Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti (eds.)


The volume brings together some of the papers presented at a conference held in Brussels in 2013 on the theme of divine powers in Late Antiquity, with invited papers added on later. It is divided into two parts, the first discussing the notion in pagan Neoplatonism, the other bearing on some of the most important Jewish and early Christian teachings.

Plotinus’ use of the concept of δύναμις is complex, with occasional divergences, and Kevin Corrigan connects an overall survey with an analysis of some principal passages (e.g., III 8, 8.1-8; VI 2, 20.13-26; VI 7, 40. 5-18). He also makes a link with Aristotle’s notion and emphasizes that Plotinus inscribes Aristotle’s δύναμις-ἐνέργεια theory within the broad framework that he adapts from Plato. On Aristotle’s account, potentiality requires a previous item which actualizes it. This view is in sharp contrast with the Plotinian distinction between potential existence and power with a stress on the active aspect of the latter.1 To give just one sample, the Intellect defines itself by the power acquired from the One (v 1, 7. 9-17). In fact, it has two powers, one directed inwards, to see the contents of its own, and another directed towards the One. Thus the One is also the object of its thinking, although—as Corrigan emphasizes it—it is the object of thought for the intellect that will-come-to be (p. 26). So the double activity model is applied to the internal articulation of a single level of reality and to the derivation of one hypostasis from another. Interestingly, it is applied also to the explanation of free agency (vi 8. 6) with the emphasis on the inner activity as the locus of freedom. The relation between human action and divine power can be discussed from a different angle, too. Pauliina Remes shows that the vertical chain of causation offers two repercussions for the understanding of action. The many ways in which the explanandum is related to the higher explanatory entities form the core of the explanation but the distinctiveness of the phenomenon may be in danger as well since there is something in the phenomenon of action that resists vertical explanation. On her interpretation, Plotinus appreciates the features that are distinctive of a given action. As a consequence, action divides into two kinds: a determinate kind arising

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1 Here one might bear in mind that the notion of the One as ‘power of all’ (v 1, 111 8) constitutes a decisive turn from the final causality of the first principle to its efficient causality, see G. Aubry, *Dieu sans la puissance: Dunamis et Energeia chez Aristote et chez Plotin*, Paris: J. Vrin, 2007. 213. Among others, she also stresses (pp. 212-3) that Plotinus’ notion is derived from Plato’s thesis that (*Rep.* 509B9-10) the Good is beyond being (οὐσία) by surpassing it in dignity and power, and points towards the Christian notion of God as omnipotent creator.
out of a direct relation to the good and to the contemplation of forms, and a weaker and more indeterminate kind that lacks this connection. Plotinus develops the classical picture of action as involving an agent and a patient for he recognizes that not every activity is directed to something in the external world; there are intransitive or independent (ἀπόλυτος) motions such as walking. Thought and forethought seem to belong to this category as well. Although Plotinus favoured a model of vertical explanation, he did not fail to recognize actions and activities as directed to something other in the physical world. In this model, there seem two kinds of qualitative differences at play: beauty and goodness may establish themselves in manual production and in actions not directed towards the fulfilment of virtue. There is a shift between them and actions with an intelligible goal.

The connection between divine powers and cult statues has been examined by Irini-Fotini Viltanioti. The treatise *On Statues* has survived in fragments but so much is clear that it also witnesses to the change of ways of seeing in that age. Viltanioti focuses on the notion of the role of powers in statues. After having surveyed the recent discussions she claims that the text talks about gods mostly as powers, some are different kinds of the same power. In some other cases, however, they are symbols of powers. Furthermore, except for Zeus, all the powers inhabit the physical world. The powers should be considered in the context of Porphyry’s doctrine of twofold power (an internal power which is part of the essence of the thing and produces an external power constituting the ontological level below) and spiritual ascent. On her reading, Porphyry’s aim was to guide novice philosophers on the way in which proper contemplation of the images of gods could serve in unifying the power which in turn leads to the ascent of the soul towards the Intellect and the One. A similar issue, now in Iamblichus, was taken up by Peter T. Struck. The link between divine power and human intuition is set in a philosophical context of which the most important characteristic is the theme of divinatory insight as a kind of epiphenomenon of physiology which manifests a divine hand. The author stresses that despite undeniable differences the views of Porphyry and Iamblichus have much in common. Both philosophers follow earlier ideas of divination by characterizing the knowledge resulting from traditional divinatory practices as centred around the functionalities of the body. Moreover, both depart from the tradition by claiming that because the appeal to material structures the divine power is compromised in such practices. Unlike Porphyry, however, Iamblichus calls a more powerful kind of insight, attributable to divine power, as a new form of μαντική. This is not an insight that can be gained from the material world. A similar subject was taken up by Todd Krulak in the discussion of the link between animation of statues and divine manifestation in
Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus*. He concentrates on 1 330-331 to describe the transaction that occurs between image and divinity. His working assumption is that the animation practice of the Neoplatonists tapped into the same pattern of the ritual as that drawn upon in the *Asclepius*, although the utility of the rite and the reported experience of the practitioner differed. The distinction between δύναμις and ποίησις (the final causative extension of divine activity) in Proclus serves to show that depending on the quality of the rite and extent to which the image is suitable for illumination, the statue participated in different levels of the invoked deity. Marco Antonio Santamaria Álvarez discusses the transmission of divine power in the Orphic *Rhapsodies*. The *Rhapsodies* offers novelties in comparison with Hesiodus’ *Theogony* and earlier Orphic accounts such as the Derveni papyrus. The most important one may the restriction of violence in the transmission of divine power between the generations of gods. It is a somewhat offline paper since, for all its merits which are beyond doubt, it does not have much to do with issues specific to late antiquity, even if the fragments have been preserved by the Neoplatonists.

Philo of Alexandria was a major source for some of the Fathers when working out the doctrines of their own. Baudouin S. Decharneux discusses his doctrine of divine powers in *De opificio mundi*. These powers were considered as expressions of the otherwise unknowable god and have creative force; they can be taken as Father and Maker in clear opposition to any doctrine which insists on the eternity of the world. From this point of view, Philo owes much to the literalist interpretation of the *Timaeus*. However, Decharneux draws attention to the variety of Philo’s use of the word ‘create’ (ποιεῖν); it may also refer to the organization of pre-existing matter and does not imply temporal sequence necessarily. The distinction between the first man and the man of soul and body is explained with reference to the Platonic notion of μίμησις, which involves the gradual diminution of power as it is merging into the world of division and matter. Jonathan Hill gives a useful overview of δύναμις in early Christianity, the period from Paul to Justin Martyr. He aims to show the distinctive nature of the Christian account. In Pauline texts Christ is portrayed sometimes as the power of God (1 Cor 1:23-2:16) where power is linked to wisdom.2 The whole issue is discussed in the context of apostolic mission, which left its mark on the interpretation of divine power as well. It is explained in three

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2 It may be important to have in mind that other traditions are also at work here; e.g., the propagation of divine wisdom contributes to our normative self-identification (identifying ourselves in relation to nothing but Christ as a person), which recalls the Stoic theory of οἰκείωσις, see T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, 148-150.
aspects, Trinitarian (linked also to the Holy Spirit), communicative (efficiency of preaching) and in that of weakness (along with suffering, weakness enables Paul to receive Christ's power). The development of this interpretation in later thinkers is also discussed, starting from Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius applies the notion of divine power to the bishops as its recipients, the author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* associates it salvation, and Justin takes it, among others, as represented by the Cross and incarnated in some way in Christ. Mark Edwards gives another helpful survey, now on the power of God. He starts with Justin Martyr which offers an interesting comparison with Hill's paper. Both authors emphasize that on Justin's account all power in humans comes only from God through Christ for it is a power entrusted to the believers, but Edwards also points out that this power belongs to the exalted Christ as well as to Christ himself and that it is a delegated power. Clement of Alexandria cites 1 Cor 1:24 throughout the *Stromateis* to indicate, among others, that our freedom is not abridged when God brings the wisdom of this world to naught. He must have considered divine power communicable for he claims that even those in the Hades must be brought to life by the power of Christ's teaching, whether uttered by himself or the apostles. His pupil, Origen, owes much to Justin Martyr (e.g., on power of the exalted Christ) but works in a more systematic way. Edwards stresses that we do not have explicit evidence for Middle Platonic influences on the church father. The survey ends with Athanasius of Alexandria who opposed Porphyry in many points; for example, he denies (*Contra Gentiles* 6) that power can be equated with God. In the summary Edwards contends that Christianity was a distinct philosophy which argued with integrity from its own premises.

Ilaria L. E. Ramelli concentrates on Origen. The philosophical roots of his doctrine include Justin Martyr and Bardaisan of Edessa, while his influence can traced in Gregory of Nyssa. On Bardaisan's account power is an aspect of Christ-Logos. The thesis finds an echo in Origen who considers power as one of the ἐπινοίαι of Christ and plays a central role in creation, a view—Ramelli believes—that can also be ascribed to Bardaisan. For Origen, in line with his eschatologically oriented perspective, God's power is not only creative but also directed towards salvation with the implication that the Cross is a sign of it. Gregory shares the attempt, which leads to his doctrine of the universal salvation. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz focuses on one text, Basil of Caesaria's *Homiliae in hexaemeron*. He draws attention to Basil's claim that the generative power given to earth remains with it which leads to the generation of animal life. Basil's overall aim was to provide a proper understanding of the cosmos by combining literal reading with an expansion of the text of the *Book of Genesis*. Interestingly enough, he seems to have owed much to Aristotle and Galen as well, although that does not mean—as Radde-Gallwitz emphasizes
it—that he followed these authors uncritically. To take but one sample, he firmly rejected Aristotle’s notion of prime matter. Anna Marmodoro discusses Gregory of Nyssa’s views on the creation of the world, concentrating on the problem whether he held that what the immaterial God causes to come about is immaterial too. It invites the question of the status of material objects, if there are such, and the causality of their creation. One has to ask whether by assuming that an immaterial god brings about material objects we do not violate the principle of ‘like causes like’. On Marmodoro’s interpretation, a version of eliminativist interpretation takes Gregory to hold that objects are constituted of qualities inhering in a substratum that is assumed to be of mental nature. The immaterial God created immaterial qualities of objects. They are abstract qualities which are somehow physical because the definitions are truly predicated of them. They also compose with one another to give rise to physical bodies.

The book is furnished with detailed bibliography and two indices, a general one and an index of names. In sum, the only imbalance I have registered is the fact that in the part discussing pagan authors only two out of the six contributions examine issues that are not related to cults directly, with the result that some aspects (e.g., Proclus’ *El. Theol.* or the commentaries by Simplicius and Philoponus) have been left out of consideration. This said, my general impression is that it is a collection of papers of high quality.

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