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HUMAN OR DIVINE FREEDOM

PROCLUS ON WHAT IS UP TO US[1]

In his treatise 'On Providence, Fate and What is up to us', Proclus replies to a series of problems and objections against the hypothesis of a power 'that is up to us', which had been raised by Theodore, an old friend from the school.[2] Theodore, an engineer, defended in a letter to Proclus a radical determinism. The world is a mechanical system governed by an unalterable necessity, which leaves no place for any self-determination of the human soul. Proclus summarises Theodore's view as follows:

> taking fate (εἱμαρμένην) to be the connection and the ordered sequence of events, you suppose that this dramaturgy is directed merely by some kind of unalterable necessity; and the latter you celebrate as providence, considering it the only self-determining power (αὐτεξούσιος) and mistress of all things, whereas the self-determination of the human soul, about which there is so much talk, is in your opinion only a name and nothing in reality. For the soul is situated in the world and subservient to the actions of other things and is a part of the functioning of the cosmos. Rather, to use your own words, the inescapable cause, which moves all things this cosmos comprehends within itself, is 'mechanic', and the universe is, as it were, one machine, wherein the celestial spheres are analogous to the interlocking wheels and the particular beings, the animals and the souls, are like the things moved by the wheels, and everything depends upon one moving principle.[3]

According to Theodore fate (which is in his view identical with providence) directs and governs as an immanent cause the system of the world and all beings within it, including humans. To talk about human self-determination makes no sense. Only the 'master of all beings' can be said to have such a power, as Theodore argues in the seventh aporia discussed by Proclus:

> Next you ask what this power is that is up to us (…) and you define it as that which is by nothing dominated or mastered, but is, as you literally say, self-determined (αὐτοπερίγραπτος) and self-activated (αὐτενέργητος). But if it is of such a nature, it is also absolutely incorruptible and supremely powerful and it belongs only to the first lord of all beings, whereas what is up to us (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) does no longer belong to us.[4]

This problem is based upon an analysis of the notion of 'what is up to us' (ἐφ' ἡμῖν). Theodore's argument can be construed as follows. When we say that something is up to us, we mean that we dominate and master it, that it falls under our power. What is fully in control of something is, as Theodore says, a power that determines and contains itself and activates itself, that is, it is

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[1] A first draft of this paper was presented at Princeton University in December 2006. I profited from the response of Steve Strange, who sadly passed away a few months later, and comments in the audience. A French adaptation of that lecture was published in the Festschrift for Lambros Couloubarisis: see Steel (2008). I am indebted to Richard Sorabji for commenting on the last version of this paper.

[2] This works is one of the three treatises that Proclus devoted to the problems of providence, fate, free choice and evil. The integral text of the 'Tria opuscula' is only preserved in the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke. Fortunately large sections of the original Greek text can be retrieved in the three treatises that the Byzantine scholar Isaac Sebastocrator devoted to the same issues, plagiarising Proclus. I quote the text with reference to the standard edition of the Latin text by Boese (1960). For an excellent philological commentary and a reconstruction of the lost Greek original see Strobel (2013). I published an annotated English translation of the treatise in 2007. My translation are taken from that volume with some modifications and corrections. On Theodore and his arguments against free choice, see Steel (2005) and the introduction of my translation.

[3] *De prov*. 2,5-19.

[4] *De prov*. 56,1-7.

αὐτοπερίγραπτος and αὐτενέργητος.[5] A being that is capable of self-activation and of maintaining itself in being, is incorruptible and has absolute power. Therefore, if we take the expression 'what is up to us' in a strict sense, only 'the master of the universe'[6] can be said to have all things in his power. We thus end with the paradox that 'what is up to us' is no longer a characteristic of 'us', human beings, but is in fact a privilege of the divine cause.

In his reply Proclus reproaches Theodore for understanding the expression ἐφ' ἡμῖν in a sense that deviates radically from its traditional meaning. The 'ancient philosophers', he says, never understood τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν as an absolute power of self-determination, but used the expression to designate our faculty of choice (τὸ προαιρετικόν), which makes us master, not of everything we would want to have or to do, but of 'choosing what is good and avoiding what is bad'.[7] Using the dialectical method of division, Proclus defines this faculty of choice as follows.[8] The soul's faculties are either rational or irrational; choice certainly belongs to the rational part, since irrational animals live and act without deliberation. Among faculties one can in turn distinguish between cognitive and appetitive faculties. It is clear that choice has to do with appetite, for that is precisely what it is said to be, a choice and desire[9]. Further, 'every desire either regards that which is truly good or only that which is seemingly good or both'.[10] We cannot say that it always intends the truly good or always what seems to be good, but is in fact evil; for we praise and blame people according to their right or wrong choices.[11] Therefore, it is concerned with both.

> To sum up, choice is a rational appetitive faculty desiring both true and apparent good, and it leads the soul toward both. Through this faculty the soul (…) does wrong and does right. Considering the ambivalent activity of this faculty the [ancients] have called its inclination to both sides <what> is up to us. [12] Thus, the faculty of choice and what is up to us may be identical.[13]

The faculty of choice characterizes the human soul in its intermediary position between divine beings and mortal animals. Neither of them is subject to this ambivalent inclination: the animals because of their deficiency, since they are only concerned with apparent goods, that is, with what is pleasurable, the gods because of their excellence, since they are established among true goods. The faculty of choice is of both what is good and its opposite, evil, whereas the will (βούλησις) only regards the good. It is, as Proclus says, a unitary power (ἑνοειδής… ὅτι μία καὶ ἀγαθοειδής),

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[5] The term αὐτοενέργητος is not infrequent in later Neoplatonism, and in particular in Proclus, who uses it to characterise the self-activated activity of the rational soul (which does not need an external stimulus). As a self-moving principle, the soul is not just acted upon, but is always self-activating, as is clear in the process of knowledge. The other term αὐτοπερίγραπτος is nowhere else attested. Damascius, however, uses the term αὐτοπερίγραπτος for divine beings, in the sense of 'what circumscribes or contains oneself'. See *In Parm.*, vol. II, p. 100,n.2; III, p.23,n.4 ed. Westerink-Combès.

[6] *De prov*. 56,6-7: 'primo preside omnium entium' τῷ πρώτῳ προστάτῃ πάντων τῶν ὄντων (Strobel). 'Preses' can indeed be the translation of προστάτης (cf. *Prov*. 12,2 fate as 'corporum preses'). It could also stand for ἡγεμών or καθηγεμών. The expression sounds rather 'Christian'. See the discourse of Constantine preserved by Eusebius 3,2,1-2: τί οὖν δηλοῖ ὁ λόγος; τῶν ὄντων ἁπάντων ἕνα εἶναι προστάτην, καὶ πάνθ' ὑποτετάχθαι τῇ ἐκείνου δεσποτείᾳ μόνου, τά τ' οὐράνια τά τ' ἐπίγεια καὶ τὰ φυσικὰ καὶ ὀργανικὰ σώματα.

[7] *De prov*. 60,4-7. See also n.* below.

[8] *De prov*. 58,1 'et sumes utique ex divisione diffinitionem talem potentie huius'.

[9] Cf. Aristotle, NE VI 2, 1139b1-2: διὸ ἢ ὀρεκτικὸς νοῦς ἡ προαίρεσις ἢ ὄρεξις διανοητική, καὶ ἡ τοιαύτη ἀρχὴ ἄνθρωπος.

[10] The distinction between true and apparent good with reference to desires is made by Aristotle in *Top*. 146b36-47b2 (cf. Alex. *In Top*. 472,12-13). See also the close parallel in Alexander, *De anima* (*Mantissa*), 151,24-26 ὄρεξις μὲν πᾶσα ἀγαθοῦ ἢ φαινομένου ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀγαθὸν τελικόν, τὸ δὲ φαινόμενον οὐ τοιοῦτον, φαινόμενον δὲ ἀγαθὸν τὸ ἡδύ. Cf also ps.Philoponus, *In de Anima*, 585,27-31.

[11] See Aristotle, EE II 11 1228a11-12.

[12] *De prov*. 59,5-6: 'Huius potentie operationem videntes biviam in nobis vocaverunt ad ambo ipsius inclinationem'. In my (2007) translation I was mislead by Moerbeke and translated 'considering the activity of this faculty authors have called its ambivalent inclination the crossroad in us' (taking 'biviam' for crossroad). Strobel (2013) rightly rejects this interpretation. The adjective 'biviam' may be an attempt to translate ἐπαμφοτερίζουσαν. See Philoponus and Hermias quoted below, n. 15 and 18.

[13] See also *De prov*. 39,18-20: τὴν ποιὰν ὁρμὴν καὶ τὴν αἵρεσιν χαρακτηρίζειν τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν.

related to the good alone, whereas the faculty of choice is essentially dual (δυοειδής) and ambivalent.[14]

The term βούλησις is notoriously difficult to translate in contemporary philosophical language. Because of the voluntaristic overtones, which the term 'will' has acquired in modern philosophy, most translators now avoid this term and use 'wish' as translation for βούλησις.[15] However, if 'will' is too strong a term to render βούλησις, 'wish' is often too weak, for example when speaking of the βούλησις of the gods (who represent the ideal mode of what willing means[16]) or even of the βούλησις or θέλημα of the One, as in Plotinus' treatise 'On the voluntary and the Will of the One' (VI 8 [39], 2), on which more below. And is difficult to say with Epictetus that the Stoic wise conforms his 'wish' to the 'wish of Zeus'. We may learn what the term meant for Platonists from Plotinus' attempt to define βούλησις in I 4 [46] 6,17-22, where he calls it 'the real drive of desire (ἔφεσις) of our soul towards that which is better than itself'. 'When that [good] is present within it, the soul is fulfilled and at rest, and this is the way of living it really wills (ὁ βουλητὸς ὄντως βίος)'. When we use the term 'willing' in its proper sense, Plotinus explains, we should not apply the term to occasions when we have to choose necessary goods and avoid corresponding evils (such as freedom of pain or sickness). 'This sort of avoidance is not a matter of willing (οὐ βουλητόν), for we should will rather (μᾶλλον γὰρ βουλητόν) not to have occasion for this sort of avoidance.' When used in this strict sense, willing is a rational desire intent on the true good, beyond the ambivalence of choice.[17] Hermias, a student with Proclus of Syrianus, notices, however, that the term βούλησις may be used in two senses. We may use, indeed, 'willing' for a desire with judgement and choice that may go in opposite directions, as when we say 'I will this or I will that', I want to walk or not. But we may also use the term to indicate what Hermias calls 'the natural will' (φυσικὴ βούλησις), which is a vital power drawing the living being to what is desires by nature, as is the 'will to live'; such a will is above all choice (ἀνωτέρα πάσης προαιρέσεώς).[18] In human souls it is the innate natural appetite for the good.[19] To render this sense of βούλησις I prefer to use the term 'will' as translation.[20]

Influenced by Proclus, Ammonius (Philoponus) explains the distinction between choice and will, as follows:

> The practical [faculties of the rational soul] are will and choice (βούλησις καὶ προαίρεσις); and will is concerned only with what is good, whereas choice goes in two directions (ἐπαμφοτερίζει). Will belongs to the rational soul itself by itself, choice to the soul that is intertwined with non-rationality. For when the soul is outside the domain of becoming, it is active in accordance with will only, for it is in what is good only; but when its gets into the domain of becoming, since the non-rational faculties get intertwined with it, it holds the faculty of choice because of its being interwoven with the non-rational soul, because then it sometimes comes on the side of the non-rational, sometimes on the side of reason and it chooses the one over the other.[21]

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[14] *De prov*. 58,4-8; see also n.* below.
[15] But see M. Frede (**) with bthe excellent review by Mansfeld. I this paper I ll avoid the discussion of the problem of 'free will'.
[16] On the will of the gods, see below**
[17] Therefore βούλησις is for Plotinus ultimately identical with νόησις. See VI 8 [39], 6,36-41: ' ἡ δὲ βούλησις ἡ νόησις, βούλησις δ' ἐλέχθη, ὅτι κατὰ νοῦν· καὶ γὰρ λέγομεν· «ἡ βούλησις τὸ κατὰ νοῦν μιμεῖται.» Ἡ γὰρ βούλησις θέλει τὸ ἀγαθόν· τὸ δὲ νοεῖν ἀληθῶς ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ. Ἔχει οὖν ἐκεῖνος, ὅπερ ἡ βούλησις θέλει καὶ οὗ τυχοῦσα ἂν ταύτῃ νόησις γίνεται'.
[18] See Hermias, *In Phaedr*. 24, 8-20 ed. Moreschini. Already Iamblichus made the same distinction between the 'will' and the 'ambivalent life of choice'. See *De myst*. I 12, p 31, 7-9 ed. Saffrey-Segonds: τοσούτῳ προέχει τῆς ἑκουσίου κινήσεως ὅσον ἡ τἀγαθοῦ θεία βούλησις τῆς προαιρετικῆς ὑπερέχει ζωῆς. On this text see Sorabji (2004a), p.314-315.
[19] See the classic definition in Damascenus, *Exp. fidei* 36,60ff.: Βούλησις δέ ἐστι ποιὰ φυσικὴ θέλησις ἤγουν φυσικὴ καὶ λογικὴ ὄρεξίς τινος πράγματος. Ἔγκειται μὲν γὰρ τῇ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ψυχῇ δύναμις τοῦ λογικῶς ὀρέγεσθαι. Ὅτε οὖν φυσικῶς κινηθῇ αὕτη ἡ λογικὴ ὄρεξις πρός τι πρᾶγμα, λέγεται βούλησις. βούλησις γάρ ἐστιν ὄρεξις καὶ ἔφεσίς τινος πράγματος λογική.
[20] Long opts for 'volition' in his study on Epictetus (2002). More problematic is the translation of the verb βούλομαι by the verb 'will': here I cannot avoid alternatives such as 'wish' 'desire' 'like' and 'want'.
[21] Philoponus, *In de anima* 5, 24-32 translation van der Eijk (2005) modified.

In support of his understanding of 'what is up to us' as the faculty of choice and not the will, Proclus refers, as we have seen, to 'the ancients' (οἱ παλαιοί). These authorities stand primarily for Plato and Aristotle interpreted in a Platonic manner.[22] Aristotle explicitly relates choice to what depends upon us, as in *Nic*. *Ethics* III 2, 1111b29-30: ὅλως γὰρ ἔοικεν ἡ προαίρεσις περὶ τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν εἶναι. He also argues that the will or wish (βούλησις) is different from choice and is not necessarily related to things that are up to us. For we may wish many things, even impossible things, as to be immortal or to reign over all human beings, we may will things to happen that are not up to us, for example that a certain athlete wins a game. Deliberation and choice, on the contrary, are always about things that are up to us. Aristotle points to another difference: willing is rather about the end, the goal we pursue (we want to be healthy or wealthy or have power), whereas choice is about actions that may forward the end we want to obtain. It is not enough to have the will to be healthy, we have to deliberate and choose what to do or what to avoid in order to be healthy. In this deliberation we may take good or wrong decisions and may be praised or blamed accordingly. Nobody, however, will be praised or blamed for what he wishes or wills. In Aristotle's view the will is always directed towards what is good, something that for the agent appears to be desirable or advantageous. This does not exclude that some persons sometimes desire to obtain things that are *not really* good for them. Proclus, however, following Plato, makes a much stronger claim than Aristotle: the will is *always intent on what is really good*:

> The will, the [ancients] say, only regards the good, whereas choice is likewise of good and not good things, just as a belief (δόκησις) is also of what is not good. (…) Our ordinary way of speaking also bears witness to this: for we praise the choices of some people and blame those of others. Evil, however, we say is, is not something one wishes (ἀβούλευτον), and to those who choose it, evil seems to be a good. For no soul would knowingly choose evil, but would avoid it. Due to ignorance, however, it is occupied with it. For although it has by nature a 'keen love' of the good, it is unable to see where the good lies. Hence, because the soul has in its own being this ambivalent inclination, I mean towards good and evil, philosophers have called this faculty of the soul through which we are able to choose one thing over another, the 'elective' (προαιρετικόν).[23]

That we all pursue the good and that nobody knowingly chooses evil, is a fundamental principle of Platonic ethics.[24] If somebody 'wishes' (wills) to acquire things he considers to be good (health, wealth, power), and it can be shown that they are not really good for him, one should not say in the strict sense that he 'wills' them. As Socrates argues against Polus in the *Gorgias* (466-469), in such a case, a person, does not really 'will' (βούλεται) what he pursues, but only chooses to do what *seems* to him (δόξῃ) the best to do. Even tyrants (who are said to have absolute freedom to do whatever they want to do) never do 'what they will', since they want things that are not in their own interest: 'I say, Polus, that tyrants have the least power in their cities. For they do just about nothing they *will*, though they certainly do whatever *seems* to them to be the best' (*Gorg.* 466.d.8-e.2 οὐδὲν γὰρ ποιεῖν ὧν βούλονται ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, ποιεῖν μέντοι ὅτι ἂν αὐτοῖς δόξῃ βέλτιστον εἶναι). Proclus is certainly influenced by this passage in the *Gorgias* when he distinguishes between the will, which is a rational desire of the true good, and the illusionary belief (δόκησις) that makes us desire something that seems to us to be good, but is in fact pernicious. Proclus makes the same distinction in his commentary on *Timaeus*, when he explains why some souls always intend ('will': ἐθέλουσι) to follow divine justice, and yet do not always

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[22] The connection between 'choice' and 'what is up to us' is made since Aristotle throughout the tradition; see for instance, Epictetus, *Diatr*. 1,22,10; Alexander, *De fato* 109,12-13; *De anima* (*Mantissa*) 119,7; 169,37-39; 171,16-17; 172,7-8; Nemesius, *De nat. hom*. ch. 33 and 41. On the difference between Alexander and Aristotle see Sorabji, not Aristotle - most fully in attachment sent
earlier

[23] *De prov*. 57,8-12; 15-27

[24] See *Gorgias* 488a3; *Prot*. 345e1; *Meno* 77a-78b; *Resp*. IX 589c6; *Tim*. 86d2-e1; *Leg*. IX 860d-e : this last text is quoted by Proclus in his discussion of the problem in *In Remp*. 2,355,19ff. (see below p.*). See also *De mal*. *sub*. ch. 49 and note 347 in Opsomer-Steel (2003), p. 127. Olympiodorus calls this Platonic dogma a 'paradox' (*In Gorgiam*, p. 190, 15-19). For, there are, he says, also voluntary sins and even Plato distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary sins (cf. *Leg*. IX 860c7-862c5). Yet he defends the doctrine arguing that every fault depends on a *paralogismos* in practical judgment.

obey. He refers to 'the arguments of the *Gorgias* that distinguish the true will from an illusionary belief (δόκησις).[25] In a similar way, commenting on the first exchange of words between Hermogenes and Cratylus in the *Cratylus* [383a1-2: 'do you will (βούλει)? 'if you like it' (εἴ σοι δοκεῖ)] he explains that 'δόκησις is often of things we do not will and yet are chosen (τῶν ἀβουλήτων καὶ προαιρετῶν), whereas the will is always of what is good'.[26]

The Platonic claim that the will is always intent on the good is critically examined by Aristotle in EN III 4, 1113a15ff.. The question is raised whether one can simply identify the good with the object of willing (τὸ βουλητόν). Aristotle considers two opposite views. Some say that the good is what people will. This view, however, is problematic. For if it happens that a person wishes or wills something, which can be shown to be not really good, but only apparently good, the proponents of this view have to admit that such a person does not really 'will' to obtain what he 'wills'. This is, indeed, Socrates' position in the *Gorgias,* when he argues that tyrants do not really 'will' what they believe to 'will'. This position is, however, psychologically nonsense. After all, it cannot be denied that those people really will what they will, even if it can be shown that it would have been better for them not to 'will' what they wanted to obtain. Other people, Aristotle says, solve the problem in a radically different way. They maintain that the object one wills (or wishes) is what *seems* (δοκεῖ) to be good to a particular person in a particular context. However, there is, as Aristotle explains, a problem with this position too, for it makes the object of the will purely subjective and relative. In such a view, no critique is possible of the different goals people wish to obtain. Whatever they 'will' is good for them, since they 'will' it. Aristotle therefore introduces a distinction between what is unqualifiedly an object of the will (this can only be the true good) and what is an object of the will for a particular person in particular circumstances. Aristotle makes a similar distinction between what is pleasurable for a healthy person (this is absolutely pleasurable) and what is pleasurable for somebody who is sick. When I am sick, I may not like my coffee at breakfast. There is nothing wrong with my coffee; I just experience it as not enjoyable. It makes no sense to criticise my experience with objective arguments and to deny that I find the coffee not enjoyable. Yet, only the healthy person can say something about what is pleasurable in an absolute sense. The same holds for the good. Only what the virtuous person wills and pursues as good is really good.

Aristotle thus shares Plato's view that in principle our rational desire (or 'will') is always related to what is really good, whereas the sensual desire is attracted by the appearing good. Something is good not because we desire it, but we desire it because it 'seems' to be good to us.[27] But Aristotle does not infer, as did Plato in the *Gorgias*, that people who are misled in their judgment by ignorance and wish to obtain something that is not really good, *do not really 'will' it*. But Proclus, as we have seen, defends the authentic Platonic position. In his view, the will can never intend something that is not good. If a person wishes something that is not really good, it is not an act of *boulêsis* but of *dokêsis*. According to Proclus the main difference between the will and choice is that the former is only intent on the good, whereas the latter is concerned with both good and evil (appearing as a good). We can choose for what is really good or be fascinated by the many appearing sensible goods and opt for them. As the power of choosing between good or evil, it is *proairesis*, and not the will, that is the seat of moral responsibility and is what is called 'up to us'.[28] This is clear again from Proclus' interpretation of the myth of Er:

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[25] See *In Tim*. 3,289,28-20: On this point one may complete Festugière who notices: 'Pas plus que Diehl (qui ne donne aucune reférence) je trouve cette distinction dans le *Gorgias*' (t.V, p. 166, n.1). The reference is to *Gorgias* 466d8-e2. Similar reference *In Parm*. IV, 852,24-25 ed. Steel.

[26] *In Crat.* XIV, p.5,20-22: ἡ γὰρ δόκησις τῶν ἀβουλήτων πολλάκις ἐστὶ καὶ προαιρετῶν, ὥσπερ ἡ βούλησις τῶν ἀγαθῶν. The correction of the editor Pasquali <ἀ>προαιρέτων is not needed.

[27] See *Metaph*. XII 7, 1072a27-29: ἐπιθυμητὸν μὲν γὰρ τὸ φαινόμενον καλόν, βουλητὸν δὲ πρῶτον τὸ ὂν καλόν . ὀρεγόμεθα δὲ διότι δοκεῖ μᾶλλον ἢ δοκεῖ διότι ὀρεγόμεθα. A very Platonic passage.

[28] Cf. Nemesius, *De natura hominis*, 41, p. 119,6-9 ed. Morani. One should not criticize God, says Nemesius, for having created human being with the power of self-determination, which is changeable. Vices do not exist in the powers we have, but in the dispositions we acquire through our choices. It is by choice that we are evil and not by nature.

> It is needless to demonstrate that according to Plato 'what is up to us' exists, since he consistently says that the choices of our souls are for them causes of all that is good or bad and he calls virtue 'without a master' (617e3). However, according to Plato what is voluntary (ἑκούσιον) and what is up to us are not identical. For what is voluntary is only to be found in good persons, since the life of bad persons is not voluntary and is not what they will (ἀκούσιος καὶ ἀβούλητος). But our faults (ἁμαρτήματα) too come from our choices and are up to us. For we choose them and having chosen them carry them out, but because of ignorance. If, then, faults are not voluntary, yet they too depend on our choices, whatever is voluntary is object of choice, but not all that is chosen is voluntary.[29]

That the evil we do is 'up to us', even if we did not truly want it, if we had better known, is the fundamental message of the myth, which teaches that the responsibility for evil lies 'with the one who chooses, not with the god' (617e4). Yet all faults we make are *involuntary,* as Plato demonstrates in *Laws* IX (860d).

Aristotle, as we have noticed, was the first to distinguish between voluntary action and deliberate choice, and the distinction he made is repeated throughout the tradition.[30] Aristotle also examines cases where we have to make a choice for something we do not wish to do: as when a captain decides to throw away the cargo to save the ship. Such an action is undoubtedly up to him (he could have decided otherwise), yet it is difficult to call it 'voluntary' without qualifications. The captain certainly did not wish it. [31] However, Aristotle would never have admitted the Platonic claim that immoral actions are 'involuntary'. To be sure, he accepts that ignorance may diminish or do away with the voluntary character of an action. However, only the ignorance about the *particular* circumstances of an action makes it involuntary and excusable. For instance, when a soldier kills a friend in war, taking him for an enemy, this killing is involuntary, though it was up to the soldier to shoot or not. In this sense one can say that he did not want to kill him. But the ignorance about the general principles about what one ought to do never renders an action involuntary.

> In fact every wicked person is ignorant of what he ought to do and refrain from doing, and it is such a mistake that makes people unjust and generally bad. But one may not call an action 'involuntary' when the agent is ignorant of what is beneficial, because it is not ignorance in choice that causes involuntariness (that rather causes wickedness), nor ignorance of the universal (since people are blamed for that), but ignorance of particulars – the circumstances of the action and what it is concerned with. For it is on these that pity and pardon depend, since someone who is ignorant of any of them is acting involuntarily.[32]

The fact that someone (as the tyrant in the *Gorgias*) wishes to acquire things that are not really beneficial, because he is ignorant about what the true good is, does not suffice to make his action involuntary, as Plato thought. Otherwise one risks of making all immoral actions involuntary and keeping only the good actions as voluntary.

Plotinus reacts to Aristotle's objection in his treatise 'On the voluntary and the will of the One' (VI 8 [39], 2). After having endorsed the Aristotelian distinction between what is 'voluntary' ('what we do without being forced to and with knowledge of what we are doing') and

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[29] *In Remp*. 2, 355,11-18. See also Plotinus sees no difficulty in reconciling the involuntary character of wrongdoing with responsible agency. See III 2[47] 7-10: 'the involuntary character of wrongdoing does not deny that the agents themselves are acting from themselves ; but it is because they act themselves that they do themselves wrong.' (Ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἄκοντες, ὅτι ἁμαρτία ἀκούσιον· τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ἀναιρεῖ τὸ αὐτοὺς τοὺς πράττοντας παρ' αὐτῶν εἶναι, ἀλλ' ὅτι αὐτοὶ ποιοῦσι, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ αὐτοὶ ἁμαρτάνουσιν).

[30] See Alexander, *De fato*, XIV, p. 183, 24ff. and the commentary by Sharples (1983), p. 145-146. On the difference between Aristotle and Alexander see Sorabji (1993), Ch. 9, pp. 108-12.

[31] On Aristotle's discussion of the jettisoning of cargo under duress EN 3.1 EN 5.8, see Sorabji (2011), pp. 259-261.

[32] EN III 2, 1110b28-1111a2, translation Crisp (2000) slightly modified.

'what is up to us' ('an action we are master of'), he notices that both notions 'may in reality coincide, even if their definition is different, but sometimes they may be discordant' and he refers to the example of a man killing someone without knowing that he was his father. In this case ignorance does indeed away with the voluntary character of an action that is up to us. But Plotinus doubts whether one should limit this to cases of ignorance of particular circumstances.

> Surely the knowledge involved in [what makes an action] voluntary must not only concern the particular circumstances [as Aristotle said], but also [be taken] generally. For why is an action involuntary if someone does not know that it is his friend [for example, when killing a friend taking him for an enemy], but not involuntary if one does not know that one ought not to do it? Possibly because one ought to have learnt that? [An Aristotelian might object]. But not knowing that one ought to have learnt is not voluntary, nor is voluntary what leads one away from learning. [33]

Though Aristotle is not mentioned – added references are mine -, the point made by Plotinus is clearly a critique of Aristotle in defence of the Platonic view on involuntary faults. Whereas Aristotle only accepts the ignorance of the *particular* circumstances of an action as a diminution of their voluntary character of the action, Plotinus insists that it also applies to cases of ignorance of *general* principles. An immoral action is always involuntary because it results from ignorance what one ought to do, whether general or particular ignorance. The Aristotelian objection that 'one should have learnt them' is countered by referring to an initial ignorance (not knowing that one should have learnt) and to the circumstances that made the acquisition of this knowledge of the principles impossible. Many people live indeed in circumstances wherein they are not educated and not taught what they ought to do. If we take ignorance in this broader sense, as including also ignorance about what one ought to do, all immoral action is indeed involuntary. Whereas Plotinus still formulates his view with some hesitation, Proclus is absolutely convinced. No immoral action can be called voluntary, though we are responsible for it. Only actions pursuing what is good are voluntary in the strict sense.

Notwithstanding their agreement on this point, Proclus' views on what is up to us are radically different from Plotinus' argument in treatise VI 8. Plotinus starts his investigation 'On the voluntary and the will of the One' with the question whether we may attribute to the gods a power that is up to them. The power of choice seems to be characteristic of human beings, who hesitate between alternative courses of actions, and this ambivalence is rather an indication of human impotency. Maybe we should attribute to the gods 'omnipotence' and not the possibility of having something 'up to them'. The question had already been discussed in the schools in the first centuries, as we learn from Alexander of Aphrodisias.[34] Alexander denies that the gods have a power that is 'up to them'. The gods are what they are by their own nature. It is not 'up to them' to be blessed and virtuous, whereas this is up to us, humans. Plotinus, on the contrary, applies the notion of a power that is 'up to us' also to the gods, after having first explained what this power implies and having reduced it to the will. Only when we have first made clear what the expression 'up to us' means when applied to our own situation, can we investigate whether such a power may be attributed to the gods. Plotinus starts his argument from a description of a state of affairs where things are certainly *not* up to us.

> I myself think that, when we are pushed around among opposing chances and compulsions and strong assaults of passions possessing our soul, we acknowledge all these things as our masters and are enslaved to them and carried wherever they take us, and so are in doubt whether we are not nothing and nothing is up to us.[35]

In contrast with such a state of affairs we may define what is 'up to us' as a state wherein

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[33] *Enn*. VI,8 [39], 1,39-44 translation Armstrong modified.
[34] See *De fato*, 197,26-30; 198,17 en 204,12ff. and Sharples (1983) p. 162, and Lavaud (2007), p. 176-178.
[35] *Enn*. VI,8 [39], 1,22-30 translation Armstrong modified.

> We might do as we like (βουληθέντες) without being enslaved to chances or compulsions or strong passions, with nothing opposing our will (βουλήσεσι).[36]

We thus reach the following notion of what is up to us:

> What is enslaved to the will (βουλήσει δουλεύει) and would come to be or not to the extent that we wished it.

Having 'reduced what is up to us to the will', Plotinus continues his argument by establishing that this power of self-determination is established 'in reasoning and knowledge' (3, 2-5). 'The soul, then, becomes free when it presses on without hindrance to the good through the intellect; and what it does because of this, is in its power'. (7,1-2). In the second part of the treatise Plotinus examines in what sense the One himself can be said to be free, as master of itself and its own being. The One 'is as he willed'; 'his *ousia* is identical with his will, if he has any *ousia* at all' (13,8-10). 'The nature of the Good is in reality the will of himself ,… not following his on nature but choosing himself'. 'So he was all will, and there is nothing in him which is not that which wills – nothing, then, before willing. So he himself is primarily his will. So then he is also as he willed and what follows upon his will' (21,14-17).[37]

Proclus was appalled by these provocative statements of Plotinus on the freedom of the One. But apart from this theological debate, it is the starting point of the argumentation that shows how different Plotinus' understanding of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν is from that of Proclus. Whereas Plotinus reduces what is up to us to the will or rational desire intent on the good, Proclus clearly distinguishes it from the will. As we have seen, it is a faculty of choice between alternatives, between true and apparent good, characteristic of human souls, who are intermediary between gods and irrational animals. To live as one likes according to one's will is a privilege of the gods, who enjoy absolute freedom (ἐξουσία), because in them will and power fully coincide.[38] In defence of Plotinus, however, it should be said that he too admits that the notions of 'will' and 'what is up to us' are different. When, however, one considers the ideal realisation of what τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν is, namely to be fully master of our actions, one should conclude with Plotinus that only the virtuous person has this self-control, because he has learned to choose only what depends on him and thus lives as he likes 'subjected to his will'. Plotinus beautifully expresses this normative ideal in his treatise on fate:

> When the soul has as guide its own pure and unaffected reason, then this impulse alone is to be said to be 'up to us' and voluntary; this is our own work, which did not come from somewhere else, but from within from our soul when it is pure, from a primarily guiding principle and master.[39]

Plotinus' understanding of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν thus comes close to what the Stoics defined as 'freedom'. The Stoic definition of freedom is a radical one: 'to be free is to do whatever one likes to do'. Epictetus begins his long diatribe on freedom (IV,1) with this definition:

> 'He is free who lives as he wishes to live (ἐλεύθερός ἐστιν ὁ ζῶν ὡς βούλεται); who is neither subject to compulsion nor to hindrance, nor to force; whose motivations (ὁρμαί) are not impeded, whose desires attain their purpose, and who does not fall into that which he would avoid'.[40]

In fact, Epictetus adopts in a moral sense the political notion of freedom, which, according to Aristotle, means: 'to be free is to do whatever one wishes to do (ἐλεύθερον δὲ τὸ ὅ τι ἂν βούληταί

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[36] *Enn*. VI,8 [39], 1,31-33.
[37] Translations of Plotinus are from Armstrong. For Plotinus' provocative views on freedom see in this volume**.
[38] See Olympiodorus, *In Gorgiam* 37, p. 190, 10-16; Proclus, *In Remp*. 2,355, 19ff On the coincidence of power, ill and knowledge in the gods, see Proclus, *In Tim*. 1, 389, 19ff. and also *Dec. dub*. 18, 19 'neque sine voluntate virtute in illis neque impotente voluntate locum habente'.
[39] Plotinus, Enn. III 1 [3], 9,10-14
[40] Epictetus, *Diatr*. IV,1,1. For translations of Epictetus I use with modifications the translation of George Long (**). On Epictetus' concept of freedom and how ,it is related to what is up to ,us, see recently Sorabji (2013°, chapter 3.

τις ποιεῖν) (*Pol.* IV, 1310a.31-33). On the contrary, the characteristic of slavery is 'not to live as one wishes' (*Pol*. IV, 1317b.10-13). According to the Stoics this ideal of freedom can never be realised by political institutions. Only the wise, the virtuous person, can be really free. Freedom in this sense is an ideal, which has to be distinguished from 'what is up to us', the possibility of choice, which 'is not the privilege of the sages, but is shared by all men, not just by the wise'.[41] However, by making the right choices, and in particular by distinguishing what sort of things are up to us and what not, the wise person may attain real freedom, a life of which he is fully in control. If one investigates the meaning of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν with regard to its ideal fulfilment in the life of a virtuous person and not the initial ambivalence of choice, one may understand why Plotinus defines it in the way he does and why he reduces it to 'living according to one's will'. Plotinus, as we know, does not like to make clear-cut distinctions, as between the soul and the intellect, but always considers the dynamism of the spiritual life moving from one state to another. Thus, on its highest level τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν becomes identical with the will and the will with the intellect.[42] Proclus, on the contrary, has a more 'scholastic' approach: whatever may be the dynamism of our psychic life, the faculty of choice is definitely different from the will. The objection of Theodore shows in his view the danger of not making this distinction. When Theodore argues that only the 'lord of all things' can have τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν in the full sense, he confuses the possibility to do what is up to us with 'the power that can lead all things in accordance with its impulses and obtain whatever it desires', which is in fact a divine power. Theodore, Proclus says, should have limited the power of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν to the desirable things inside the soul.[43]

> For 'what is up to us' does not consist in the power and licence (ἐξουσία) to do all things. For the power that exercises authority over all things is unitary; and therefore it is also a power over *all things*, since it is one and good; the elective faculty is dual, and therefore *not of all things*, because it is, by its ambivalent inclinations, inferior to the power which comes before all things.[44]

We find the same refusal to understand the human self-determination as an absolute freedom in Hierocles, who was together with Proclus, and maybe Theodore, a student of Syrianus. In his treatise On Providence, partially preserved in Photius' summary, we read:

> Our self-determination (αὐτεξούσιον) is not of the sort that it can change through its own choices (προαιρετικαὶς κινήσεσι) what exists and what comes to be. Otherwise there would not only be a different world and a different state of life according to each individual person, given that we do not all wish (βουλομένων) the same things, but all things would change together with the dispositions of each person, if these indeed were effective and capable of producing beings, and be altered according to the sudden turns of human choices. Hence it is reasonable that the power of human self-determination, being easily moved and ephemeral, be completely impotent in regard to the existence or change of anything, if there is no cooperation from outside.[45]

Proclus would fully agree. It is also his view that 'what is up to us' should not be seen 'as a force ruling over external events'. Our self-determination only has control over what is internal to us, what is the domain of our choices, but not over the external things. In this context Proclus refers with approval to the distinction 'the noble Epictetus' made between what is up to us and what

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[41] Sharples (1983), p.9 and n.42; see also Long (2002) p. 221, following Bobzien (1998): 'a free will in this sense is not the actual condition of every person, as would be the case if Epictetus were an indeterminist. Although it is every person's natural or normative condition, it is achievable only by those who attend to his constantly repeated injunction to focus one's desires and aversions exclusively on things that fall within the scope of one's volition'.
[42] See VI 8 [39] 6,30-31: 'Whatever the will wills and effects without hindrance, that is *primarily* what is up to us' (ὃ αὐτὴ βούλεται καὶ ἐνεργεῖ ἀνεμποδίστως, τοῦτο καὶ πρῶτον ἐφ' ἡμῖν)
[43] *De prov*. 61, 1-6.
[44] *De prov*. 60,4-8, but see the continuation of this text in n. **
[45] cod. 251,465a40ff.; cf. Schibli modified, p. 356-7; We find similar argument in Proclus, commentary on the myth of Er, see *In Remp*. II, 255ff. See also I. Hadot, Le problème, **140ff.

does not depend on us.[46] However, as Proclus observes, as long as we are engaged in this life in practical matters, we will be confronted with a mixture of what is up to us and what is not up to us.[47] Even if we have in ourselves the power to choose or to avoid a certain action, whenever we make a decision and start executing what we have chosen to do, the action enters in a series of causes and effects, which constitutes the fatal order of the universe. Therefore, Proclus admits with the Stoics that we are never fully responsible of the outcome of what we decide to do; only the moral quality of the decision is up to us.

> One must not refer all events only to the order in the universe, as we neither attribute them all to our impulses, nor again deprive the soul of the power of choice, since it has its very being precisely in this, in choosing, avoiding this, running after that, even though, as regards events, our choice is not master of the universe. For one must require of every cause only as much as it is capable of. Now, what is up to us is not just a capacity for acting but also a capacity of choice (choosing to act either by itself or together with other factors). And we say that it acts wrongly and rightly because of its choice, since even if what is done is good, but the agent acts from an evil choice, we say that the action is bad. For what is good in what is done is due to another [external] factor, but what is bad is due to the choice of the agent. Thus it is evident to all that we are masters of our actions to the extent that they can be deliberately chosen.[48]

Therefore, there is a great difference between the virtuous person and the mass of ordinary people. Virtuous people can have some impact on what happens to them in the external world. To be sure, they cannot change what happens, but through their virtuous dispositions they 'colour' as it were the external with the qualities of their internal life, whereas non-virtuous people just follow the external events and are slaves of what is happening, whereby 'even what is internal in them is lost buried in the external.[49] Hence, only virtuous people can be said to be free,[50] whereas evil people are dominated by the events and subservient to fate, thrown away without any internal assent. Every person, then, has a share of freedom insofar as it has a share of virtue. 'The person with this disposition is noble and free, whereas the evil person is a slave to all things, even if he reigns over all things.'[51] It is, as Proclus says, the privilege of the most divine among our souls to live 'a voluntary and free life' (ἑκουσίου καὶ ἐλευθέρας), just as it is the destiny of the inferior souls to be impeded by the body as in a prison, and to live an involuntary and enslaved life. Other souls, in turn, are situated between the two groups. They do not yet live this voluntary life, but, insofar as they are liberated from the passions due to the body, they may 'ascend over necessity to a life that dominates the domain of generation'.[52] Their life is not yet that of true freedom, nor a life subordinated to fate, but a responsible life directed by right choice.

As is evident from the last texts, Proclus does not abandon the ambition of the soul to become absolutely free. Even in the above quoted text wherein he rejects Theodore's understanding of what is up to us as 'the licence (ἐξουσία) to do whatever one wishes', he leaves the possibility open that the soul may acquire such a divine power.

> What is up to us might become a power over all things, if it has not impulse of choice, but is only will. For a life as we will (βουλευτή) is in accordance with the good and such a life

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[46] *De prov*. 55, 8-10:'et ego valde letor ad tales dubitationes videns generosum adventicium [Ἐπίκτητον!] qui sepe iubet [iubeo *ed*.] non confundere que in nobis cum hiis que non in nobis'.
[47] *De prov*. 61,9-10: 'propter quod commixta vita nostra ex his que non in nobis et ex his que in nobis' . Cf also Plotin Enn. VI 8[39] 2,36-37: 'everything in the sphere of action, even if reason is dominant, is mixed and cannot have being in our power in a pure state'.
[48] *De prov* 36,1-14; for a similar argument see *In Remp*. 2,259,23ss.
[49] *De prov*. 61,8-17.
[50] *De prov*. 24,3-4: 'omnis igitur anima, secundum quod virtute partcipat, et eo quod est liberam esse"
[51] *De prov*. 25,2 2-23.
[52] *De prov*. 24,15-19. On the intermediary souls and their transition from necessity to a 'voluntary life' see also *In Crat*. CLXXVIII, p. 104,4-22. See below n.*

> makes what is up to us very powerful and it is really godlike: thanks to this life the soul becomes god and governs the whole world, as Plato says.[53]

Yet even the freedom attained by the wisest of souls is not absolute, for they may only have it insofar as they become servants of the gods. As a matter of fact, souls cannot act without being subordinated to other causes. In fact, we are always subservient to those agents who can procure us what we want to obtain.[54] When we lead a life of passions, we set our goals on things that do not depend on us and thus become subservient to those agents, who can provide them or take them away from us. That is why 'necessity dominates over evil people, who are incapable of dominating themselves'. The universe deals with those people as if they were irrational animals having no proper wishes or goals. Quite opposite is the situation of a virtuous person, who is really free and can pursue the goals he puts forward. However, he too is subservient to those 'who are capable of providing him with what he wishes'. Since he has made true virtue his own goal, he must become subservient to the gods, from whom comes true virtue in us. Hence, we have a choice between servitude 'from below' or 'from above'. When the soul is ruled from below, it is dominated by the inescapable necessity governing the physical world, it becomes the servant of the body and its needs, and it will just be 'a slave together with those who are only slaves'.[55] When it is ruled from above, it obeys the gods, who have power over all things, and becomes similar to them, so that it may govern with them the whole world. By becoming a 'servant of the gods' the soul 'will reign together with its masters'.[56] This is what Plato said in the myth of the *Phaedrus*: 'when the soul is perfect and winged it journeys above and governs the whole world', following Zeus and the procession of the Olympic gods.[57]

The servitude to the gods thus becomes for our souls the expression of a free and voluntary life. In a very original way Proclus finds an indication of such a freedom in the description of the life of two lovers in *Symposium* 184c. Pausanias examines there under what conditions the 'willing subjection' (ἐθελοδουλεία) of the beloved to his lover is acceptable. Such servitude is normally shameful, because it goes against the dignity of a free man. For Pausanias, however, a voluntary servitude between lovers may be accepted and even praised, when it is done for the sake of virtue:

> If someone decides to put himself at another's disposal because he thinks that this will makes him better in wisdom or in any other part of virtue, we approve of his voluntary subjection: we consider it neither shameful nor servile.[58]

It is this passage that Proclus has in mind when he speaks of the voluntary servitude of the virtuous soul, which obeys the laws set by the gods. Such a voluntary slavery is the greatest freedom for the soul.[59]

If the soul should not give up the ambition of absolute freedom, this ambition can, however, easily be perverted, as is evident in the case of Alcibiades. This young man, Proclus

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[53] *De prov*. 60,7-12: 'Fieret autem utique et ipsum omnium, si non electivum impetum haberet, voluntas autem sit solum: nam volita vita est secundum bonum, que et le in nobis facit potentissimum et deiformis enter existit, propter quam et anima fit deus et totum mundum dispensat, ait Plato." The Moerbeke translation poses problems. Either we take 'fieret autem utique' (and 'haberet' in the conditional clause) as expressing an irrealis (ἐγένετο δὲ ἄν), but then there is a problem with 'sit' (which stands for ᾖ and should be corrected by conjecture into ἦν) or we take it as a translation of an optative form (γένοιτο δὲ ἄν). In my translation (2007) I adopted the first explanation and translated: 'It would have become itself the power over all things, if it had not had the impulse of choice, but had only been will.' However Strobel (2013) convinced me that the second explanation goes better in the context. The conclusion with reference to Plato's *Phaedrus* (see n.**) makes evident that Proclus envisages here a real possibility.

[54] The following argument is found in *De prov*. 24-25

[55] *De prov*. 25,8: 'conservire servientibus solum'.

[56] *De prov*. 25,7-8: 'conprincipiari principantibus sibi'

[57] *Phaedr*. 246c1-2, quoted in *De prov*. 24,14-15; 60,12; see also *In Alc*. 149,1-8, discussed below, *Theol. Plat*. IV, p.19,14-17; VI, p. 77,25-30.

[58] *Symp*.184c4-7 translation Reeve. Reference to the same passage also in *In Parm*. IV 943,7.

[59] In the radical democracy Plato describes in *Republic* VII people ridicule those who obey the laws calling them 'willing slaves' (*Resp*. 562d).

says, ‘demonstrates the lack of moderation in a life that loves to rule’. This does not mean, however, that the love to rule is as such wrong.

> The desire to hold sway over all mankind and the transfer from more partial powers to more common and comprehensive is typical of someone who looks to the absolute class of gods, which holds authority (ἐνεξουσιάζον) over all the intermundane and extends its influences over everything in the world. For there is, ‘the mighty leader Zeus ordering and caring for all things’ as the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* observes. So the one who is ‘Zeus-like and a leader-type by nature’ through his desire for what is whole and universal, has no regard for the opportunities of power that are at hand, but yearns for the more universal, and ends by striving to join with the gods in the government of the whole world’.[60]

All this may seem excessively religious for modern ears and a typical case of Neoplatonic mysticism. However, here again, Proclus does nothing but develop a theme that was already present in Stoicism. That real freedom consists in obeying God is indeed a common Stoic doctrine, if we understand God as the universal Logos governing the world. In his treatise *On the happy life* (XV, 7), Seneca formulates this beautifully: ‘We are born in the [divine] kingdom. To obey god is our freedom.’ (‘In regno nati sumus. Deo parere libertas nostra’). And Epictetus develops the same theme in a celebrated passage in his diatribe on freedom (IV,1,89-90.99-101):

> I have never been hindered in my will, nor compelled when I did not will. And how is this possible? I have placed my impulses in obedience to God. Is it his will that I shall have fever? It is my will also. Is it his will that I should move toward anything? It is my will also. Is it his will that I should obtain anything? It is my will also. Does He not will? I do not will it. (…) How do you understand 'attaching yourself to God'? In this sense, that whatever God wills, a man also shall will; and what God does not will, a man shall not will. (..)Why, then, do I fight against God? why do I will what does not depend on the will (τί θέλω τὰ μὴ θελητά)?

For the Stoic sage freedom is certainly not an escape from this world governed by necessity, to which be belongs. On the contrary, the wise person subjects his will to God’s will, that is, the divine reason governing the world, and thus obtains a share in the divine freedom, which is not the same as omnipotence. For even the gods are not omnipotent, as they cannot put under our control what is not up to us. Zeus himself apologises to Epictetus for not being capable to give him control over his body and the external events. However, what Zeus could give him, was a divine privilege: ‘we have given you *a certain portion of ourselves*, this capacity for impulse and repulsion, desire and aversion’ (I,1,12). As the Stoics, Proclus exhorts us to attach ourselves to the gods and to find in this obedience true freedom. But the metaphysical presuppositions of his Platonism give this exhortation a quite different meaning. The God Epictetus recommends us to follow is the inescapable fate we are subjected to as a part of the universe. For what happens is not just fate, but an expression of divine providence, a rational order we share as rational beings. According to Proclus, however, we find freedom not in an acceptance of a necessity governing the physical world, but in an escape from fate through an ascent of the soul to an intelligible realm.[61] Divine providence reaches beyond fate, though encompassing it, and gives it a higher significance, integrating the physical determinism within the finality of the good.[62] And the soul itself is not a complex corporeal entity or a form of life linked to the body, but an incorporeal substance that in its rational activities may transcend the body. Proclus devoted the first part of his treatise On Providence (ch.3-35) to a demonstration of these two fundamental

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[60] Proclus, *In Alc*. 148,23-149,6 translation O’Neill modified.
[61] In chapter 21 Proclus quotes with approval the Chaldean Oracles, which exhort us ‘to escape the ruthless fatal wing of Moira’.
[62] On the subordination of fate to providence see Nemesius, *De nat. hom*. 38, p. 109,17-18; see also [Plut.], *De Fato* 573b. Calcidius, In Tim. 143, p. 182,4-5; 146, p. 185,2. On the discussion of fate and providence by Platonists, see Dörrie-Baltes (1993), 86-88; 320-327; Schibli (2002), 129-163; Dragona-Monachou (1994), 4417-4490; Sorabji (2004b), 79-133.

presuppositions, on which hinges the whole argument on freedom. In this Platonic perspective, the ambivalence of what is up to us, a faculty of choice between true and apparent goods, displays the ambivalent ontological position of the human soul as an intermediary between the sensible and the intelligible realm. The soul may 'ascend' to the intellect and opt for what is really good or 'come down' and adopt the concerns of the body and what appears to the body as good or evil, i.e. the pleasurable and painful. It is subjected to fate 'insofar as it devotes itself to things that come to be', but it is free when it activates 'its intellectual and self-chosen activity'.[63] Epictetus' exhortation to distinguish between what is up to us and what not and to choose only what is up to us now becomes an injunction to distinguish between the sensible and the intelligible realm and to live according to the soul that transcends the body. Therefore, to find one's freedom in the servitude of the gods cannot just mean that one identifies oneself with the divine reason as expressed in fate. Joining the gods means for Proclus transcending with the gods, in a life of virtue and contemplation, 'the crooked paths of matter, the tangles of evil, and the harshness of generation'.

> For the enforced activities of the soul are due to the harshness of the material [conditions] and the twisted nature of life in generation diminishes the voluntary life of souls. The ascent to the gods, however, offers them a smooth and refined life instead of a hard and harsh one, a voluntary instead of a constrained one (βουλητὴν ἀντὶ ἀναγκαίας ζωήν)' 'a relaxed activity (ἄφετον ἐνέργειαν),[64] a life free of sorrow (ζωὴν ἀπήμονα)[65] ἄφετον, gentleness, lack of disturbance, and intellectual stillness (πραότητα καὶ ἀταραξίαν καὶ γαλήνην νοεράν).[66]

The last terms echo again descriptions we find in the Hellenistic schools of the ultimate happiness virtuous persons may obtain. But how far removed from them is Proclus ideal of a life as we would wish to live.

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[63] See Iamblichus, Letter to Macedonius (apud Stobaeum, I 5. 17; II, p.173,5-17 W)): 'Insofar as the soul gives itself to things that come to be and subjects itself to movement of the universe, it is put under fate and serves the necessities of nature. But insofar as it is active with its intellectual activity, which is truly left free (ἄφετον) from everything and self-chosen activity, it practices its own things in a voluntary way and adheres to the divine and good and intelligible with truth.' On this text see Taormina (2012), p.181-226; 282-285 (edition with abundant annotation). Proclus explicitly refers to Iamblichus' works on fate and providence as one of his inspirations (see *De prov*. 5,1-3)

[64] The edition reads ἄφατον ἐνέργειαν. I did no check a manuscript, but ἄφατον must certainly be corrected into ἄφετον. On ἄφετον ('let loose, ranging at large') as a metaphor for a free flourishing activity see Aristotle, *Rhet* II 11, 1411b29-29. Connection with 'activity' also made by Philo, *Quod deus sit immutabilis*, 49,4-5; Iamblichus in the letter quoted in n.61 and Proclus, *In Tim*. 3,280,11-13.

[65] ἀπήμων (unhurt) is already a metaphor in Homer. The connection with ζωή seems to have been first made by Proclus. The expression passed through Dionysius the Areopagite to patristic and Byzantine authors.

[66] Proclus, *In Crat*. CLXXVIII, p. 104, 16-21,translation Duvick modified.

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