Porphyry’s Real Powers in Proclus’ *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*

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Abstract

In his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Porphyry of Tyre argued against the second-century Platonist Atticus’ thesis that the creation in Plato’s *Timaeus* was a process from a point of time. This paper focuses on the summary of one of Porphyry’s arguments against this thesis exposed in Book 2 of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus*. It argues that Proclus does justice to Porphyry’s views and that the argument points to a classification of powers in Porphyry’s metaphysics that has so far been neglected by scholars.

Keywords

Porphyry – Proclus – Timaeus – power – hypostasis – immanent incorporeals

1 Introduction

In Book 2 of his *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, Proclus deals with Porphyry’s arguments against the second-century Platonist Atticus (c. 150-200). Atticus
held three views which Porphyry rejected: that Plato admitted three interconnected principles, namely the Demiurge, the Forms, and Matter; that the Demiurge and the Good were the same entity, namely the supreme God; that the creation in Plato’s *Timaeus* was a process from a point of time.1

Porphyry argued against Atticus in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*. This work, to which later commentaries—including the Successor’s—are indebted, survives only in fragments deriving from Philoponus, Macrobius, and, mainly, Proclus. Most of the “fragments”, and all of those occurring in Proclus, are not verbatim quotations but paraphrases. The extent to which these paraphrases contained in Sodano’s edition2 represent Porphyry’s actual views needs to be reassessed through the careful examination of each of them.

In the case of the arguments against Atticus,3 Proclus states that he is briefly summarizing (συντόμως περιλαβώμεν) the relevant section of Porphyry’s commentary. His summary, extending over approximately six pages, seems to follow closely the structure and order of Porphyry’s demonstration, since Proclus consistently indicates the change of chapter (κεφάλαιον) and also repeats some expressions which seem to be Porphyry’s.4

In this paper, I shall focus on Proclus’ concise report of one of Porphyry’s arguments against Atticus’ view that creation in the *Timaeus* is a process from a point of time. I shall argue that Proclus does justice to Porphyry’s views and that the argument points to a classification of powers in Porphyry’s metaphysics, which has so far been neglected by scholars.

2 The Argument

According to Proclus, Porphyry pointed out a serious contradiction in Atticus’ views about the Demiurge. On one hand, Atticus and those around him took

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1 And not “in time”, for, in such contents, time comes into being along with the cosmos. See D. T. Runia and M. Share (2008) 249. On this topic, see Baltes (1976-78) esp. vol. 2, 222 ff.
2 A. R. Sodano (1964). Sodano’s collection needs to be reassessed.
the essence (τὸ εἶναι) of the Demiurge to lie in creating (δημιουργεῖν). If the essence of the Demiurge lies in creating, then it is impossible for the Demiurge to exist if the cosmos, which is the outcome of his creating, does not exist. The Demiurge is ungenerated, as Atticus also acknowledged. This means that the creation is not a process from a point of time and that the cosmos itself is ungenerated too. But, on the other hand, those around Atticus claimed that the Demiurge can exist (εἶναι) even without creating, which is impossible if the Demiurge’s essence lies in creating. The argument I shall focus on here occurs within this context. Proclus’ summarizes it as follows:

And, changing again their mind, they [i.e. those around Atticus] say that God exists even without creating, not even knowing this, namely that real powers act through their mere existence, and that the power to make grow and the power to nourish, nourish the body and make it grow through their mere existence. This is indeed how the soul animates and vivifies and moves its instrument [i.e. the body]; for it is not as a result of decisions on our part that the body has perceptions or has a pulse, but the mere presence of the soul realizes these activities.

6 Porph. in Ti. Fr. 51, p. 36, 2-3 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 119 E, p. 392, 39-40: εἰ δὲ τούτῳ ἀληθές, σὺχ ὁδὸν τὲ κόσμου μὴ ἐντὸς εἶναι τὴν ἁρχήν.
7 Porph. in Ti. Fr. 51, p. 34, 14-15 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 119 B, p. 391, 12-13 I Diehl: έστω δὴ οὖν, ὡς φασίν, θλη καὶ θεός ἀγένητα ἄμφω ἀπ’ αἰτίας.
8 The subject can be inferred from Porph. in Ti. Fr. 51, p. 34, 9 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 119 B, p. 391, 7 I Diehl.
9 Attic. Fr. 27 Des Places.
I take the argument to run as follows:

(i) Real Powers act through their mere existence. Acting through mere existence is, I submit, a necessary condition for being a real power. This means that, if a power does not act through its mere existence, then it is not a real power. And, equivalently, if a power is a real power, then it acts through its mere existence.

(ii) The Demiurge is a real power.

Therefore,

(iii) the Demiurge acts through his mere existence.

But (iv) the Demiurge is ungenerated (ἀγένητος).

Therefore,

(iv) the Demiurge's activity is also ungenerated. In other words, the creation is not a process from a point of time.

But how are we to understand the fact that the Demiurge is active through his mere existence? Look at the soul, says Porphyry, as summarised by Proclus. The soul's power to nourish and the soul's power to make grow respectively nourishes and makes grow our body through their mere existence (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι). The mere presence (ἡ παρουσία μόνον) of the soul is sufficient for animating and vivifying and moving the body. Nothing but the soul's mere presence is needed for the realization of these activities. The mere presence of the soul brings about these effects and the absence of soul entails the absence of these effects.

The Argument’s Attribution to Porphyry

Proclus’ text raises many questions. Let me begin by investigating the extent to which it preserves Porphyry’s own thoughts. In what follows, I shall argue that several reasons support this hypothesis.

First, the importance of δύναμις in this argument fits well within the importance of δύναμις in Porphyry’s metaphysics and in his vision of the hypostases more precisely. As Andrew Smith notes, Porphyry speaks “in terms of a double
δύναμις rather than the double ἐνέργεια of Plotinus.\textsuperscript{11} In Sententia 40, Porphyry says that the ἀένναος οὐσία, which I take to mean the intelligible being, is κατὰ δύναμιν ἀπειρος, “infinite in power.”\textsuperscript{12} According to Sententia 11, at the culminating moment of their activities, incorporeal hypostases (ἀσώματοι ὑποστάσεις) are characterized by περιουσία δυνάμεως, “superabundance of power,”\textsuperscript{13} an expression which, as Smith points out, evokes Plotinus “superabundance of beauty” with respect to the One (τῇ παρ᾽ αὐτῷ περιουσία τοῦ κάλλους).\textsuperscript{14} Jan Opsomer also underlines the importance of δύναμις as manifested in Porphyry’s understanding of “the demiurgic process as a dynamic continuum”, understanding which “contrasts with the late Neoplatonic tendency to distinguish hypostases in a rather rigid manner.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the central role of δύναμις in the argument conforms with the importance of δύναμις in Porphyry’s ontology.

Second, although the term δύναμις is frequent in Proclus and in his \textit{Commentary on the Timaeus} more especially, it is noteworthy that the expression ἀληθὴς δύναμις never occurs in Proclus. It never occurs in Porphyry’s surviving works and fragments either. In fact, it is an \textit{unicum} found in this testimony to Porphyry’s \textit{Commentary on the Timaeus}. Thus, given that the percentage of Proclus’ works that have been lost is considerably limited in comparison to that of Porphyry’s, it is more likely that the expression ἀληθὴς δύναμις derives from Porphyry rather than from Proclus.

In addition, what is distinctive of “real powers” is that they act through their mere existence, αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν. What does αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν exactly mean? I shall return to this question later. For the moment, the fact that the expression αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν is repeated thrice\textsuperscript{16} and also paraphrased four times\textsuperscript{17} throughout Proclus’ testimony shows that, like the expression ἀληθὴς δύναμις, it probably derives from Porphyry.

\textsuperscript{11} A. Smith (2011) IX 71. On the Plotinian emanation doctrine, see also C. Rutten (1956).
\textsuperscript{12} Porph. \textit{Sent}. 40, p. 48, 14-15 Lamberz: ὅταν λάβῃς ἀένναον οὐσίαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ κατὰ δύναμιν ἀπειρον, κτλ. See Brisson and Dillon 2005, 714. That the power of the intelligible principles is infinite, is a Plotinian commonplace.
\textsuperscript{13} Porph. \textit{Sent}. 11, p. 5, 1-4 Lamberz: Αἱ ἀσώματοι ὑποστάσεις ὑποβαίνουσαι μὲν μερίζονται καὶ πληθύνουν εἰς τὰ κατὰ ἄτομον ὑφέσει δυνάμεως, ὑπερβαίνουσαι δὲ ἑνίζονται καὶ εἰς τὸ ὁμοῦ ἀντιχωροῦσι δυνάμεως περιουσία. See also \textit{Sent}. 37, p. 45, 5-9 Lamberz.
\textsuperscript{14} Plot. vi 7 32, 33. See A. Smith (2011) IX 75.
\textsuperscript{16} See above n. 4 vbh7uh.
Importantly, the lengthy final section of Proclus’ summary is devoted to the manner in which divine Intellect, θεῖος νοῦς, creates through his mere existence, αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι. Proclus could not have devoted this section to the meaning of αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι, stating, in addition, that this was the topic of an entire chapter of Porphyry’s commentary, if Porphyry had not insisted on it in the lost section of his commentary.

Furthermore, the association of power (δύναμις) with activity (ἐνέργεια) in the argument summarized by Proclus harmonizes with Porphyry’s definition of δύναμις in one of the fragments of his lost treatise On the powers of the soul (Περὶ τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεων) preserved by John Stobaeus. This is how Porphyry defines a power in this work:

Κατασκευὴ δὲ ἡ πρὸς ὃ πέφυκε τῶν μερῶν οἰκεία ἐπιτηδειότης· δύναμις δὲ τῆς κατασκευῆς ἔξις ἀφ᾽ἧς ἐνεργεῖν δύναται, καθ᾽ὃ κατεσκεύασται ἕκαστον. ἔνιοι δὲ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔφασαν εἶναι κατασκευὴν καὶ δύναμιν.

The constitution (κατασκευή) is, indeed, the parts’ own suitability (ἐπιτηδειότητς) for what [a particular thing] is by its nature made for; furthermore, a power (δύναμις) is the disposition (ἔξις) of the constitution, which enables this thing to act (ἐνεργεῖν δύναται) in accordance with its constitution. But some say that the constitution and the power are one and the same.

What matters here, is that, for Porphyry, δύναμις is associated with ἐνεργεῖν, “acting”. In the argument against Atticus, real powers act, ἐνεργοῦσι, through their mere existence. In both cases then, powers are connected with activity. Indeed, as mentioned above, Porphyry speaks in terms of double δύναμις rather than double ἐνέργεια, which entails that he attributes to power an even more active role than Plotinus.

Finally, what the argument tells us about the soul is compatible with the role Porphyry attributes to δύναμις as an explanation of the soul’s presence to the body. More precisely, in Sententia 4, the soul is thought of as being present

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20 = Procl. in Ti. 120 D, 28-29 1 Diehl: τῷ παρεῖναι μόνον ἐνεργήσαν; Porph. in Ti. Fr. 51, p. 38, 22 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 120 D, p. 395, 31 1 Diehl : ἥμα τῷ γενέσθαι.
18 Porph. in Ti. Fr. 51, p. 38, 4-6 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 120 C, p. 395, 10-12 1 Diehl: Τέταρτον πρὸς τοῖς εἰρημένοις ἐστι τῶν λόγων κεφάλαιον, ὃν ὁ τρόπον ἐπιδεικνύει τῆς δημιουργίας αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι τὸν θεῖον νοῦν ἐπιτελούμενον, κτλ.
to the body by constituting—through its inclination (ῥοπή)—some kind of second or secondary power (δευτέρα δύναμις), which is close to the body:

Τὰ καθ’ ἀὑτὰ ἀσώματα υποστάσει μὲν καὶ οὐσίᾳ οὐ πάρεστιν οὔδε συγκίρνατι τοῖς σώμασι, τῇ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ῥοπῆς υποστάσει τινὸς δυνάμεως μεταδίδωσι προσεχοῦς τοῖς σώμασιν. Ἡ γὰρ ῥοπὴ δευτέρα τινὰ δύναμιν ὑπέστησε προσεχῆ τοῖς σώμασιν.20

Per se incorporeal entities are not present to bodies and do not mix with bodies with respect to their hypostasis nor with respect to their essence [i.e. as such], but rather, in virtue of the reality generated by the inclination, they impart a power which is close to bodies. For the inclination constitutes a secondary power which is close to bodies.

The implication here seems to be that the primary power, in relation to which the power which is close to bodies is defined as a secondary power, is the soul itself. This is compatible with what Proclus tells us, for, according to the argument he ascribes to Porphyry, the soul is a real power whose mere presence realizes the activities of animating, vivifying, and moving the body. How does the soul’s presence realize these activities? Proclus does not explain more. But Sententia 4 can offer an explanation: due to its inclination, the power the soul consists in constitutes a secondary power that is close to bodies. An additional observation is possible: in Proclus’ account, the soul is considered as a bundle, so to say, of powers, including, among others, the power to nourish and the power to make grow. In a similar way, in Sententia 37, the soul’s nature is said to be “endowed with an infinity of powers”, ἀπειροδύναμος,21 and Porphyry devoted an entire treatise, of which only a few fragments have survived, to the soul’s powers.

20  Porph. Sent. 4, p. 2, 1-4 Lamberz. My translation based on Dillon’s translation. See L. Brisson and J. M. Dillon (2005) 11 796. On this sentence, see A. Smith (1974) 1 sq. For ῥοπή as a natural propensity or disposition, see Plot. II. 1,3, 22; A. Smith (1974) 1 n. 2. Other explanations include “an act of will on the part of the soul” or the “inevitability of the soul’s fall as something built into its nature”; see H. Dörrie (1959) 88. Dörrie detects both meanings. Dillon notes that ῥέπειν is “the technical Neoplatonic term for the downward expression of the superior hypostasis”; see L. Brisson and J. M. Dillon (2005) 11 805. In Porph. Sent. 28, p. 17, 4-6 Lamberz, the secondary power is described a δύναμις ῥέπουσα εἰς τὸ ἐξω: αὐτὸ [i.e. τὸ ἀσώματον] δεῖ ὑποστῆσαι δυνάμεις ῥεπούσας ἀπὸ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸ ἑνώσεως εἰς τὸ ἐξω, αὐτὴ δὴ κατιὸν συμπλεκέται τὸ σώματι.

21  Porph. Sent. 37, p. 43, 13 Lamberz: ἀπειροδύναμος γάρ ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς φύσις.
For all the above reasons, I think that the argument’s attribution to Porphyry is likely. In what follows, I shall first investigate the meaning of αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν; second, I shall attempt the task of identifying the entities falling under the rubric of real powers. In the final section, I shall endeavour to show that the argument points to a classification of powers in Porphyry’s metaphysics.

4 The Meaning of αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν

As explained above, if a power is a real power, then it acts through its mere existence (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖ). And, equivalently, if a power does not act through its mere existence, then it is not a real power. But how is αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν to be understood? The formula hints to the fact that real powers act by their being themselves or what they are, without deliberation. A contemporary metaphysician could understand this in terms of the power’s not being in need of enabling conditions in order to be active. For example, for the power to see, the enabling condition is light. If it is dark, one has to turn on the light, so that (s)he can see. Does Porphyry understand αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν in a similar sense of no need for enabling conditions? I think that he does.

According to Proclus, Porphyry understands αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν in terms of the power’s not being in need of the removal (ἐξαιρεῖν) of inhibiting factors (τὰ ἐμποδῶν, τὰ ἐμπόδια) or unsuitability (ἀνεπιτηδειότης) in order to be active. Thus, for Porphyry, the power to see does not act through its mere existence, and thus it is not a real power, because it needs to have the inhibiting factor, namely darkness, eliminated, say by turning the light on, in order to act. Proclus’ Porphyry proposes another example: that of a human artisan (τεχνίτης). The artisan (who, for the sake of the parallel, can here be considered as identical to his creative power) has to have the inhibiting factors or unsuitability removed, by using tools for drilling, planing or turning his material, in order to make it suitable and easy to work (εὐεργον) and subsequently

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23 Porph. in Ti. 51, p. 38, 4-14 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 120 C-D, p. 395, 10-22 I Diehl: Τέταρτον πρὸς τοῖς εἰρημένοις ἐστὶ τῶν λόγων κεφάλαιον, ἐν ᾧ τὸν τρόπον ἐπιδεικνύει τῆς δημιουργίας αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι τὸν θεῖον νοῦν ἐπιτελοῦμεν, καὶ κατασκευαζεῖ διὰ πλειώνων· καὶ γὰρ ὁ τεχνῖτης βέβαιον πρὸς τὴν ἐνέργειαν ὄργανον διά τὸ μὴ πάσης στρατευτῆς τῆς οὐκ ἔσται, δηλοῦει δὲ καὶ τοῦτοι τοῖς ὄργανοις χρώμενοι πρὸς τὸ εὐεργον ποιήσαι τὴν ὑλήν, τρυπῶντες ἢ ξεόντες ἢ τορνεύοντες, τὸ δὲ πάντα ὧν τὸ εἴδος ἐντίθησι, ἀλλ’ ἐξαιρεῖ τὴν ἀνεπιτηδειότητα του θεομένου τὸ εἴδος· αὐτὸς δὲ ὃς ὁ λόγος ἀχρόνως ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης παραγίνεται τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ, πάντων ἐξαιρεθέντων τῶν ἐμποδῶν· καὶ εἰ μὴ ἦν ἂν καὶ τούτοις ἐμπόδιοι, τὸ το εἴδος ἀθέρως ἄν τῇ ὑλή προσῆγον καὶ ὄργανον οὐδὲν ἄν ὄλως ἐξεκθήθησαν.
impart form to it. According to the definition in Porphyry’s *On the powers of the soul* quoted above, some philosophers took the suitability (ἐπιτηδειότης) to be a power. But, for Porphyry, a power, δύναμις, is always connected with activity (ἐνέργεια). The suitability alone is not a power. Matter is, in fact, powerless, ἀδύναμος, as we learn from Sententia 20, and true not-being (ἀληθινὸν μὴ ὄν). Now, unlike the human artisan, the divine craftsman, the Demiurge, does not need to have any impediments or unsuitability removed in order to create, but does so through his mere existence, simply because, for him, there is nothing which can be an ἐμπόδιον, given that he has mastery over all matter (πάσης κρατεῖν τῆς ὕλης). And since the Demiurge is ungenerated, as already mentioned, his creating activity is also ungenerated. In other words, the creation is not a process from a point of time, but rather ἄχρονος, and the form is also added ἀχρόνως, timelessly, to the matter.

One further remark is possible before moving to the following section: the enabling conditions, or elimination of unsuitability, of which the Demiurge is not in need in order to act, should not be confused with the contributory causes or συναίτια the Demiurge uses in the *Timaeus* in order to achieve his aim, that is, in order to bring about the best. The συναίτια are necessary conditions, not enabling conditions. In order to bring about the best, which corresponds to the final cause (αἰτία), the Demiurge, or the efficient cause (αἴτιον), does not need enabling conditions, but does employ συναίτια, which correspond to the process or activity of creating (which, if taken as a process, is not a process from a point of time). In the case of a human artisan, the suitability or readiness of the material is the enabling condition, whereas the process of manufacture is the συναίτιον.

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25 See Porphyry’s verbatim quotation in Philoponus: Porph. in *Ti.* Fr. 47, p. 32, 1-3 Sodano = Phlp. Aet. vi 14, p. 164, 22-24 Rabe: ταῦτα δὲ ἀεὶ ἄμα γίνεται πάντα καὶ οὐ χρόνῳ δημημένα, ἄλλ᾽ ἢ γε διδασκαλία ἄκριτως διαφέρει, ἵνα διδασκαλία ἀκριβῶς τὸ γιγνόμενον. Compare with Procl. in *Ti.* 116 C, p. 382, 12-20 I Diehl = Lamb. in *Ti.* Fr. 37, 4-10 Dillon. Dillon attributes this fragment only to Iamblichus and suggests that Iamblichus would have claimed to be in accord with Porphyry; see J. M. Dillon (2009) 311-12.


27 Plato uses the example of vision, which I understand as follows: in the case of the power to see, or vision, light is the enabling condition, but the mechanism of vision described
In the following section, I shall endeavour to identify the entities Porphyry takes to be real powers. Subsequently, in the last section of this paper, I shall argue for a distinction, in Porphyry’s metaphysics, between real powers, on one hand, and immanent powers, on the other.

5 Real Powers in Porphyry’s Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology

Which entities fall under the rubric of real powers according to Porphyry? First, as Proclus’ testimony makes clear, the Demiurge or divine Intellect (θεῖος νοῦς). Did Porphyry posit a straightforward equation between the Demiurge and the Soul, as Proclus thought? I think that Porphyry did not consider the Demiurge as strictly identical to the universal Soul. An obvious reason is that such an assumption would undermine the Timaeus’ distinction between the Demiurge and the World Soul. In addition, it would be odd indeed if, on the one hand, Porphyry were against Atticus’ identification of the Demiurge with the Good, and, on the other hand, he identified the Demiurge with the Soul. Rather, I share Jan Opsomer’s view that, in this case, Proclus misinterpreted Porphyry, probably because of “the late Neoplatonic tendency to distinguish hypostases in a more rigid manner”, which would have prevented Proclus from doing justice to Porphyry’s views:

Only a drastic simplification could occasion the reproach that Porphyry posited a straightforward equation of the demiurge with the world soul [...]. Actually, Porphyry repeatedly calls the demiurge an intellect [...] Porphyry conceives of demiurgy as a steady gliding down and self-development of intellect that in his lowest manifestation becomes the transcendent soul, maker of the world of becoming and division. [...]. He conceives of the demiurgic process as a dynamic continuum that in the Timaeus is the συνάιτιον of seeing. The same power to see in another state, i.e. when it is has reached its end by seeing, is the συνάιτιον contributing to assimilation to God, which is the final and true cause. Scholars generally take the mechanism of vision to be directly the συνάιτιον of assimilation to God, thus neglecting the fact that vision contributes to assimilation to God only when it actually reaches its end by seeing, which corresponds to another state of the same power.

contrasts with the late Neoplatonic tendency to distinguish hypostases in a rather rigid manner.\textsuperscript{29}

We can therefore be confident that Porphyry did not equate the Demiurge with the Soul. The latter is indeed cited as the example \textit{par excellence} of real powers in Proclus’ paraphrase. More precisely, Porphyry takes the individual soul to be a real power. But, if this is so, the same is true for the World Soul, since the souls are “both many and one, with the single universal soul not preventing the existence of many souls within it, and the many not affecting a partition of the single soul between them.”\textsuperscript{30} Now, if the Intellect and the Soul are real powers, so must be the One, which is ontologically prior to them and from which the Intellect and the Soul and everything else derive. Here one should not fail to evoke that, in Plotinus, the One is emblematically called \textit{δύναμις πάντων}.\textsuperscript{31} If this insight is correct, then we can safely infer that the three hypostases, namely the One, the Intellect, and the Soul, belong to the class of real powers.

But the hypostases are also the domains of corresponding divine and daemonic entities. As Aaron Johnson\textsuperscript{32} observes, the main passage on Porphyry’s theological hierarchy occurs in \textit{On Abstinence}.\textsuperscript{33} There, we find the following hierarchy: the God over all (\textit{θεὸς ὁ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν}); the intelligible gods (\textit{νοητοὶ θεοί}); the gods within heaven (\textit{θεοὶ οἱ ἐντὸς οὐρανοῦ}) or heavenly gods; and other demons (\textit{δαίμονες ἄλλοι}). This hierarchy, Johnson explains, fits well the three Plotinian hypostases: One, Intellect and Soul.\textsuperscript{34} The God over all is the theological translation of the One. The Intellect is the hypostatic domain of the intelligible gods. Finally, the heavenly gods, i.e. the Olympians, and other demons, belong to the domain of the Soul, considered as embracing “all the theological space below the intelligible gods, both divine and demonic”. These divine and daemonic entities must therefore also fall under the rubric of real powers.

Furthermore, in Proclus’ summary, imagination, \textit{φαντασία}, is also described as a real power which acts through its mere presence (\textit{τῷ παρεῖναι μόνον}}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{29} See \textit{supra} n. 15.  
\textsuperscript{31} Plot. III 8.10, 1; V 1.7, 9-10; V 3.15.32-35; V 4.1.36; V 4.2.38. See also P. Kalligas (2014) 640.  
\textsuperscript{32} A. Johnson (2013) 73 sq.  
\textsuperscript{34} A. Johnson (2013) 74.
Porphyry’s Real Powers

For example, the thought of something dangerous (ἔννοια δεινοῦ) acts through its mere existence, without being in need of enabling conditions in order to make the body turn pale. The presence of imagination is sufficient for acting and bringing about this change. Φαντασία is attributed to the individual souls (ψυχῶν μερικῶν φαντασίαι) as well as to “certain powers superior to us” (χρείττοις ἡμῶς δυνάμεις), namely daemons, with respect to whom it is called an ἐνέργεια, an activity (δαιμόνων ἐνέργειαι).

The extant evidence does not allow us to go very far in assessing Porphyry’s views on φαντασία. The topic has mainly been discussed by Anne Sheppard, who has pinpointed a number of problems and also made several useful observations. It is not my aim here to assess Porphyry’s views. I am only interested in the evidence concerning φαντασία in as much as it can shed light on imagination’s identification as a real power in Porphyry’s metaphysics. As is well known, the Aristotelian doctrine that situates imagination (ϕαντασία) between perception (αἴσθησις) and intellect (νοῦς) was taken over by Neoplatonic philosophers. Thus, in Sententia 16, we find the famous Aristotelian idea that “intellections (νοήσεις) do not occur without imagination (ϕαντασία).” Importantly, in Sententia 43, φαντασία is considered as one of the three cognitive powers (γνωστικαὶ δυνάμεις) that are in us (ἐν ἡμῖν), along with intellection (νόησις), which is hierarchically prior, and sense-perception (αἴσθησις), which is hierarchically posterior. As Sheppard observes, imagination is also

35 Porph. in Ti. 51, p. 38, 15-20 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 120 C-D, p. 395, 22-29 i Diehl: καὶ μὴν καὶ ἡ φαντασία πολλὰ περὶ τὸ σῶμα παθόματα ἀπεργάζεται παρ᾽ αὐτὴν μόνην τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἐνέργειαν· ἦν εἰς τὸ σώμα ὑπέκειται καὶ ἐρυθρὸς ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐφοβήθη δεινοῦ τινος ἔννοιαν λαμβάνει καὶ ὄχθην τὸ σῶμα ἀπέφηνε. καὶ τὰ μὲν πάθη περὶ τὸ σῶμα, αἴτιον δὲ τούτων τὸ φάντασμα, οὖν ὤσει καὶ μοχλείαις χρησάμενον, ἀλλὰ τῷ παρεῖναι μόνον ἐνεργήσαν.

36 Porph. in Ti. 51, p. 38, 20-29 Sodano = Procl. in Ti. 120 C-D, p. 395, 29-396, 8: i Diehl: ἔτι δὲ αὖ κατὰ τοὺς θεολόγους εἶναί τινας καὶ κρείττους ἡμῶν δυνάμεις φαντασίαις καὶ ἅμα τῷ γεγένθαι ποιητικῶς, ὅν δὲ ἐθέλωμαι, καὶ τὰς φωταγωγίας ἀπεργάζεσθαι καὶ δεικνύναι θείας τινὰς ὑπὸ τὴν ἑαυτῆς κινήσει, † τοιαύτας ἐξ ἐκεῖνος παρέκτησαι τῷ δημιουργῷ ὑπό τὰς φωταγωγίας τις καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων ἐνέργειας τοιαύτα ἅμα ἐκτείνει, τί καθορίστηκεν τὸν ἕναν ἀπὸ τὸν οὐκ ὐποτάσσεσαν παρέκτησαι τῷ αἰσθητῷ, ἀλλὰς μὲν λεγόντα—τὸ ἑνώλων, ἀναφέρει δὲ ἀπογυμναίον τὸ ἀπτόν, ἀμερῶς δὲ ἐκτείνεται τῷ διαστατών;


38 See Arist. De an. III 7, 431 a 16-17; III 7, 431 b 2; De mem. 1, 449 b 31-450 a 1. In Aristotle, φάντασμα is the product of φαντασία.


40 Porph. Sent. 43, p. 54, 12-13 Lamberz: γνωστικαὶ δὲ δυνάμεις ἐν ἡμῖν ἀδρόναλες ἀἰσθήσεις, φαντασία, νοῦς.
called a power (δύναμις) in a fragment deriving from Porphyry’s *Ptolemaeus’ Harmonics*,41 and is attributed to the “sub-rational level within the soul”42 in Fr. 449 Smith preserved by Michael Psellos.43 The intermediate position of φαντασία situated between the powers of intellection, on the one hand, and perception, on the other, would have certainly been further investigated in the lost part of *On the powers of the soul*, in whose surviving fragments φαντασία and related terms repeatedly occur.44

In light of the above, I think that φαντασία is considered as a real power in as much as it is a power of the soul, or, to put it better, in as much as it is one of the powers in which the soul consists, along with other powers mentioned above: the power to animate, the power to move, the power to nourish, the power to make grow etc. One could take a step further and suppose that, in the lost parts of his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Porphyry posited a more straightforward analogy between, the Demiurge, i.e. the divine intellect (θεῖος νοῦς), and the Demiurge’s activity, on the one hand, and φαντασία and its activity, on the other. Moreover, the attribution of φαντασία to daemons allows us to suppose that, in this context, Porphyry might have also referred to the daemons’ ability to transfer shapes from their imagination onto their astral bodies, mentioned in *Ad Gaurum*45 and echoed in Sententia 29, where the souls in Hades transfer an image from their imagination onto their πνεῦμα, which they still preserve, so that they can resemble the people whose apparitions they are.46

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42 Idem, 74.

43 Porph. Fr. 449, p. 519, 17-21 Smith: οὕτω δὴ τῇ ψυχῇ οὕς οἷον τῇ ψυχῇς ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ γενέσθαι γνωστικὴ σύν εἴρηται, μὴ πρὸς τὸ αὐτῆς προσαγορεύουσα μὴ πρὸς τὸν δούλον τὴν προσαγορεύουσα. καὶ ὁδόν γὰρ ὅτι δοξαστικὸς ὁμοιόμορφος καὶ φανταστικός δεσμός παθητικοῖς αὐτῆς ἐκλύουσι. See also A. Sheppard (2007) 74.

44 Φαντασία: five times (Fr. 251, p. 269, 25 and 29 Smith; Fr. 252, p. 271, 8 and 12-13 and 15-16 Smith); φανταστικὸν: four times (Fr. 251, p. 270, 40 and 44 Smith; Fr. 252, p. 270, 4 Smith; Fr. 253, p. 272, 16 Smith); φάντασμα: five times (Fr. 255, p. 277-2787, 7 and 8 and 10 and 13 and 16-17 Smith); φανταστική: four times (Fr. 255, p. 278, 9 and 10 and 15 and 16 Smith); φανταστόν: once (Fr. 255, p. 255, 14 Smith).


But let us come back to the question of real powers as a specific group of entities. To sum up, the entities which Porphyry’s fragment authorises us to consider as real powers are the hypostases, namely the One, the Intellect, and the Soul, and the entities of the corresponding theological domains, namely the God over all, the intelligible gods, and the heavenly gods (i.e. the Olympians) and other daemons.\(^{47}\) In the last part of this paper, I shall argue that Porphyry posited a distinction between real powers and immanent powers.

6  **Real Powers *versus* Immanent Powers**

In Sententia 42, Porphyry mentions powers (δυνάμεις) among immanent incorporeals:

> Ἀσώματα τὰ μὲν κατὰ στέρησιν σώματος λέγεται καὶ ἐπινοεῖται κυρίως, ὡς ἡ ὕλη κατά τοὺς ἄρχαίους καὶ τὸ εἶδος τὸ ἐπί ὕλης, καὶ αἱ φύσεις καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις· οὕτως δὲ καὶ ὁ τόπος καὶ ὁ χρόνος καὶ τὰ πέρατα. τὰ γὰρ τοιαύτα πάντα κατὰ στέρησιν σώματος λέγεται. ἤδη δὲ ἦν ἄλλα καταχρηστικῶς λεγόμενα ἀσώματα, οὐ κατὰ στέρησιν σώματος, κατὰ δὲ <τὸ> δίως μὴ πεφυκέναι γεννᾶν σώμα.

Of incorporeals, some are so-called and conceived of properly by virtue of lack of body, as is the case with matter, according to the ancients, and the form in matter, when it is conceived of separate from matter, and natures and *powers*; and this is the case also with place and time and limits. For all such entities are so called by virtue of mere lack of body. But, ontologically prior to them are some other entities which are catachrestically termed “incorporeals”, not by virtue of lack of body, but rather in virtue of not having it in their nature to generate a body at all.\(^{48}\)

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47 Porphyry’s views on the hypostases as ἅληθεις δυνάμεις that act through their mere existence are sourced from Plotinus; see Plot. II 5, 3, 20-40. As A. Smith (2011) IX 66 explains, “the transition from potentiality to actuality involves πάθη and such πάθη are πάθη because they are caused by an external agent. It is the absence of any such external agent which is important for the intelligible world”. The soul’s identification as a power and its qualification ἅληθες are particularly noteworthy (although, in Plotinus, the ἅληθες ψυχή is the soul in the intelligible, while no such clear distinction is made in Proclus’ paraphrase).

The distinction between incorporeals that are properly so-called and entities which are catachrestically called incorporeals is further discussed in Sententia 19:

"Ἡ τῶν ἀσωμάτων προσηγορία οὐ κατὰ κοινότητα ἑνὸς καὶ ταυτοῦ γένους καθάπερ τὰ σώματα, κατὰ δὲ ψιλὴν τὴν πρὸς τὰ σώματα στέρησιν ὅθεν τὰ μὲν αὐτῶν ὄντα, τὰ δὲ ὄντα ἐνιὰ ὡς κεκώλυται. καὶ τὰ μὲν πρὸ σωμάτων, τὰ δὲ μετὰ σωμάτων καὶ τὰ μὲν χωρισταὶ σωμάτων, τὰ δὲ ἀχώριστα· καὶ τὰ μὲν καθ’ ἑαυτὰ ὑφεστηκότα, τὰ δὲ ἄλλων εἰς τὸ ἐνεργείας· καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐνεργείας τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ἰσαίς ἀυτοκινήτους, τὰ δὲ αὐτὶς ἰσαίς παραρτέρισμαι <καὶ> ταῖς ποιαις ἐνεργείαις.49 κατὰ γὰρ ἀπόφασιν ἐν ὃικ ἐστίν, οὐ κατὰ παράστασιν ἐν ἐστὶ προσηγορεῖται.

The appellation “incorporeals” does not owe its provenance to the commonality of a single same genus, as is the case with bodies, but by reference to a mere lack of bodies; this is why there is nothing in the way of some of them being beings, and others non-beings, and some being prior to bodies, while others are with bodies; of some being separable from bodies, while others are inseparable from bodies; of some subsisting by themselves, while others have need of other things in order to exist; of some being identical with activities and self-moving lives, while other exist beyond and under the lives and the corresponding activities. For they have received this appellation of theirs by way of negation, stating what they are not, not by way of assertion of what they are.50


50 Porph. Sent. 19, p. 10, 1-11 Lamberz. Dillon’s translation slightly modified. See L. Brisson and J. M. Dillon (2005) II 800. On ἰσαίς with reference to the soul, see Richard Goulet’s commentary in L. Brisson and J. M. Dillon (2005) II 509-512. I take ἰσαίς αὐτοκινήτους to denote not only the soul, but all three hypostases. It would be impossible for the soul considered as life (ζωὴ) to derive from non-lives. In addition, παραρτέρσας is generally opposed to hypostasis; see Eustr. in EN p. 89, 13 sq. Heylbut: πράγματα ὡς εἶπεν ἀνυπόστατα καὶ ὡς ἐν παραστάτω τὸ εἶναι ἔχοντα. Thus, one would be justified in supposing that the activities and self-moving lives, as opposed to παραρτέρισμαι, are the hypostases. The improperly called incorporeals, i.e. the hypostases, are identified with activities in Sent. 18, p. 9, 1-2 Lamberz as well: τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὅλης κεχωρισμένα καὶ σωμάτων ἐνεργείαις.
Porphyry’s views on immanent incorporeals have mainly been discussed by Riccardo Chiaradonna, who examines the sources of the theory and the status of the immanent incorporeals, before attempting to draw some general conclusions by focusing on the status of matter and form. The question of powers as immanent incorporeals does not receive sufficient treatment in Chiaradonna’s article. What are these powers? Chiaradonna notes that they are “extremely obscure”, so that “it is difficult to explain what precisely they could be.” He nevertheless goes on to suggest they could refer to “incorporeal qualities, ‘affections’, […] whose interaction produces physical change in the standard Peripatetic analysis.”51 As I understand them, the powers mentioned in Sententia 42 are powers within the physical, corporeal world of our daily experience, which are “with bodies” (μετὰ σωμάτων) and “inseparable from bodies” (ἀχώριστα σωμάτων), such as, for example, the fire’s power to light up, the water’s power to hydrate, the soil’s power to nourish a plant, the hammer’s power to break the window etc. As has been shown,52 we find plenty of these powers in the surviving fragments of Porphyry’s On Statues. And this not because, in this work, Porphyry dealt only with immanent powers, but because Eusebius, in whose Praeparatio Evangelica the Porphyry’s fragments are preserved, chose his material according to his own dessein, which was the refutation of physical allegory.

The question I would like to address here is the following: are the powers mentioned among immanent incorporeals real powers? The fragment deriving from Proclus shows that Porphyry thought of the hypostases as real powers. The hypostases are transcendent incorporeals. This means that at least some real powers are transcendent incorporeals. Transcendent incorporeals are opposed to immanent incorporeals. Can real powers be found among immanent incorporeals?

For a power to be a real power, it has to act through its mere existence (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν). For a power to act through its mere existence, it has first to exist and second to act. According to Sententia 19, immanent incorporeals are non-beings, οὐκ ὄντα. Similarly, in Sententia 42, they are thought of as having no existence, i.e. as non-beings (οὐκ ἔστι).53 And we know of at

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52 Viltanioti (2017).
53 Porph. Sent. 42, p. 54, 5-6 Lamberz: δέον ὡς ἄλλο γένος ἦν ὑποτεύσαι καὶ μή ὃτι οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἔτερον μηδὲ τότῳ μὴ ἐναι δοξάσαι.
least one immanent incorporeal, namely matter, which has no existence at all, being a true not-being, ἀληθινὸν μὴ ὄν, as opposed to other, less true, non-beings. We can therefore assume that immanent incorporeals are non-beings, be it in a strong sense, as it is the case with matter, or, possibly, in a weaker one. Accordingly, it seems that the derived and parasitic as it were existence Sententia 19 attributes to immanent incorporeals (ἄλλων εἰς τὸ εἶναι δεόμενα) is to be taken as non-existence in the weak sense of the term rather than as an existence situated between existence that is properly so-called and non existence. In light of the above, if immanent incorporeals, including powers, are non-beings, then immanent powers are not real powers. In addition, in a problematic passage of Sententia 19, immanent incorporeals are said to be not activities (ἐνέργειαι) but under and beyond activities (παρυφιστάμενα ταῖς ποιαῖς ἐνεργείαις), parasitic, so to say, on activities. If immanent powers do not act, it is impossible for them to be real powers. Thus, the powers enumerated among immanent incorporeals cannot be real powers. And this also means that, contrary to what has been suggested, they cannot be identical to the soul’s powers examined in Porphyry’s lost treatise On the Powers of the Soul.

Are there any powers that do have an existence of their own but still do not act through their mere existence, so that they cannot be considered as real powers? There are no such powers, since all intelligible entities, i.e. all entities which have an existence of their own, have been identified as real powers. There is, then, in Porphyry’s metaphysics, what we could call a “power dualism”, which follows the Platonic distinction between the intelligible and the sensible realms. So that ἀληθεῖς δυνάμεις are ἀληθεῖς in as much as ἀλήθεια is proper to the intelligible realm. And immanent powers could be said to be “non-real”, μὴ ἀληθεῖς, or even “unreal”, ψευδεῖς, in so much as they are not intelligible entities, but only “copies” or “images” of the relevant real, transcendent powers.

54 Porph. Sent. 20, p. 11, 4-5 Lamberz: διὰ οὕτως ὄν, ἀλλὰ μὴ ὄν, καὶ όχι ὅπερ κίνησις μὴ ὄν ἢ στάσις μὴ ὄν, ἀλλ’ ἀληθινὸν μὴ ὄν.
55 This reading eliminates the apparent contradiction between οὐκ ὄντα (line 13) and εἰναι (line 16). The contradiction is pinpointed by Richard Goulet in L. Brisson and J. M. Dillon (2005) II 505.
56 George Karamanolis has suggested this to Chiaradonna (2007) 48 n. 48.
57 Porphyry attributes ψεῦδος to another immanent incorporeal, namely matter; see Porph. Sent. 20, p. 11, 9-10 Lamberz: διὸ πάν ὃ ἐπαγγέλλεται ψεῦδεται. Porphyry follows in this Plot. I 11 5, 4, 24, where matter, as ὄντως μὴ ὄν, is called ἀληθινὸς ψεῦδος and ἐνεργείᾳ ψεῦδος.
Concluding Remarks

By way of conclusion, I would like to consider an idea which is not explicitly put forward in the Greek texts but which can be inferred, if the insight concerning what I have called a “power dualism” in Porphyry’s ontological system is correct. This approach would entail that, for Porphyry, the study of real powers, i.e. of the intelligible realities, including the transcendent Intellect and the Soul, and of the divine, has the axiological priority over the study of immanent powers, which is, in fact, part of the study of the physical world. This, of course, does not mean that immanent powers do not play any role in Porphyry’s philosophy. In this respect, Riccardo Chiaradonna rightly points out the problems deriving from such an underestimation of the role of immanent incorporeals in Porphyry’s thought. However, I submit, that for Porphyry, the study of immanent powers as opposed to real ones could be understood in terms of a well-known distinction found in Plato’s *Timaeus*:

> Wherefore one ought to distinguish two kinds of causes, the necessary and the divine, and in all times to seek after the divine for the sake of gaining a life of blessedness, so far as our nature admits thereof, and to seek the necessary for the sake of the divine, reckoning that without the former it is impossible to discern by themselves alone the divine objects after which we strive, or to apprehend them or in any way partake thereof.

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