In a Platonic universe, all order is seen as imposed on natural things by a divine agent, who has to cope with a substrate that in itself is disordered and chaotic. This Platonic view entails a number of specific problems, to which Plato does not seem to offer a straightforward answer. Present-day scholarship is still divided concerning crucial points of the doctrine, and this hesitation about Plato’s view of a divine creator and the substrate of his operation existed already in ancient times. Aristotle rejected this view straightforwardly, and, generally speaking, the later ancient tradition favoured Aristotle’s hylemorphism over against the Platonic account.

In the present contribution, we should like to focus on Proclus, one of the most important and notorious followers of the Platonic account of divine creation. As Proclus is taking Plato ‘à la lettre’, he will have to provide answers to the main problems of the doctrine: how did he envisage the interaction between the order-giving divinity and the substrate of its operation? How exactly is the order of the divine realms translated into laws governing the lower realms? Moreover, how does the substrate of this ordering look like, and which role does it play in the legislation? As with positive law, the rules imposed are always designed to tackle particular problems in particular circumstances. That is to say: the subjects to the law determine the conditions that lead to the legislation. Hence, if one translates the imagery of law-giving to nature, then the notion of physical necessity will have two different components: the necessity imposed on nature by the laws, and the necessity exhibited by the substrate, imposing itself on the law-giver.

From this perspective, we shall have to unravel many stages of necessity, and of the substrate alike; doing so, we hope to contribute to a further elucidation of the Neoplatonic hierarchical world-view, and particularly of its lowest stages.
I. Plato’s Timaeus

The basic idea of Plato’s cosmology is that any kind of order is brought about by an immaterial, intellectual operation that leads the universe. In the tenth book of the *Laws*, which is Plato’s main treatise (if that term may be used) on theology, Plato subtly modifies the scope of the famous φύσις-νόμος-debate that occupied the previous generation of philosophers and sophists. He claims that the cosmos cannot be explained on the basis of merely physical principles, i.e., material principles that are inherent in nature, but rather that all existing things are brought about by an order that is imposed on them by soul—and thus, the essential characteristic of nature is this order or law: φύσις is νόμος.¹

In the *Timaeus* this central idea is elaborated in detail, with an important extra element, namely that the intelligent design is here confronted with a counterpart that has an important influence on the operation of the demiurge. At *Tim*. 47 e–48 a, after a discussion of the demiurge’s intervention to create the universe, the world soul, the gods, time and the planets, and living beings, Timaeus introduces a new element. The world, he says, is not just the result of the intellect’s operations. It has come about by a combination of ἀνάγκη (necessity) and intellect (νοῦς):

Now in all but a brief part of the discourse I have just completed I have presented what has been crafted by Intellect. But I need to match this account by providing a comparable one concerning the things that have come about by Necessity. For this ordered world is of mixed birth: it is the offspring of a union of Necessity and Intellect. Intellect prevailed over Necessity by persuading it to direct most of the things that come to be toward what is best, and the result of this subjugation of Necessity to wise persuasion was the initial formation of this universe. So if I’m to tell the story of how it really came to be in this way, I’d also have to introduce the character of the Straying Cause—how it is its nature to set things adrift.²

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¹ Plato, *Leg.* X 884 a–907 d.
² *Tim*. 47 e–48 a 7 (trans. D. J. Zeyl): Τά μὲ νόθαν παρε ἡλιθία τῶν εἰρήμεν πρὸ χαίρει εἰ πάντα διὰ τὰ διὰ νοῦς ἀνάγκης γεγονόμενα τῷ λόγῳ π αὐτὸ ἔθε τοι νοῦς τὸν κόσμου γένεσις ἐξ ἀνάγκης διὰ καὶ νοῦς αὐτότικος εἰρής οὐκ ἀρχηγός ἄριστος τῷ πείθει ξανατῆς τῶν γεγονόμενα τὰ πλείστα εἰ πὸ ἐβελώστων ὡς νοῦς τάντα ταῦτα τῇ ἀνάγκῃ ἡπτομένης ὧπό π ἐθαύμας εἰ φρόνος οὐκ ἀρχής συνίστατο τὸν παν. ἐ ἔτις οὖν