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DIVINE POWERS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

EDITED BY

ANNA MARMODORO &
IRINI-FOTINI VILTANIOTI

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Introduction

Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti

This volume explores how some of the most prominent philosophers and theologians of late antiquity conceptualize the idea that the divine is powerful. The period under consideration spans roughly four centuries (from the first to the fifth CE), which are of particular interest because they ‘witness’ the successive development and mutual influence of two major strands in the history of Western thought: Neoplatonism on the one hand, and early Christian thought on the other. Representatives of Neoplatonism considered in this volume are Plotinus (c.204–270), Porphyry of Tyre (c.234–305), Iamblichus of Chalcis (c.245–326), and Proclus (c.412–485); while, on the Christian side, the volume includes chapters on Clement of Alexandria (c.150–215), Origen (c.184–254), Athanasius (c.296–373), Basil of Caesarea (c.329–379), and Gregory Nyssen (c.335–394). Additionally, the volume includes a study on the Jewish polymath Philo of Alexandria (25 BCE–50 CE), a Platonist who was also in some ways a precursor of Christian thought. By including Philo too, the volume takes into consideration three religious traditions: the pagan, Christian, and Jewish; and draws on a variety of sacred texts, such as the Septuagint, Pauline literature, and the Synoptic Gospels, which furnished the basis of Christian reflection and apologetic; as well as the (pagan) Orphic *Rhapsodies*—the Neoplatonists’ par excellence *Hieros Logos*.

Among a great variety of topics relevant to the study of conceptions of the divine in late antiquity, the volume focuses on some selected issues, with the goal of sketching what we might call the ‘power theology’ of Late Antiquity.¹ Such power theology is to be understood to encompass all speculations (philosophical or other) on the divine that ascribe a key role to the notion of power (*δύναμις* in Greek, *potentia* in Latin). By using divine powers as its focal

¹ We use the terms ‘theology’ and ‘theologians’ in the context of this introduction in the broadest possible sense, meaning, respectively, ‘discourse on the divine’, and ‘those engaged in theoretical reflection on the divine’.

point of interest, the volume can pursue a unitary research programme, while spanning different religious traditions as well as different forms of discourse (philosophical discourse, revelation, mythological discourse, and so on). This introduction will briefly sketch the notion of power that serves as a *trait d'union* to the variety of chapters and topics included in the volume; this sketch will draw on how ancient thinkers conceptualized the notion before it became so prominently of theological importance in Late Antiquity.²

In very general terms, powers are instances of physical properties that enable their possessors to bring about or suffer change, when the conditions are appropriate.³ For example the capacity of a magnet to attract metal, that of a glass to break, or that of an electron to repel another, are all instances of physical powers. When change takes place, the relevant power is manifested or exercised. Attracting metal for example is the manifestation or exercise of the magnetic power of a magnet.

A power (type) is essentially defined by its manifestation (type); for instance, fragility is the capacity to break (when struck in appropriate conditions). When a power is exercised or manifested, this changes the causal profile of the world—different types of powers may come about from the manifestation of the initial ones; for instance, sharpness in pieces of broken glass. The appropriate conditions for a manifestation of a power vary depending on the type of power in question; in general terms, we can think of them in terms of the presence of a stimulus (e.g. striking the glass) and the lack of anything preventing the manifestation of the power (e.g. the glass is not wrapped in bubble wrap). We have so far spoken only of physical powers, but there are also mental and abstract powers to which the same broad analysis would apply *modulo* their causal role.⁴

With respect to origins of the philosophical use of the term *δύναμις*, the ancient Greek word for what we call ‘power’, Souilhé, who was among the first to investigate the question, argued that such use could be traced back to early Pythagoreanism.⁵ However, as Barnes subsequently pointed out,⁶ Souilhé’s hypothesis was, as it were, a child of its time, which often erroneously took post-Aristotelian Pseudo-Pythagorean and Neo-Pythagorean sources to shed light on early Pythagorean doctrine. The view that scholars by and large hold

² A comprehensive account of the notion of power (or even of divine power) in classical philosophy would be out of place in an introduction and take us beyond the scope of the present book. What is briefly presented below draws largely on Marmodoro’s publications on the topic.

³ A power that disposes its possessor to bring about a change, is thought to be an ‘active’ power, while one that disposes the possessor to suffer a change, a ‘passive’ power.

⁴ The philosophical literature on the metaphysics of powers is vast and growing; the reader who wants to explore it might find it helpful to start from Sungho Choi and Michael Fara, ‘Dispositions’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), at <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/dispositions/>>.

⁵ Souilhé 1919, 23–5, followed by Taylor 1934, 97–9.

⁶ Barnes 2001, 23 and n. 10; 56 n. 3.

nowadays is that the origins of the philosophical use of the term are to be found in the Hippocratic medical writings,⁷ where the notion of power (*δύναμις*) is often associated with that of nature (*φύσις*), in a way reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedrus* (where Hippocrates is explicitly mentioned).⁸ Numerous medical texts deal not only with the powers of particular foods or drinks but also with our physical and mental dispositions. Alcmaeon, who represents the Crotoniate medical tradition, explains health as a balance of powers (*ἰσονομία τῶν δυνάμεων*), an approach echoed in Plato's *Republic* IV.⁹

Theorizing about causal powers began in the classical world as early as theorizing about nature, even before a technical vocabulary for the metaphysics of powers was developed. Marmodoro has formulated and investigated elsewhere the hypothesis that most ancient thinkers during the first millennium of Western philosophy accounted for the constitution of all there is with powers as the *sole type of elementary building block* in ontology.¹⁰ Evidence of this way of thinking is to be found in the *Theaetetus*, where Plato describes, albeit briefly, the view that all there is is the result of causal interactions. It is significant that he attributes this view broadly to his predecessors, as a general conception of reality that permeated their thought:

About this theory, we can assume the agreement of the whole succession of wise men, apart from Parmenides—not only Protagoras, but Heracleitus and Empedocles as well; and we can also assume the agreement of the best poets in each genre—Epicharmus in comedy and Homer in tragedy. When Homer spoke of ‘Oceanus, origin of gods, and mother Tethys’ he meant that *everything is the offspring of flux and change*. (152 e 2–8, my emphasis)

As Plato builds on the details of the theory, it becomes evident that he is describing an ontology of interacting causal powers:

Nothing is hard, hot, or anything, just by itself, but in their intercourse with one another things come to be all things and qualified in all ways. (156 e 9–157 a 2)

Further on in the dialogue, Plato explains how the identity of a property P is defined, in terms of its relations to the properties which generate P through their interaction, and in terms of the relations P has to properties it interacts with.

⁷ On this hypothesis, see Barnes 2001, esp. 28–31, 34–7, 54–5; Marmodoro and Prince 2015.

⁸ See above n. 19. On *φύσις* and *δύναμις*, see Barnes 2001, 37–43.

⁹ Alcmaeon 24 b 4 d.–k. On Alcmaeon, see also Kouloumentas 2014.

¹⁰ The research was conducted within the context of Marmodoro's project *Power Structuralism in Ancient Ontologies*, funded by a starting investigator award from the European Research Council and based at the University of Oxford (2011–2016). Viltanioti was a post-doctoral fellow in that research team. A number of publications on ancient power ontologies followed, including Marmodoro (2014b; 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d; 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; and forthcoming) and Viltanioti (2012).

Even in the case of those of them which act and those which are acted on, it isn't possible to arrive at a firm conception [...] of either of them, taken singly, as being anything. It isn't true that something is a thing which acts before it comes into contact with the thing which is acted on by it; nor that something is a thing which is acted on before it comes in contact with a thing which acts on it. And what acts when it comes into contact with one thing can turn out a thing which is acted on when it bumps into something else. (157 a 3–7)

So (an instance of) the power of heat can act on something colder but be acted upon by something colder or hotter. In the *Sophist* Plato offers the definitive criterion—of a world of *just* powers—by defining the *real* as *power*, and finding this a common commitment of the most disparate of the ancient ontologies: 'I'll take it as a definition that those [things] which are amount to nothing other than power' (247 d–e).

To Plato we also owe the first explicit definition of power given in the history of philosophy. Building upon the common use of the word *δύναμις*, in Book V of the *Republic*, Plato offers the following account:

Powers are a class of entities in virtue of which we and all other things are able to do what we or they are able to do. [...] In a power, I cannot see any colour or shape or similar mark such as those on which in many other cases I fix my eyes in discriminating in my thought one thing from another. But, in the case of a power, I look to one thing only, that to which it is related and what it effects, and it is in this way that I come to call each of them a power.¹¹

The identity criteria of a power, then, are what it does and to what it does it. This definition is complemented by Phaedrus' assertion that what we and all other things are able to do involves not only acting but also being acted upon.¹² There are therefore active and passive powers, which Plato sees as forming pairs of partner powers (as modern metaphysicians call them), each of which serves as the stimulus of the other for manifesting simultaneously in appropriate conditions.¹³

Particularly relevant to this volume's domain of investigation is that in the *Republic*, Plato famously uses power terminology to describe the Good as being the ultimate cause of all things: 'the Good itself is not essence [being] but still beyond essence in dignity and in power'.¹⁴ This passage of the *Republic* on the Good as a transcendent power, a power that is beyond being, was bound to become a key reference for power theology in Late Antiquity; it was repeatedly quoted, alluded to and exploited by both pagan Neoplatonic philosophers and Christian thinkers, from Plotinus' description of the One as 'the power of all'

¹¹ Pl. R. V 477 c. Trans. P. Shorey, modified.

¹² Pl. *Phdr.* 270 c–d.

¹³ Pl. R. 507 c–e. See also *Tht.* 182 a–b.

¹⁴ Pl. R. VI 509 b: οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεῖα καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.

(δύναμις πάντων),¹⁵ to Eusebius of Caesarea, Cappadocian speculations on the Trinitarian doctrine, and down to the Middle Ages.

Platonism is especially relevant to the present volume, because it formed the background of the conceptual overlap, dialogue, and exchange between pagan Neoplatonism and Christianity,¹⁶ which in turn gave rise to Late Antique power theology. But what of before, and what of after Plato? As already mentioned, philosophical reflection on causal powers is, we may say, as ‘old’ as human thought. Certainly Pre-Platonic thinkers accounted for a variety of natural phenomena by positing the existence of causal powers in operation in nature, even if without making use of the term *δυνάμεις*. Some scholars, including the authors of this introduction, have argued elsewhere in press that the opposites of the Pre-Socratic tradition, and even Philolaus’ Pythagorean principles of Limiters and Unlimiteds, are to be understood as powers (and that powers were for most of the Pre-Socratics the sole type of building blocks of reality).¹⁷ Gregory Vlastos is a significant exponent of this line of thinking; for instance he wrote about Anaxagoras that,

[T]he most important step ever taken toward the true understanding of Anaxagoras, was made by Tannery’s suggestion that [...] the hot and the cold, the dry and the moist, and all the traditional “opposites” of Ionian cosmology [...] are conceived...as substantial “quality-things” or, better still, *as forms of energy or “power” (dynamis)*. (1950: 41–42, my emphasis)

Turning now to philosophical reflection on powers after Plato, Aristotle is the most prominent source we need to look at, to understand how the power theology of Late Antiquity developed. Aristotle contributed to the history of philosophy an account of powers that was very influential and is still very much leaned upon in contemporary metaphysics. In general terms, for Aristotle, a power is first and foremost the capacity to bring about change:

All potentialities that conform to the same type are starting points of some kind, and are called potentialities in reference to one primary kind, which is a starting point of change in another thing or in the thing itself *qua* other. (*Metaphysics* 1046 a 9–11)¹⁸

¹⁵ Plot. III 8, 10, 1; V 1, 7, 9–10; V 3, 15, 32–5; V 4, 1, 36; V 4, 2, 38.

¹⁶ Justin, Tatian, Clement, and Arnobius are all self-acknowledged converts, as later on are Marius Victorinus and Augustine. Porphyry and Ammonius (Sakkas?) were possibly converts. See also Edwards 1993; Schott 2008a.

¹⁷ See e.g. Marmodoro on Anaxagoras (2014 and 2017, various authors on Empedocles (2016), Viltanioti on Philolaus (2012); also Mourelatos (1973) and Barnes (2001) on the Pre-Socratics in general.

¹⁸ In addition to the primary type of powers just mentioned, that is the active ones which can initiate change, for Aristotle there exist passive powers that are capacities to suffer change. Examples of such capacities or powers are, for example, fragility, or malleability, or flexibility, and so on. The distinction between active and passive powers allows Aristotle to underpin the asymmetry of causation (see Marmodoro 2016).

The change resulting from the exercise of a power is the end (*τέλος*) that a power is directed toward. For a power, reaching its end is exercising its powerfulness, and thereby becoming actual (manifest). Most importantly, for Aristotle the actuality of a power is its *activation*, namely a transition of the power itself that is comparable to a thing's transition from rest to activity. This new stage reached by the activated power is the causal *activity* the power is engaged in. For example, when activated, the power to heat is heating something else. This is the most important and distinctive feature of Aristotle's power ontology that sets it apart from all other contemporaries and also modern ones.¹⁹ For Aristotle, the actuality (manifestation) of a power is *not* a new property that comes about. Rather, it is the activation of the power, either as it is exercising its causal influence on a passive power, or as a passive power suffering such an influence. For example, in the case of a builder who has the power to build a house, the built house is the 'after-product' of the activation of the active and passive powers in play in the circumstances (where the passive ones are those of the building material); the building process is their manifestation. For Aristotle a power in potentiality is *the same power* as that power in actuality, that is, when it is activated. In other words, the difference between potential and actual power is *not a numerical difference* between them. The most relevant texts are in this connection *Physics* III 3 and *De anima* III 2.

Among the post-Aristotelians, we will briefly here introduce only the Stoics as the next stage of development of power ontology in classical philosophy. The Stoics inherit from Aristotle his metaphysical analysis of material objects in terms of matter and form, or in short, what is known as his hylomorphism. They posit two cosmological principles (*archai*) out of which everything is made. These first principles are, in Stoic terminology, that which acts (*pneuma* or breath or God), and that which is acted upon (*hylē* or matter). Both are everlasting, un-generated and indestructible. *Hylē*, the passive principle, is entirely unqualified in itself, but is at all times inseparably connected to, and qualified by (in the sense we will explain below) *pneuma*. *Pneuma* also exists always as combined with *hylē*. Together *pneuma* and *hylē* make up the four elements (fire, air, earth, and water) and from them, ordinary material objects.²⁰ The two principles are described as follows in Diogenes Laertius:

They [the Stoics] think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts and that which is acted upon. That which is acted upon is unqualified

¹⁹ Marmodoro has developed Aristotle's insight into a theory she calls *power structuralism*; see cited publications.

²⁰ For the Stoics, qualitative difference and structure are primitives in their ontology. Both qualitative difference and structure are found primitively in God. That God is the active principle and matter is the passive one is also a primitive in the Stoic system.

substance, i.e. matter; that which acts is the reason in it, i.e. God. For this [...] constructs every single thing [composite] throughout all matter.²¹

There are a number of issues one can investigate in relation to this characterization of the two principles. One is of particular interest to us here (and has not yet received due attention in the secondary literature). We know that for the Stoics both *pneuma* and *hylē* are bodies (*sōmata*), because they are causally active (and only bodies for the stoics can be causally active).²² On the other hand, the way *pneuma* and *hylē* are characterized in the quotation here above requires us to examine the question of what body is, for the Stoics. *Pneuma* is corporeal (it is body, *sōma*), but has no matter (*hylē*) in its constitution. So in the Stoic conception, ‘body’ cannot be what has matter. At the same time, *hylē* is property-less (*ἄπλοιοις*), and yet, body (*sōma*), too. Hence being a body cannot depend on having any type of property. What does ‘body’ mean for the Stoics, then? We know that body is three-dimensional (see e.g. LS 45 e), and causally powerful (see e.g. LS 45 a). Marmodoro has argued elsewhere that the Stoics are operating on a conception of body that is Pre-Aristotelian and even Pre-Platonic, and rather akin to that of the Pre-Socratics: ‘body’ for the Stoics means *extended causal powerfulness*.

The scope of this introduction limits us to the mere mention of (only some of) the milestones achieved in classical philosophy in theorizing about causal powers. But even such a necessarily brief sketch will enable the reader to appreciate the background to the development of what we called earlier the power theology of Late Antiquity. Following the lead of Plotinus and Porphyry, pagan Neoplatonists, on the one hand, postulated a complex hierarchy of gods, whose powers derived, ultimately, from the infinite power of the ineffable One designated as *ὁ θεός*, *the God over and above all gods*.²³ Christian thinkers, on the other hand, proclaimed the existence of only one Trinitarian God and ‘Lord of all powers’, who, unlike the Neoplatonic One, was an object of worship.²⁴ And nothing indeed, as Mark Edwards observes, would have been more alien to the thought of Plotinus’ followers than the Christian God’s powers to ‘arbitrarily create the world, permit it to fall, and

²¹ Δοκεῖ δ’ αὐτοῖς ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ὄλων δύο, τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον. τὸ μὲν οὖν πάσχον εἶναι τὴν ἄπλοιοις οὐσίαν τὴν ὕλην, τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λόγον τὸν θεόν· τοῦτον γὰρ [...] διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς δημιουργεῖν ἕκαστα. (7.134 (SVF 2.300, part 2.299) LS 44B). Note that Property-less matter is not space or generally the individuating principle of substances, according to the Stoics. Particulars are individuated by their respective individual forms, and are, in Stoic terminology, *peculiarly qualified* (see e.g. LS 28 I).

²² They are each body in a special sense of being somehow interdependent and thus one incomplete without the other.

²³ See Rist 1967; Edwards 2006, 148.

²⁴ Nothing indeed, as Mark Edwards, observes, would have been more alien to the thought of Plotinus’ followers than the Christian God’s powers to ‘arbitrarily create the world, permit it to fall, and redeem it by his love’ (Edwards 2015, 42).

redeem it by his love'.²⁵ Yet both Neoplatonic and Christian philosophers and theologians aspired to Unity: Unity in multiplicity in the former case; Trinitarian Unity in the latter. The age of absolute or radical Unity was still to come with the rise of Islam, whose study exceeds the scope of this volume, but whose attitude with respect to the concept of the powerfulness of the divine is nevertheless to be situated in the wake of the Late Antique developments analysed in the present work.

These developments are, as mentioned, to various degrees indebted to or in dialogue with classical philosophy, and Platonism in particular. The main representatives of the Late Antique pagan Platonic School that we now call 'Neoplatonic', from Plotinus and Porphyry to Proclus and Damascius (c.458–550), elaborated a version of Platonism enriched with Aristotelian and even some Stoic elements. Christian argumentation entered into dialogue with and largely drew upon earlier Platonic or properly Neoplatonic philosophical concepts to express the Christian message, perpetuating in this a practice of appropriation inaugurated by Philo of Alexandria. This practice was not unilateral; think, for instance, of the term *ὑπόστασις*, which denoted the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, before it acquired its Neoplatonic meaning referring to Soul, Intellect, and the One.²⁶ The special appeal of Platonism to Christianity is to be explained not only by the fact that Platonism was the dominant philosophical movement of Late Antiquity, but also by the importance Plato had attached to the divine,²⁷ which he considers as *πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον*.²⁸ As Mark Edwards puts it, 'since it taught (or was thought to teach) the unity of God and his creation, the benign direction of human affairs by providence and the survival of the soul for reward and punishment after death, Platonism was often the philosophy of choice when Christians sought to give more intellectual clarity to the dogmas that they believed on the authority of the Church'.²⁹ Hence, while Neoplatonic philosophers piously evoked the authority of Plato, combining it with that of Aristotle and the earlier pagan theologians to support their own doctrines, their Christian counterparts used Platonic arguments to support or explain the scriptures in new resourceful ways. The existing links between Neoplatonism and earlier philosophy raise many questions, as does the relationship between Platonism and Christianity; they are questions to which the most divergent answers have been offered in the scholarly literature, as will be seen in some of the chapters in this volume, with respect to the specific topic of divine powers.

The present volume is divided into two parts; the first part is devoted to the pagan Neoplatonic School, dealing with divine powers in Plotinus' metaphysics

²⁵ Edwards 2015, 42.

²⁶ Chitchaline 1992; Edwards 2006, 148–9.

²⁷ O'Meara 1982, ix–x.

²⁸ Pl. *Lg.* IV 716 c: *ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἡμῖν πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄν εἴη μάλιστα*.

²⁹ Edwards 2015, 41.

(Chapter 1) and ethics (Chapter 2), but also with the way in which the most prominent Neoplatonic philosophers after Plotinus applied their doctrines of divine powers on aspects of Graeco-Roman cult, such as statue iconography (Chapter 3), divination (Chapter 4), and statue animation (Chapter 5). The last chapter of this section focuses on divine power in the mythological discourse of one of the sacred texts of Neoplatonism, namely the Orphic *Rhapsodies* (Chapter 6).

In Chapter 1, 'The Sources and Structures of Power and Activity in Plotinus', and after a brief introduction on Neoplatonism and Plotinus' general world view, Kevin Corrigan offers an overview of Plotinus' doctrine of *δύναμις*. He importantly makes a link with Greek philosophy of the classical period, claiming that Plotinus inaugurates a new way of thinking about powers by inscribing the Aristotelian theory of *δύναμις* to the Platonic one. While addressing primarily metaphysical questions, in its last section, Corrigan's chapter contains some ethical observations on human agency and freedom, which bring us to the second chapter.

In Chapter 2, 'Human Action and Divine Power in Plotinus', Pauliina Remes analyses the way in which Plotinus applies his theory of causation to account for human action. Remes argues that, while Plotinus treats action as an expression of divine power, he nonetheless appreciates the features that are distinctive of it as an activity that takes place within the sensible realm. In doing so, he combines, according to Remes, Aristotelian and Platonic views in an innovative way. Thus, following on from Chapter 1, Chapter 2 bears on the continuity between classical and Late Antique doctrine. But it also takes a step further by addressing the question of how closely or distantly Plotinus' theory of action is related to modern approaches.

With Chapter 3, we move from Plotinus to his disciple and editor, Porphyry of Tyre. This chapter is the first of three dealing with the way in which Neoplatonic views on divine powers were applied to various aspects of Graeco-Roman religion. What is the role of powers in the fragments of Porphyry's *On Statues* deriving from Eusebius of Caesarea's *Praeparatio evangelica*? This chapter argues that powers had a core role in the original treatise and that this role is to be considered in connection with Porphyry's doctrines of twofold power and of the soul's ascent. On this reading, *On Statues* appears to be not an early work from the philosopher's youth in Phoenicia or in Athens, as Bidez had proposed, but a mature work, in which Porphyry probably engages in dialogue with Iamblichus.

The reference to Iamblichus brings us to Chapter 4, 'Iamblichus on Divination: Divine Power and Human Intuition'. Here, Peter Struck looks at the ways in which Iamblichus describes divine power in his treatment of divination in the third book of *De mysteriis*. He argues that Iamblichus draws a distinction between two opposed types of divination: on the one hand, 'true' or 'divine' or 'authentic' divination, which is anchored solely to divine power; on

the other, ‘non-divine’ divination, which is enmeshed in the material world, attributable to lower-order human cognitive power, and akin to what modern observers would call ‘human intuition’. Hence, according to Struck, a closer look at the third book of Iamblichus’ *De mysteriis* reveals the philosopher’s particular reshaping of the powers of the divine in new ways but also brings into sharper focus the fact that, before him, the notion of human intuition had been left without designation.

In Chapter 5, ‘Powers and *Poiesis*: Statue Animation and Divine Manifestation in Proclus Diadochus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus*’, Todd Krulak focuses on an allusion to the ritual of statue animation from Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus*. Through this ritual, statues were considered as being consecrated, ‘ensouled’ by deity, and thus rendered fit to communicate oracles. In the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Proclus hints that the deity could appear in lesser or greater degrees. Those who obtained but a dim manifestation of the God, experienced only the secondary and tertiary powers (*δυνάμεις*) of the deity, while those who encountered the God fully and clearly, were thought to participate in its creative activities (*ποιήσεις*). Krulak takes ‘powers’ and ‘creative activities’ to be technical terms and seeks to unpack how Proclus may have understood them to function in this context and what they might signify with respect to the benefits of the rite for the telestic expert.

The picture of Late Antique power theology would have remained incomplete had it not taken into account non-philosophical forms of theological discourse. We have seen above that the notion of divine power is first encountered in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. The last chapter of the first section of this volume, Chapter 6, ‘The Sceptre and the Sickle: The Transmission of Divine Power in the Orphic *Rhapsodies*’, turns to the theme of divine power in one of the last Greek theogonies dating between the late Hellenistic and early Imperial eras: the Orphic *Hieros Logos in Twenty Four Rhapsodies*. Neoplatonic philosophers such as Proclus, Hermias, Syrianus, Damascius, and Olympiodorus thought highly of this Orphic theogony, which they interpreted finding in it support for their own ideas. Marco Antonio Santamaría does not focus on these Neoplatonic interpretations, but rather seeks to analyse the mythical language used for describing the transmission of divine power within the poem itself and argues for a series of significant innovations in comparison to both Hesiod’s *Theogony* and previous Orphic theogonies. This chapter brings the first part of the volume to a close.

The second part of the volume bears on some of the most important early Jewish and Christian teachings on divine powers down to the Cappadocian Fathers. Special importance is attached to the analysis of the notion of divine power in the canonical texts of early Christianity (Chapters 8 and 9). Unlike the first section, this section does not focus on ritual, since, with some exceptions, such as, for example, Origen’s *On Prayer*, the topic of *δύναμις* in liturgy and liturgical texts has not yet been significantly developed at this early

stage. Some chapters of this section deal with one individual thinker, such as Philo (Chapter 7), Origen (Chapter 10), Basil of Caesarea (Chapter 11), and Gregory of Nyssa (Chapter 12), while some others examine a series of early Christian texts taken together (Chapters 8 and 9).

The first chapter of the second part, Chapter 7, 'Divine Powers in Philo of Alexandria's *De opificio mundi*', makes a connection with Middle Platonism and Judaism. The figure of Philo stands at the background of both the pagan Neoplatonic and the Christian Schools, in so far as he develops Platonic thinking and simultaneously inaugurates its use as a tool for understanding the Old Testament. Philo's importance for the beginnings of Christian thought is such that the study of early Christian doctrines on divine powers needs to start from him. In this chapter, Baudouin Decharneux focuses on *De opificio mundi*, Philo's most important and best known work, showing that, in this treatise, the treatment of divine powers is equally indebted to biblical and to Platonic ideas, and arguing for a Philonic conception of demiurgy which is properly dynamic in a sense that anticipates some Neoplatonic conceptions of the demiurgic process.

The next three chapters investigate the notion of divine power from Paul to Athanasius of Alexandria. Following on from Chapter 7, Chapter 8 makes a link with Judaism by including a survey on *δύναμις* in the Septuagint, and concludes that the word is rarely used in the context of divine power in the Old Testament. Both Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 ground their analysis on interesting observations on the notion of *δύναμις* in the New Testament, and argue for the pre-eminence of the scriptures, whereas Chapter 10 argues for the Neoplatonic character of early Christian investigations into the notion of divine power, focusing on Origen as a case study.

In Chapter 8, 'The Self-giving Power of God: *Dunamis* in Early Christianity', Jonathan Hill puts forward the idea of a distinctively early Christian understanding of divine power in terms of a logic driven primarily by concerns about apostolic mission and preaching. The author maintains that the New Testament offers a reimagining of the nature of divine power in three different ways, namely the Trinitarian, communicative, and weakness aspects to the concept, and seeks to understand the way in which this reimagining is reinterpreted by three early Christian authors of very different kinds: Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote epistles some time after Paul; Hermas, who conveyed visions and parables in a deeply allegorical style; and Justin Martyr, an apologist who used the language and concepts of contemporary Platonism.

Like Chapter 8, Chapter 9, 'The Power of God in some Early Christian Texts', argues for a distinctively Christian understanding of divine power, but in terms of a very different logic than that of the previous chapter. Mark Edwards maintains that Late Antique Christianity should be understood as a distinct philosophical School, which had its own first principles, interpreted its own texts, and gave its own sense to terms that it used in common with other

Schools. As a result, early Christianity should be credited with the elaboration of a Christian *philosophical* notion of divine power born of reflection on the common ‘reservoir’ of Christian thought, any other influence being strictly secondary. This is not, however, to underestimate the contacts and dialogue between the Christian and the pagan Neoplatonic Schools. Within this framework, Edwards delineates a typology of the power of God in early Christian sources, including the New Testament, Justin Martyr, and other Apologists of the second century, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Athanasius.

In Chapter 10, ‘Divine Power in Origen of Alexandria: Sources and Aftermath’, Ilaria L. E. Ramelli argues in favour of the existence of two divergent but interconnected branches within the Platonic School, namely the pagan and the Christian ones. Ramelli argues for the internal unity of pagan and Christian Platonic investigations into the topic of divine powers, by focusing on Origen’s doctrine as a case study. Her learned discussion traces the interwoven threads of the concept of *δύναμις* as an *ἐπίνοια* in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and others, linking it to broader ontologically based impulses to apophaticism.

The last two chapters place the theological thinking of two of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, in conversation with classical and Late Antique philosophical ideas. In Chapter 11, ‘Powers and Properties in Basil of Caesarea’s *Homiliae in hexaemeron*’, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz puts Basil’s account of the powers of the elements into dialogue with Galen and Aristotle, pointing out the way in which the interaction with Greek philosophical sources is intentionally muted. This chapter illustrates the awkwardness with which Basil, following a tradition inaugurated by Philo, attempts to preserve the biblical literalism, an attempt resulting in Basil’s being of two minds with respect to the powers and properties of things created and uncreated.

In Chapter 12, Anna Marmodoro investigates ‘Gregory of Nyssa on the Creation of the World’. The Church Fathers held that God created the world from nothing, by an act of will, at a particular time. But how can an *immaterial* entity be the cause of the *material* world (crossing the categories)? Isn’t this a violation of the causal principle that ‘like causes like’ which all ancient thinkers endorsed? Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–395) is a very interesting player in the debate that this conundrum generated among early Christian thinkers. Gregory explicitly endorses the ‘like causes like’ principle. Some scholars have thus suggested that he is committed to the view that the created world is immaterial, as its Creator is. Marmodoro shows that the textual evidence is not compelling in that direction. She argues that Gregory’s solution to the philosophical conundrum of the world’s trans-categorical creation is to posit that an immaterial God created the physical qualities of objects, which, *qua* qualities, are *immaterial* entities. Since material bodies consist of their physical qualities, which are created by God, material bodies are created by an immaterial God without crossing categories.

This chapter brings the volume to a close. Inevitably, some important thinkers and major topics could not be included in the volume. Philosophers and theologians such as Emperor Julian, called the Apostate (c.331–363); Damascius, the last scholar of the Academy; Simplicius (c.490–560); Marius Victorinus (fourth century); Gregory Nazianzen (c.329–390); Augustine (354–430), ‘perhaps the first to see in Neoplatonism a Christless Chistianity’;³⁰ Synesius of Cyrene (c.373–414), the Neoplatonic philosopher who became Christian bishop; and the enigmatic author who calls himself Dionysius the Areopagite (late fifth–early sixth century BC)—but also texts such as the Chaldaic Oracles and the corpus of the Magical Papyri—are only some of them. The legacy of Late Antique power theology in the West as well as in Byzantium and in Islamic thought has also remained unexplored, while the question of divine powers in classical antiquity has only been briefly outlined. This volume’s aim is to draw scholarly interest on Late Antique power theology, in the hope of opening the floor for further discussions on the topics, in antiquity but also in Eastern and Western Middle Ages.

³⁰ Edwards 2006, 147.

Part I

The Powers of the Gods

From Plotinus to Proclus

The Sources and Structures of Power and Activity in Plotinus

Kevin Corrigan

What is power and activity for Plotinus?¹ Where does power come from? What is its structure? Is feeble human power related to divine power? Is divine power free if it is ruled by necessity, that is, if it cannot do anything else *but* make or give birth? In this chapter I shall, first, add a few cautionary words about Plotinus himself and the movement he is supposed to have originated; second, provide a brief overview of Plotinus' world view; and, third, examine the terms he uses to articulate a theory of power and some of the principal passages in which he does so. I shall argue overall that Plotinus inscribes Aristotle's *dunamis-energeia* theory—or power/potency/act theory—within the larger framework of power that he adapts primarily from Plato, but in doing so develops in new ways the dynamism that lies at the heart of both thinkers. This is not to restrict many other influences at work in the *Enneads*—Stoics, Middle Platonic thinkers, Chaldean Oracles, Gnostics, among them—but rather to highlight what is most important in the overall structures of power, act, and agency that Plotinus hands on to later ancient and medieval thought.

PLOTINUS AND NEOPLATONISM

Neoplatonism is a modern term that indicates what modernity saw as a 'new' form of Platonic thought, connected with the separation of an earlier 'Plato' (424/423–348/347 BCE) and his immediate heritage from the later reinvention

¹ For the question generally, see Emilsson 2007, 22–123; 2009; Groff and Greco 2013; Marmodoro and Prince 2015.

of Platonic tradition that occurred in the nineteenth century. Neoplatonism has been traced back to Plotinus (204–270), an Egyptian who wrote in Greek and lived in Rome, and whose works, known as the *Enneads* (or six groups of nine treatises), were collected by his pupil and colleague, Porphyry (234–305). The term is then extended to cover subsequent thinkers including Iamblichus (c.245–325), Syrianus (d. 437), Proclus (412–485), Damascius (c.458–538), and some of the Aristotelian commentators such as Simplicius (c.490–560), as well as many later figures in different traditions—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—who were influenced to greater or lesser degrees by Plotinus’ thought—figures ranging from Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth to early sixth century), Augustine (354–430), Avicenna (c.980–1037), Ibn Gabirol (1021–1058), and Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) to Bonaventure (1221–1274), Aquinas (1225–1274), Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), and others in the Italian Renaissance.

Plotinus himself was educated (together with Erennius and an ‘Origen’—whether pagan or Christian, we do not know) by a certain Ammonius Sakkas, a shadowy figure, who lived on the outskirts of Alexandria, about whose teachings Plotinus swore an oath of secrecy.² Of Ammonius, we know virtually nothing. In the *Enneads*, furthermore, Plotinus disavows any originality for his own thinking in regard to Plato (beyond the thesis that the individual soul, even in historical existence, remains undescended, or simultaneously present in both the sensible and the intelligible worlds—a thesis rejected by later Neoplatonic thinkers such as Iamblichus and Proclus).³ What then remains to identify ‘Neoplatonism’? Not very much, in fact, except an indefinable, but unmistakable, sense of originality. According to Porphyry, what was characteristic of Plotinus’ thinking was that he brought the ‘mind of Ammonius’, a mind that took a distinctive line of inquiry on traditional texts and problems (such as the Platonic dialogues or the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias on Aristotle), to bear on every question.⁴ So Plotinus’ thought was not a fixed departure point, because Plotinus himself indentures his thought to many others before him, especially Plato, and because his distinctive lines of inquiry inevitably arise out of questions in Plato, Aristotle, and the whole of earlier thinking.

TERMINOLOGY

The term *dunamis*, and its counterpart *energeia*, derives from Aristotle and Plato and has a considerable range of meaning. *Dunamis* can mean ‘power’,

² Porph. *Plot.* 3, 24–30.

³ Wallis 1995, 120.

⁴ Porph. *Plot.* 14, 1–18.