrates the agreement with Aristotle on each point previously listed:

1) According to Simplicius, Aristotle agrees with Plato in holding that a body, limited by nature, has a limited power as well.³⁵ However, Plato argues that the **κόσμος** is an *extended* body, i.e. visible and tangible. It is rather limited, divided into parts and, therefore, unable to achieve perfect harmony with itself. Also, it can be neither self-substantiating nor indefinitely remain in existence (Simp., *In De cael.* 140, 12–16). As a compound, the **κόσμος** can neither coincide with itself nor, thereby, resist alteration. Also, because it belongs to the nature of what is **γενητόν**, Plato calls it *bound* and *not completely immortal*: The cause of its remaining in existence comes from the outside, for it cannot, by itself, remain eternally.³⁶ However, Simplicius says, it would be absurd to think that Aristotle could have missed the scope of Plato's argument (Simp., *In De cael.* 140, 9–12):

Now then, is Aristotle unaware that Plato did not say that the **κόσμος** came to be in some part of time, when Plato says that time has come to be with heaven and clearly adds the reason why he says that the **κόσμος** has come to be, the reason being not that so and so many years ago it came into existence, but that it is visible and tangible and has a body?³⁷

Ἄρα οὖν ἠγνόησεν Ἀριστοτέλης, ὅτι γενητόν τὸν κόσμον οὐκ ἀπὸ μέρους χρόνου τινὸς ὁ Πλάτων εἶπεν, ὃς γε μετ' οὐρανοῦ γεγονέναι τὸν χρόνον φησὶ καὶ σαφῶς τὴν αἰτίαν προσέθηκε, δι' ἣν γεγονέναι φησὶν αὐτόν;

Plato says the **κόσμος** was *generated*, not because of its temporality,³⁸ but because of its corporeality – a point that Aristotle would never challenge. Therefore, heaven seems to be destructible *in its own nature*, but without coming to be at a certain moment of time.

2) The world must receive its unity and the cause of its generation from the outside. In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge emphasizes that the indissolubility

34 *Tim.* 41 A 7-B 6 = Simp., *In De cael.* 106, 9–14. I quote here the text given by Simplicius, which slightly differs from that edited by Burnet.

35 Simp., *In De cael.* 143, 9–14; 353, 1–3. Cf. *Phys.* VIII 10.266 a 24-b 6.

36 Simp., *In De cael.* 351, 1–3. Simplicius also refers to the *Statesman* (269 D-E).

37 Tr. Mueller (see note 19).

38 As noted by Simplicius, who refers to the *Republic* (VIII 546 A), Plato also admits that *what is temporally generated* must be *temporally destructible* (Simp., *In De cael.* 300, 15–20).

and indestructibility of the world result from his own goodness and will (106, 25–107, 6): The κόσμος remains *bound* as long as the action of the Demiurge lasts, which is conceived of as eternal. Therefore, the κόσμος is neither *completely immortal* nor *fully subject to destruction*, since the destructibility inherent in its nature is counteracted by its superior cause. If *as a body* it seems to be destructible, it is rather indestructible, because it proceeds from the permanent action of the superior cause. And Aristotle agrees again with Plato on this point, at least if one is to trust what he says in his *Physics* (VIII 10). According to him, heaven is *by nature* disposed to *receive* an uninterrupted movement, since everybody is incapable of such an action in itself.³⁹ It is directly moved by the divine cause, whether it is called Demiurge or unmoved cause, from which it proceeds and to which it reverts, and from which it receives *progressively* its completion. Therefore, for both authorities, God is responsible for the eternal movement, and he causes what he moves directly to move “neither contingently nor unnaturally, but necessarily and naturally” (360, 23: μή ἐνδεχομένως μηδὲ παρὰ φύσιν, ἀλλὰ ἀναγκαίως καὶ κατὰ φύσιν). Thanks to a parallel text, harmony between Plato and Aristotle is restored. It proves that the destructible body has indeed an indestructible nature, insofar as it is suitable to receive eternal movement, and therefore it undergoes a generation which does not involve any perishing.⁴⁰

3) A final difficulty remains in Aristotle's apparent objection: How are we to understand this temporality and indestructibility? Simplicius responds through another excerpt from the *Timaeus*:

What is it which always is and has no coming to be, and what is it which comes to be but never is? The one is apprehended by thought along with reason, and is always thus and in the same condition; the other is conceived by opinion along with irrational perception, and is generated and destroyed, and never really is.⁴¹

Τί τὸ ὄν αἰεὶ, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γινόμενον μὲν, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτὸν αἰεὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ὄν·

39 Simp., *In De cael.* 104, 22–28; 353, 3–10; 361, 2–7; 369, 27–32.

40 This solution could have been inspired by Damascius who, in his lessons on the *Phaedo*, says: “In the same way as the universe is simultaneously coming-to-be and passing away, so it is also being joined together and being dissolved, integration and decomposition exist side by side in it” (Dam., *In Phd.* I § 331, 6–7; tr. L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo. Vol. II: Damascius* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde nieuwe reeks, deel 93), Amsterdam–Oxford–New York 1977).

41 Tr. Mueller (see note 19).

τὸ δὲ αὖ δόξει μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστὸν γινόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν.⁴²

According to Simplicius, adding *οὐδέποτε* stresses the particular eternity of this kind of being. Because the *κόσμος* *never really is*, it is eternal *in some way*. Its eternity can be found in its relation to time. In order to assimilate the *κόσμος* to its intelligible model, which is by nature eternal, the Demiurge bound its production with that of time, making this latter an *image of eternity* (*Tim.* 38 B). In this sense, the *everlastingness of time* is an image of the *ceaselessness* (the “always”) of *eternity*. However, the world could not perfectly imitate the eternity of its intelligible model, if it were to occur only in a part of time – moreover a tiny part, as Philoponus holds shamelessly. Also, according to Simplicius, time contributes to the perfection of the *κόσμος*: It is a *complement* (*πλήρωμα*), the most authoritative good thing that fills its being (368, 19–26). Time does not contain the world by existing before or after it, because the *κόσμος* possesses and contains it as its part. Therefore, the world can neither come to be nor be destroyed at any moment in time, *because there cannot be any moment before or after its coming to be*. Why indeed would it come to be or disappear at one moment rather than another (105, 6–25)?

And Simplicius concludes (107, 19–24):

I myself am not unaware that saying this much might be thought to go beyond the measure with respect to explaining what Aristotle says <in *De caelo*>, but because I proposed to dissolve the objections of those who dispute the view that heaven does not come to be or perish and bring forward Plato as someone who provides support for them against Aristotle, I think it is not unsuitable to have recorded Plato's views on these matters.⁴³

Ἄλλ' ὅτι μὲν τσαῦτα λέγειν πέρα τοῦ μέτρου δοκεῖ πρὸς τὴν τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους ἐξήγησιν, οὐδὲ αὐτὸς ἀγνοῶ, λύειν δὲ τὰς ἐνστάσεις προθέμενος τῶν πρὸς τὸ ἀγένητον καὶ ἄφθαρτον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μαχομένων καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα κατὰ τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους ὡς αὐτοῖς συνηγοροῦντα παραφερόντων οὐκ ἀπεικώτως, οἶμαι, τὰ τῷ Πλάτωνι δοκοῦντα περὶ τούτων ἀνέγραψα.

The apparent contradiction between Aristotle and Plato results from Aristotle's desire to prevent any form of contradiction. Aristotle seems to have known in advance and to have sought to prevent some of his readers from

42 *Tim.* 27 D 6–28 A 4 = Simp., *In De cael.* 104, 5–8. Simplicius' quotation slightly differs from the text edited by Burnet.

43 Tr. Mueller (see note 19).

misunderstanding, insofar as he writes for an audience that is not yet able to read Plato's text accurately. However, his attempt is missed by those who fail to comply with the order of reading and to agree that Aristotle speaks for a less informed audience, using a tone of caricature and adopting a superficial perspective. In conclusion, Aristotle and Plato disagree only for those who consider them carelessly, but they reveal their own harmony to those readers who know how to be more attentive.⁴⁴

VII. Symbol, Hypothesis and Concept

Simplicius also resolves discrepancies with a third method that attempts to distinguish between discursive levels. If one does not remain at the surface of the *Timaeus*, which reading should one adopt for this text? Regarding generation, this dialogue raises an additional challenge: If time and κόσμος are simultaneous, how should we consider the succession inherent in a story that places the generation of the universe at a given time, following the will of the Demiurge? Does it not reveal Plato's need to introduce a temporality in the process of generation, and thereby a temporality of the generated being?

Simplicius' response is to emphasise the mythical nature of the text. He urges the reader to understand the argument on a *hypothetical* (καθ' ὑπόθεσιν) or *conceptual* (τῷ λόγῳ) level. In other words, such a chronology would aim at increasing the respective properties of the components, i.e. the world and Demiurge, and at drawing the consequences that would result from considering their activities as separate. In this sense, temporality constitutes a *logical* (i.e. narrative or rational) device useful for exposing how the world depends on its cause.

However, Aristotle argues, as it seems,⁴⁵ that this invalid kind of hypothetical reasoning should be distinguished from that valid of mathematicians. In geometry, an assumption *by hypothesis* involves the coexistence between the components and the compound. However, the *cosmological* composition implies the pre-existence of the components of the compound, since the disordered world seems to exist *before* the ordered κόσμος.⁴⁶ Therefore, the

44 Simp., *In De cael.* 143, 15–17; cf. *In Phys.* 1155, 8–1156, 3.

45 According to Simplicius, the objection is not raised by Aristotle himself, but it follows from its interpretation by Alexander (Simp., *In De cael.* 297, 1–298, 25). See Guldentops (see note 15) 199–206 on Simplicius' controversy with Alexander on this point. He writes: "Therefore, a critical analysis of Alexander's interpretation is not only necessary, but also in accord with Aristotle's mind and useful for those who want to understand Aristotle's texts by means of Alexander's commentaries."

46 Simp., *In De cael.* 305, 14–20; cf. *De cael.* I 10.279 b 32–280 a 11.

hypothesis would not remove the temporal aspect of the generation. How is it possible to counter and resolve this disagreement?

On the one hand, Simplicius welcomes the accuracy of Aristotle's reading: He has revealed the distinction between two kinds of hypothetical reasoning regarding generation, one valid, the other not (*In De cael.* 305, 25–33). This distinction shows that he targets a superficial reading of Plato's text, which is based on the second meaning. It remains to prove that Plato uses the first meaning.

On the other hand, Simplicius calls for a parallel with the *Statesman*. Plato separates there τῷ λόγῳ, in a conceptual or discursive way, the Demiurge from the world conceived as already existing.⁴⁷ The separation shows that, *deprived of its ordering cause*, the world naturally degenerates into a state of disorder. This kind of hypothetical argument proves that, by itself, the corporeal nature lacks order, and that introducing an organisation results only from the providential action of the Demiurge. However, it does not mean, in any way, that the separation *was or ever becomes effective*. Also, Simplicius concludes, the pre-existence of disorder on order is *not temporal*, and generation must be understood *as an ontological status*.

As proved by his hylomorphic theory, Aristotle agrees with Plato by admitting *by hypothesis* that disorder pre-existed order (*In De cael.* 306, 9–25). As he states elsewhere, disorder always exists in matter, because it belongs to its nature.⁴⁸ Order comes from the outside, that is to say from the *demiurgic and informative action*. However, the pre-existence of disorder is not *temporal*, in the sense that it would be destroyed by the *introduction of order*, but *ontological*: In itself, matter remains indeterminate. But, if privation of form belongs to the nature of matter, this latter always participates in a form. It is indeed impossible to experience matter in itself, in its identity. Consequently, if Aristotle admits that disorder always pre-exists order *ontologically*, he also admits that the coming to be of the world cannot be said otherwise than *by hypothesis*.⁴⁹

47 Simp., *In De cael.* 143, 20–21; 303, 19–24; 306, 25–307, 11; 360, 29–32. Simplicius refers to *Pol.* 272 E–273 E.

48 *De gen. et corr.* II 1.329 a 24–b 6; *Met.* VIII 6.1045 b 18–19; *Phys.* IV 2.209 b 6–17.

49 An enlightening parallel for this kind of argument concerns the composition of matter. For Simplicius, when the Pythagoreans and Plato hypothesise triangles, they must not be taken *absolutely*, but as we do with astronomers, who hold several hypotheses to preserve the phenomena (Simp., *In De cael.* 565, 26–566, 20; 576, 3–4; 641, 21–25). Because they focus on quantity and figure, instead of quality, they generally reason with respect to symmetry and similarity, two principles that, when conceived *on the mode of hypothesis*, help to explain the causes of generation, i.e. changes of figures into each other. However, this reasoning must not be taken *literally*, but *symbolically*, since other things are also said *symbolically* in the *Timaeus*. Moreover, as Simplicius notes, Plato himself reminds that, in

To conclude with Simplicius, Aristotle and Plato agree on the logical priority of disorder and on the coming to be of order, but they also agree on how these points should be understood. Therefore, the *Timaeus* only makes obvious a process that actually is *always already achieved*, whereas the *De caelo* adopts, in this respect, an *a posteriori* perspective of actualisation.

VIII. A Polymorphic Method

With regard to reconciling Plato and Aristotle on the *generation* of the κόσμος, Simplicius adopts a solution similar to that of Proclus: Unlike what Aristotle's objections might suggest, both philosophers think that the κόσμος is eternal. Nevertheless some nuances arise, which result from a difference in contexts and intentions.

First, Simplicius intends to face objections raised by Alexander and by Philoponus, who both find in Plato's *Timaeus* the temporal generation of the κόσμος, whereas Aristotle holds that it is eternal. Against Alexander who, in the disagreement, is always in favour of Aristotle, and against Philoponus, who, in the same circumstances, claims to follow Plato, Simplicius reveals a truth at the crossroads between Plato and Aristotle. This requires a closer examination of textual details and an increased attention to their meaning. From this attempt at harmonisation arises thus an essential attribute of the κόσμος, on which both authorities agree. As a *perceptible* reality, the world must be conceived of as *generated*, and as a compound reality, it proceeds from an external cause. It must therefore be conceived of as *potentially* mortal and destructible, although the goodness of the demiurgic cause prevents its destruction and preserves its unity. Hence the immortality of the κόσμος does not only result from a logical necessity, arising from its coincidence with time – as it was the case in Proclus –, but it is also related to the *permanent good action of the unmoved cause*.

Second, as a corollary, Simplicius aims to *completely harmonise* Plato and Aristotle, while Proclus considers some differences insurmountable. Firstly, while Proclus criticises Aristotle because he uses the verb *to be* to describe the heaven in its eternity, Simplicius explains the *is* in Aristotle's text as a *reference to ordinary language*. However, this does not prohibit Aristotle from being more accurate in other contexts and from conceiving an eternal becoming elsewhere (Simp., *In De cael.* 301, 8–12). Secondly, Proclus criticis-

this dialogue, he is speaking on the mode of *hypothesis* (Simplicius quotes *Tim.* 54 A 1–6, then 53 D 4-E 5, where Plato uses the verb ὑποτιθώμεθα).

es Aristotle because he places the numerical unity of the world in *being*, rather than in *becoming*. By invoking the *hypothetical mode*, Simplicius explains the permanent action of the unmoved cause, in Plato as well as in Aristotle, which confers to the world a progressive actualisation of its power, even if it is a thing impossible to experience. Finally, Simplicius does not diagnose any degradation of attributes. By exposing the procession, the metaphysical argument shows a community of the theological truth, in terms of which both authors agree. In summary, if Simplicius does not explicitly mention Proclus' criticisms, at least he resolves them by provision and restores full harmony between Plato and Aristotle.

Third, compared to Proclus, Simplicius' reading inverts the perspective, insofar as he begins with Aristotle's objections, rather than with the *Timaeus*. Therefore, the opposition between Plato and Aristotle becomes a problem less related to *causality* than to a *difference in points of view*. Aristotle starts with *what is obvious to us*, following *the most ordinary and usual meaning* of generation. But Plato follows *the most general meaning*, that of greater extension. Also the difference between the *De caelo* and the *Timaeus* concerns the use of words. Aristotle adopts the perspective of ordinary language, since he argues from an immediate relationship to things, whereas Plato insists on the accuracy of terms and on their suitability to the κόσμος (69, 11–15). Therefore the opposition reflects two ways of doing cosmology: 1) *from the point of view of man*, who understands the κόσμος with respect to his own categories of thought and from his intellectual scope, i.e. *who produces a cosmology grounded in the experience of the sublunary world*, insofar as he does not have an *immediate* and *spontaneous* access to the unified totality of the κόσμος, but only to an image of it (41, 27–32); 2) *from the point of view of the κόσμος itself*, as it fits into a scheme of procession and follows the divine and demiurgic cause, that comes from the One. Therefore, between Aristotle and Plato, between the *De caelo* and the *Timaeus*, the difference reveals an opposition between doing cosmology according to either *conversion* or *procession*.

This opposition leads to a different understanding of the modes of discourse. The *De caelo* appears to be a discourse and a demonstration of a *physical* kind, which relies on our experiencing the ordinary world and which can receive a syllogistic form, helping the understanding. The *Timaeus*, on the other hand, follows *the mode of hypothesis* (the *als ob*), i.e. a form of discourse that questions cosmology *a priori* in order to understand (and to make understood) the properties that resist an empirical seizure. It explains the world on an *a priori* mode, as a model expressing temporally what is necessarily out of time. However, according to Simplicius, these two modes do not exclude each other, but they suggest that the world has a different existence and temporality than its cause or products. Doing so, he subverts Aristotle's objection, to whom using the hypothetical mode is a defect in

natural philosophy. However, Simplicius makes it the very way to understand the eternal conditions of realities that relate to becoming.

As a conclusion, when Simplicius interprets and resolves Aristotle's objections, he may invoke a principle according to which these would target a superficial reading of the *Timaeus*, based on ordinary language (a reading due to Alexander and Philoponus), rather than Plato himself.⁵⁰ This interpretation fits perfectly into the progressive scheme of the Neoplatonic *curriculum*: If there is an attunement of the *De caelo* and the *Timaeus*, as far as they concern similar realities, the comments on the *Timaeus* found in the commentary on the *De caelo* aim at refuting a reading that results from the kind of reading expected for the *De caelo*. In this sense, Simplicius' commentary justifies the necessity of postponing Plato's to Aristotle's reading, insofar as *what is self-evident* (the truth of the *Timaeus*) should not be read on the mode of *what is only obvious to us* (the contents of *De caelo*). At most, *from this perspective*, Aristotle only *seems* to refute Plato.

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50 For example, Simp., *In De cael.* 296, 6–8; 297, 1–7; 377, 20–33; 640, 27–32.

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