

## MACROBIUS: ASTROLOGICAL DESCENTS, ASCENTS, AND RESTORATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The present article will explore Macrobius' theme of the souls' astrological descents and ascents through the heavens, also taking into account recent scholarly debates on this score, as well as his concept of the sublunar world and its relation to Hades, and the restoration. It is probable that Macrobius knew the doctrine of universal restoration (*apokatastasis*) found in Christian Neoplatonism and was inspired by it, to the point of ascribing it back – very questionably – to his great model, Plato.

**KEY WORDS:** MACROBIUS, ASTROLOGY, ESCHATOLOGY, CHRISTIAN NEOPLATONISM, PLATO.

### MACROBIO: DESCENSOS Y ASCENSOS ASTROLÓGICOS Y RESTAURACIONES

### RESUMEN

El presente artículo investigará el tema de Macrobio del “descenso” y “ascenso” de las almas a través de los cielos, teniendo en consideración los debates científicos recientes sobre esta cuestión, así como su concepto del mundo sublunar y su relación con el Hades y la restauración. Es probable que Macrobio conociera la doctrina de la restauración universal (*apokatastasis*) que encontramos en el neoplatonismo cristiano y fue inspirado por ello hasta el punto de atribuirlo -muy discutiblemente- a su gran modelo, Platón.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** MACROBIO, ASTROLOGÍA, ESCATOLOGÍA, NEOPLATONISMO CRISTIANO, PLATÓN.

Aldo Setaioli recently proposed that Macrobius *in Somn.* 1.12 combines two different models of the descent of the soul, one along the zodiac and one through the planetary spheres<sup>1</sup>. While Mireille Armisen Marchetti hypothesised that Macrobius was the author of this juxtaposition<sup>2</sup>, Setaioli suggested that this juxtaposition was in fact already at work earlier, and that Macrobius received it. In particular, he derived it, more or less directly, from the Middle Platonist and Neopythagorean Numenius, fr. 35 Des Places and fr. 31 Des Places. Both the Middle Platonist Plutarch and Nu-

<sup>1</sup> A. SETAIOLI, 2010, pp. 267-276, in polemic with W. HÜBNER, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> M. ARMISEN MARCHETTI, 2001, p. 168 n. 264.

menius himself had transformed Plato's description of the postmortem judgments and the rivers of Hades to the sky<sup>3</sup>. Macrobius in turn, as I shall show, adopted and adapted this remarkable move, by locating Hades in the sublunar sphere.

But for Macrobius, as will become clear in the course of this essay, a permanent stay in a condition of postmortem punishment is excluded, since all souls will return to their original condition. This doctrine was attributed by Macrobius to Plato, but Plato did not quite believe in universal restoration. This was rather the conviction of late antique Christian Platonists such as Marius Victorinus, Gregory Nyssen, Ambrose, and the early Augustine, who all shared the doctrine of *apokatastasis* inherited more or less directly from the early third-century Christian Platonist Origen of Alexandria.

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Macrobius' location of Hades and its rivers in the sky will return in a later Platonist, a Christian Platonist who also supported the doctrine of universal restoration or *apokatastasis*<sup>4</sup>, John the Scot Eriugena in his *Glosae Martiani*, 13.5 ed. Jeaneau, in a section entitled <Secundum> *sectam Platoniam antiquissimorum Graecorum de lapsu et apostrophia animarum*<sup>5</sup>. Here Eriugena is speaking of the fall of the souls, their descents through the planetary spheres of which Macrobius had spoken, and their reascent. *Apostrophia* indicates the Neoplatonic ἀποστροφή or ἐπιστροφή, which Eriugena – like Ps. Dionysius, whose oeuvre he knew very well – in fact identified with universal *apokatastasis*. Eriugena in this passage also presents the same etymologies of the infernal rivers that Macrobius does and the identification of these rivers with the planetary orbits, which are located under the fixed stars. These are described as the natural seat of the souls, whereas the earth is not their natural seat.

Eriugena also identifies the return of the soul to its original place with its deification<sup>6</sup>, which he calls, not θέωσις as most Patristic authors did, but ἀποθέωσις. Interpreting ἀπο- in the sense of “back”, he construes it as a “re-deification”, namely, a return or restoration to the divine state that was the original state of the soul. This return is clearly the *apokatastasis* of the soul, and this is hardly surprising since Eriugena himself was one of the few Latin supporters of the doctrine of universal restoration, which he consciously upheld in the wake of Origen and in opposition

<sup>3</sup> See Plutarch, *De deo Socratis* 591A; *De facie in orbe lunae* 943D, and I.P. COULIANO, 1983, p. 45. See also Numenius, fr. 35 DES PLACES; Porphyry *De Styge* fr. 377 SMITH.

<sup>4</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> In the Oxford manuscript: *sectam Platoniam antiquissimorum Graecorum de lapsu et apostrophia animarum*. I accept Liebeschütz's integration <secundum> *sectam Platoniam*...

<sup>6</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2013b, 2013c.

to Augustine – or at least to the late Augustine, since in his earlier, anti-Manichaean phase Augustine too had supported the doctrine of universal *apokatastasis*<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, what he describes – the original unity of all beings in God and their return to this condition in the end, which is a unity of wills and not a confusion of substances – is in fact the Origenian-Evagrian doctrine. Eriugena developed and reinterpreted it in his *Periphyseon*, which was itself modelled after Origen’s *Περὶ ἀρχῶν*<sup>8</sup>. However, both the Origenian Christian authors and Eriugena himself dropped the “astral” doctrine of descent and purification of the soul through the planetary orbits, which was supported by Macrobius as well as by another “pagan” Neoplatonist, Martianus Capella, and which probably sounded too “pagan” to them:

Because the Platonists thought that there was nothing outside the universe, they were convinced that the souls *return to the same orbits of the planets through which they imagined that they had fallen into the bodies*, and that thus they find again their original and natural abode. However, since they had been contaminated by the stains of the body, they could not return without the purification that they call ἀποθέωσις, that is, ‘re-deification’. Because at the beginning the souls were linked to the divinity in unity, in their opinion, and then they return to it after purification; therefore, *they thought that souls are purified in the planetary orbits ...*

They assigned a particular space to each single soul, according to the quality of their merits. And *they called the orbit of Saturn Styx*, which means “sadness” ... *that of Mars, on the other side, was called Πυρρολεγεθων* [*sic*], that is, flaming fire. In these two orbits the impious souls are either tormented eternally, if characterised by an excessive wickedness, or purified, in order to return, at a certain moment<sup>9</sup>, to peace. And they thought that *this peace was found in the orbits of Jupiter and Venus, where they believed that the Elysian Fields were located*, the fields of ἐλύσεος [*sic*], that is, of liberation from pains ...

Even after purification, some of the souls wish to return again to some bodies; others, on the contrary, completely despise bodies and reach *their natural abodes among the stars, from which they had fallen ...* The souls’ free examination, with which they decide whether to return back to the body or to despise any corporeal abode and to return to their original place, is indicated [*sc. in the text of Martianus Capella*] by the peregrination of the Fortunaes from river to river and their return from river to river in the opposite direction.

The Elysian Fields of the classical tradition are here given an astral location, in accordance with Macrobius’ and Martianus’ redistribution of the postmortem geography

<sup>7</sup> Demonstration in RAMELLI, 2013a.

<sup>8</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2013, the final chapter on Eriugena.

<sup>9</sup> In my edition (RAMELLI, 2006) I have corrected *quandam*, p. 132 l. 1 Jeaneau, into *quondam*, which is the perfect *pendant* to *semper*, “eternally”, in the preceding line.

(the rivers of Hades, the Elysian Fields) in an astral landscape. Thus, the Elysian Fields are situated in the orbits of Jupiter and Venus, and are identified with the place of liberation from postmortem torment and of peace. Very interestingly, one of the very first Christian texts that suggested the doctrine of apokatastasis, the *Apocalypse of Peter* (Rainer fragment), identified the Elysian Fields with the place of blessedness and salvation<sup>10</sup>. This text is likely to have influenced Clement of Alexandria and especially Origen in the elaboration of their doctrine of universal restoration<sup>11</sup>.

Eriugena in the above-quoted passage clearly does not ascribe a universalistic *apokatastasis* to Martianus, as he states that, according to him, there are some souls that are *not* purified by torments after this life, but only punished, and these must endure hell forever. This in fact was already Plato's view, but I shall demonstrate that Macrobius' own opinion was different, in that he considered the restoration of souls to be universal and even attributed this universality back to Plato himself. In this way, he ascribed to Plato what was rather the view of prominent Christian Neoplatonists.

Some aspects of the interpretations that Eriugen puts forward in the block quotation are taken up by him in several points of his Commentary on Martianus as well, for instance in 68.16 and 69.2<sup>12</sup>. This philosophical discourse concerning the descent and ascent of the souls and the eternity of their punishments is less developed in Remigius of Auxerre's commentary on Martianus. Indeed, Remigius, unlike Eriugena, was really no philosopher<sup>13</sup>. Remigius, nevertheless, does display some traces of those philosophical exegeses concerning the destinies of souls, especially in 13.6 (15.8) and 69.1 (166.49). The anonymous Berlin-Zwettl commentary, too, written by an author who was close to the Platonic School of Chartres in the Middle Ages, takes over and emphasises the Platonic-Pythagorean exegesis reflected in Martianus, and locates the true hell on earth as the place of the incarnation of the souls.

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It is thus necessary to take a closer look at Macrobius' doctrine of the soul, its astral ascents and descents, and its eschatological destinies. Macrobius was a Latin Neoplatonist<sup>14</sup> and a member of the senatorial order and *vir illustris*; his philosophi-

<sup>10</sup> See RAMELLI, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> The doctrine of apokatastasis in Clement is much more vestigial than in Origen. See I. RAMELLI, 2012a.

<sup>12</sup> This work too is available, with edition, translation, and commentary, in RAMELLI, 2006, which also includes Remigius' commentary and the Berlin-Zwettl commentary.

<sup>13</sup> On the strong link between Eriugena's commentary on Martianus and his philosophical works see RAMELLI, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> M. ARMISEN MARCHETTI, 2001, p. vii ff.; A. CAMERON, 1967; J. FLAMANT, 1977, pp. 91-141; S. DÖPP,

cal masterpiece is his commentary on the Neocademic Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. Many scholars tend to place its composition after 410 or 430 CE<sup>15</sup>; some, however, with Courcelle, Georgii, Döpp and others, advocate an earlier date, toward the end of the fourth century<sup>16</sup>. Just like Martianus, Macrobius was a "pagan" Neoplatonist, a view also shared by Christopher Jones<sup>17</sup>. Not only was Macrobius a "pagan", but he probably also had some anti-Christian points. In his *Saturnalia*, his other main work, the name Evangelus designating a very unpleasant character, ignorant and arrogant, who offends people and sows hatred, might be significant. Macrobius represents him as a person with whom a serene conversation is impossible. This is his characterisation from his very first appearance in 1.7.1-2: "*Dum ista narrantur, unus e famulatio, cui provincia erat admittere volentes dominum convenire, Evangelum adesse nuntiat cum Disario, qui tunc Romae praestare videbatur ceteris medendi artem professis. Congrugato indicavere vultu plerique de considentibus Evangelii interventum otio suo inamoenum minusque placido conventui congruentem. Erat enim amarulenta dicacitate et lingua proterve mordaci, procax ac securus offensarum quas sine delectu cari vel non amici in se passim verbis odia serentibus provocabat*". The identification of this Evangelus with the historical person mentioned by Symmachus in *Ep.* 6.7 is uncertain. Evangelus' very name, his negative depiction, and his designation of Virgil as *vester* rather than *noster*<sup>18</sup>, might suggest a (clearly hostile) allusion to Christianity.

Moreover, the three major characters who make their houses available for convivial conversation<sup>19</sup> in the *Saturnalia* are among the most illustrious "pagan" figures of that epoch: Praetextatus, who is presented very positively by Macrobius, explicitly in contrast to Evangelus (*Sat.* 1.7.2-7), was a "pagan" and for some time also an important priest; he was an expert in Eastern cults. Symmachus is the orator who asked for the restoration of the Altar of Victory to the Senate and developed the motif of religious relativism that had already been adduced by Themistius in support of

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1978; J.M. NORRIS, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., J. FLAMANT, 1977, pp. 80-81; M. ARMISEN MARCHETTI, 2001, p. xviii.

<sup>16</sup> H. GEORGII, 1912, proposed 395-410 CE; P. COURCELLE, 1956, thought that the *Commentary* was earlier than Ambrose's *Hexaëmeron* from 386-387 CE; against M. FUHRMANN, 1963. End of century: S. DÖPP, 1978. P. MASTANDREA, 2010 identifies Macrobius with the Theodosius who was *praefectus Italiae* in 430 CE.

<sup>17</sup> CHR. JONES, 2014, Appendix.

<sup>18</sup> This may refer either to the fact that Virgil was a Latin, if the speaker was a Greek, or to the fact that Virgil was a "pagan", if the speaker was a Christian.

<sup>19</sup> See KÖNIG, 2012.

religious freedom; his famous opponent was Ambrose of Milan<sup>20</sup>. Flavianus, a friend and relative of Symmachus<sup>21</sup>, favoured Eugenius against Theodosius and, when the latter defeated Eugenius and made Christianity the State religion, Flavianus committed suicide. According to Paolo Mastrandrea<sup>22</sup>, the spokesperson of Macrobius in the *Saturnalia* is a (“pagan”) philosopher, Eustathius.

Alan Cameron<sup>23</sup> has claimed that “paganism” was “mortally dead” already before Theodosius, and the “circle of Symmachus” never existed, but is a literary fiction elaborated later by Macrobius. The speeches ascribed to the personages of the *Saturnalia*, whose conversations are set in 382 CE, are fictitious and reflect Macrobius’ own interest in “paganism” and classical culture. The interlocutors of the *Saturnalia*, all dead when Macrobius published his work, were in fact “pagan” ancestors of influential Christian families contemporary with Macrobius himself. According to Cameron, Macrobius, a “pagan”, produced a literary (rather than historical) depiction of “paganism”. This does not mean, however, that Macrobius was ignorant of Christian Platonism; for instance, he might have known the Origenian doctrine of *apokatastasis*.

Macrobius’ own treatment of *apokatastasis* is found in his philosophical work, the *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*<sup>24</sup>, a commentary on the famous fragment from the last book of Cicero’s *Republic* inspired by Plato’s homonymous work. The *Somnium* corresponded, in position and content, to the myth of Er in Plato’s *Republic*, as Macrobius himself remarks in *Comm.* 1.1 and as other ancient authors, such as Favonius Eulogius (*Disp.* 1.1) and Augustine (*CD* 22.28), observed: “Imitatione Platonis Cicero de re publica scribens locum etiam de Eris Pamphylii reditu in vitam ... commentus est”. To the Pythagorean-Platonic myth of Er, in which Er is revealed the otherworldly destiny of souls, Cicero added Stoic elements in his *Somnium*.

Already in Cicero’s *Somnium* the astral beatitude of the virtuous – which will directly inspire Macrobius – is understood as truly eternal, and not liable to the cyclical destructions of the cosmos. This clearly was not in line with orthodox Stoicism that subjected everything to cyclical destructions, including souls, which were conceived as material. Only the supreme deity-Logos-Pneuma would escape annihilation. Of course, the Stoic doctrine of the periodical and total cosmic destruction, expounded

<sup>20</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2005, and 2009b.

<sup>21</sup> Flavianus was the author of the *Historia Augusta* in 392/4 according to S. RATTI, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> P. MASTANDREA, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> A. CAMERON, 2011. See now the collective review in R. LIZZI TESTA 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Ed. I. [J.] WILLIS, 1994.

in 2.10, is at odds with the Platonic conception, and Macrobius must have recourse to the trick of regarding these destructions as only partial, that is, limited to some parts of the world, which, in its wholeness, endures eternally. The *Somnium Scipionis* joined Stoic, Platonic, and Pythagorean ideas; Macrobius read it mainly in the light of Neoplatonism. He viewed the Neoacademic Cicero as Plato's spokesman.

In particular, the dogma of the absolute eternity of the soul, which is strongly asserted in Cicero's *Somnium* ("fragile corpus animus sempiternus mouet") and was demonstrated by Plato by means of several arguments<sup>25</sup>, and taken up by Plotinus, is greatly developed by Macrobius in his commentary. Now, this obviously contrasted with the orthodox Stoic doctrine according to which souls, being material, vanish at each cosmic destruction. Scipio indeed describes the so-called "great year" which is complete at each *apokatastasis*, that is – according to the astral meaning of ἀποκτάστασις in Greek, with which Macrobius was of course well acquainted – at each return of all the heavenly bodies to their initial positions<sup>26</sup>. Plato, on the contrary, had demonstrated the immortality of the soul, which he considered to be immaterial. However, Platonic elements had infiltrated Middle and Neo-Stoicism (just as Stoic elements pervaded Middle and Neoplatonism). Suffice it to think of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius.

Thus, Scipio Senior, in Macrobius' commentary, Platonically asserts that the soul is immortal and will never perish, as it never had a beginning. Souls must therefore be educated to immortality, and not be immersed in sense perception. The soul must be trained in what is best, detached from the body and tending to the contemplation of eternal realities. Those who, on the contrary, indulge their souls in bodily pleasures make it a slave to the body. Thus, after death, such souls shall be unable to return to the abode of Scipio himself, but it will have to wander for many aeons before being restored to their homeland (another classical meaning of ἀποκατάστασις was the return to one's homeland after an exile). Macrobius, however, does not mention the case of souls that *never* return to their original place, whereas in Cicero there was no precise universalistic assertion about the beatitude of souls. It is Macrobius himself who emphasises this point, as I shall demonstrate, and I shall surmise that this may be due to the influence of the universalistic doctrine of *apokatastasis* that had developed meanwhile in Christian Neoplatonism.

<sup>25</sup> Cf., e.g., M.L. MCPHERRAN, 1994; F. KARFIK, 2004, pp. 57-84; H. BONITZ, 1968, pp. 293-323; E.A. BROWN, 1997; A.S. MASON, 1994; D. APOLLONI, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> For the meanings of ἀποκατάστασις in classical Greek, including the astronomic and astrological ones, see the initial section of I. RAMELLI, 2013. A thorough investigation into "pagan" philosophical conceptions of *apokatastasis* is an ongoing, long-term project.



Like Plato, Macrobius posits the Good, i.e., the first Cause, at the top of the hierarchy of beings. The Intellect (*mens, animus*, corresponding to Greek νοῦς) comes immediately after; it derives from God and contains the ideal paradigms of all realities. These are the Ideas, which already in Middle Platonism were conceived as thoughts of God. Alcinoous in *Didaskalikos* 9 described them as νοήσεις θεοῦ αἰώνιου, “thoughts of the eternal God.” which are eternal in turn. Only in the Platonic tradition does αἰώνιος means “eternal” in the sense of atemporal<sup>27</sup>. When the Nous turns to itself instead of turning to the Good, it produces the Soul (*anima*), the third Plotinian hypostasis. In the universal Soul, all individual souls are comprised, but some separate themselves from it, falling into a body in that they abandon the contemplation of superior realities. Bodies are Platonically described as “tombs” to souls, and the souls’ liberation from matter and its plurality and dispersion is Platonic as well: reminiscence—when souls can finally remember their origin and true nature. This return to their origin and the attainment of unity is the *apokatastasis*. Thanks to its very nature and derivation, the soul can never completely detach itself from its origin (a theory that obviously resonates with Plotinian overtones, with reference to the doctrine of the undescended soul: Macrobius indeed assigns the first place in philosophy to Plotinus together with Plato in 1.8). In its upper, rational and intellectual part, it keeps an innate knowledge of the divine, and can join it again thanks to its virtues. In this way, the role of ethics is mainly that of metaphysical bridge. This perfectly fits in Platonic ethical intellectualism – which reverberated in Christian Platonism as well, where it significantly contributed to the construction of the Christian doctrine of universal *apokatastasis*. Plato and the “pagan” Neoplatonists were the main sources used by Macrobius<sup>28</sup>, but I suspect that Macrobius may have been familiar with the ideas of some Christian Neoplatonists, too.

Macrobius clarifies the *skopos* (a technical term of Neoplatonic allegorical interpretation) of Cicero’s allegory in the *Somnium Scipionis*, in Book 1, chap. 4 of his commentary. Cicero aimed at teaching that “animas bene de re publica meritorum post corpora caelo reddi et illic frui beatitatis perpetuitate”. The theme is ethical and eschatological. The reward for virtue will be eternal beatitude: “omnibus qui patriam conseruarint adiuuerint auxerint, certum esse in caelo definitum locum ubi beati aeuo sempiterno fruuntur”. Cicero focused on civic virtues, whereas Macrobius expands his interpretation to all virtues: all of them pave the way for the attainment of eternal felicity. This is Scipio’s recommendation, which manifests the doctrine of the so-

<sup>27</sup> See I. RAMELLI – D. KONSTAN, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> For the problem of Macrobius’ sources, and whether he read Plato directly, see I. RAMELLI, 2007.



called astral beatitude embraced by Macrobius himself: “iustitiam cole et pietatem ... ea uita uia est in caelum et in hunc coetum eorum qui iam uiuere et corpore laxati illum incolunt locum quem uides significans galaxian”. In chap. 9 Macrobius explains in which sense Scipio speaks of astral immortality and claims that souls come from heaven and return to heaven. Those who philosophise in the right way do not doubt that the origin of all souls is in heaven and these, while they make use of the body, can reach the highest wisdom if they become aware of their origin. Macrobius envisaged a more or less long series of reincarnations at the end of which came the definitive liberation from the body – which is “physically” located in the Milky Way, in the sky of fixed stars, the firmament. Again an astral geography for the postmortem.

In chap. 10 Scipio Senior declares that those who have been liberated from the body as from a prison are really alive, whereas life on earth is a death, according to the Orphic-Pythagorean-Platonic tradition that was received in Martianus and his commentators, as I have mentioned. In this perspective, the true Hades is on earth, in the sublunar sphere. Macrobius continues along these lines and states that Hades and its torments are the imprisonment experienced by the soul during its stay in the body. Therefore, according to an interpretation which is also present in Martianus, the river Lethe is the error of the soul that forgets its origin and preceding life; Styx is hatred, Cocytus sorrow; Titius’ legendary vulture is in fact remorse; Tantalus’ thirst is desire, and so on. Lucretius famously identified punishments in Hades with the torments that people experience on earth because of empty fears and desires<sup>29</sup>; Macrobius calls *theologi* those who interpreted Hades in this way, meaning allegorical exegetes of myths. Of course, he is mainly referring to Platonists. One of these, well known to Macrobius, was Porphyry, who in fragments 377-378 Smith<sup>30</sup> interpreted the Homeric geography of Hades as a progressive detachment of the soul from the sense-perceptible world to approach closer to the intelligible world, which is its authentic dimension, that of its union with the divine.

Macrobius explicitly ascribes to Plato and the Pythagoreans this conception of the true life as the life of the soul prior to incarnation and after the death of the body, and also mentions the  $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha\text{--}\sigma\tilde{\eta}\mu\alpha$  pun: “Ideo corpus *demas* hoc est uinculum nuncupatur, et *soma* quasi quoddam *sema* id est animae sepulcrum”. (chap. 11). He moreover states that the Platonists locate Hades in a part of the cosmos, either in the sublunary space, that is, the space between the earth and the moon, or in all the celestial spheres, crossing which the soul descends to earth or reaches its homeland.

<sup>29</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2004, chap. V.

<sup>30</sup> Ed. A. SMITH, 1993.

Here Macrobius' astral geography intersects with Platonic psychology. Chap. 12 describes the soul's descent through the planetary spheres – to which I was referring at the beginning of the present essay – not without many astrological notions. But Macrobius also relies on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*, in order to describe the passage of the soul from the monad to the dyad.

Macrobius details that, when the soul is dragged to the body, it begins to feel the *silvestrem tumultum*, that is, the disorder of matter (*silva* = ὕλη = “matter”). This expression is well attested in Neoplatonism and derives from Plato's notion of matter as disorder; for example, Iamblichus in *Theologumena Arithmeticae*, p. 44.7, speaks of ὕλης ἀκοσμία. This is why Macrobius mentions that, according to Plato's *Phaedo*, the soul, when it enters the body, falls prey to a sort of drunkenness, precisely because of the disorder that characterises matter. This drunkenness is also a forgetting: the soul can no longer remember divine realities (in Plato, the Ideas) that it had contemplated at home. Cicero's Milky Way becomes an allegory, and an astral counterpart, of Plato's ὑπερουράνιος τόπος.

The proof of the soul's oblivion is, according to Macrobius, human disagreement concerning the divine and truth in general, which demonstrates that truth is no longer immediately evident. But philosophy provides its recovery and the liberation of the soul from the body, since philosophy brings about detachment from passions and from all that is corporeal. In this way the soul, even if it is still in a body, elevates itself to its heavenly homeland. This is a prelude to the definitive liberation that will come with death for those who have led a philosophical life. This is why philosophy is considered by Macrobius, just as by Plato (*Phaedo* 67E and 81A) and Plotinus, a *meditatio mortis* and a preparation for death. The basis for this conception is a tenet of Platonic anthropology that is well outlined in chap. 12 of Book 2: it is the identification of the human being with its soul, which is immortal and uses the body as an instrument. The soul is the most divine part in each human being. Plato in his *Timaeus* had defined the human intellectual soul τὸ θεῖον in us, and the θεϊότερον part in a human being in his *Alcibiades I* 133C, from which also the identification of the human being with its soul (130C) and the notion of care of one's self as care of one's soul stem.

In the last chapter of his work Macrobius comments on the conclusion of Cicero's *Somnium*. Scipio Senior recommends the exercise of the soul in the noblest activities. In this way, the soul will return “home” at once, and all the more speedily if it is more detached from the body and attentive to the contemplation of the superior realities: “si iam tum cum erit inclusus in corpore, eminebit foras, et ea quae extra erunt contemplans quam maxime se a corpore abstrahet.” The last sentence is a warning against the kind of life in which the soul serves the body and its pleasures

and desires. The souls of such people, after death, will long wander around the earth and will return to their original seat, and thus experience their *apokatastasis*, only after many *saecula*, the αἰῶνες of the Stoic and Platonic temporal cycles. Macrobius observes that Scipio's words on the contemplation of superior realities and detachment from the body precisely refer to the theoretical virtues, and comments that those who strive for these virtues are philosophers: these people, "adhuc in corpore positi, corpus ut alienam sarcinam, in quantum patitur natura, despiciant". As for the final sanction against the souls that are excessively attached to the body, Macrobius relates it to the long sections of the myth of Er at the end of Plato's *Republic*, devoted to the eschatological destiny of such souls:

*Et facile nunc atque oportune uirtutes suadet, postquam quanta et quam diuina praemia uirtutibus debeantur edixit. Sed quia inter leges quoque illa imperfecta dicitur in qua nulla deuiantibus poena sancitur; ideo in conclusione operis poenam sancit extra haec praecepta uiuentibus, quem locum Er ille Platonius copiosius executus est saecula infinita dinumerans, quibus nocentium animae, in easdem poenas saepe reuolutae, sero de tartaris permittuntur emergere et ad naturae suae principia, quod est caelum, tandem impetrata purgatione remeare. Necessesse est enim omnem animam ad originis suae sedem reuerti, sed quae corpus tamquam peregrinae incolunt cito post corpus uelut ad patriam reuertuntur, quae uero corporum illecebris ut suis sedibus inhaerent, quanto ab illis uiolentius separantur; tanto ad supera serius reuertuntur. (2.17.12-14)*

Remarkably enough, Macrobius claims that, according to Plato, *all* souls will return to their original place, some sooner and others later, but all of them will eventually return. Even those souls that have erred most of all, after a very long stay in Tartarus, will return, purified, to their seats. However, Plato admitted of exceptions, for souls who are absolutely irrecoverable. According to him, these will remain in Tartarus forever. For he thought that sufferings were therapeutic and cured the souls, but that some were "incurable" (ἀνίατοι) because the crimes they committed were too extreme; therefore, they would never leave Tartarus, where they undergo an eternal punishment. This is stated by Plato in several passages, in particular in *Phaedo* 113E, *Gorgias* 525C, and *Republic* X 615C-616A, where the worst pains are those suffered by tyrants, even though in his *Phaedrus* the "law of Adrasteia" (248C2) prescribes that, after migrations and purifications, souls return to their original place, after three thousand years for the souls of philosophers, which become winged again at that time, or after ten thousand years for common souls. This is the only passage – against several others – that might suggest that *apokatastasis* for Plato was universal. Whereas Plato repeatedly stated that some souls would *not* return to their original place, Macrobius, just like his contemporary Gregory of Nyssa, the Chris-

tian Neoplatonist and follower of the Christian Platonist Origen of Alexandria<sup>31</sup>, thought that all the souls, without exception, would return to their “homeland”. Those who had erred the most would take a very long time to do so, but nevertheless *would* return. For Macrobius, *apokatastasis* would really be universal. He interprets Plato by radicalising his thought and giving priority to ontology over ethics. Indeed, it is true that souls “*quae corpus tamquam peregrinae incolunt, cito post corpus uelut ad patriam reuertuntur, quae uero corporum illecebris ut suis sedibus inhaerent, quanto ab illis uiolentius separantur, tanto ad supera serius reuertuntur*”; however, all souls will be restored to their original seat, because “*nesesse est omnem animam ad originis suae sedem reuerti*”. Universal *apokatastasis* is grounded in an ontological necessity according to Macrobius.

If Macrobius distances himself from Plato on this score, or rather presents him as saying something different from what he actually maintained, this means that Macrobius’ conviction concerning universal *apokatastasis*, the return of absolutely all souls to their original state and place, was truly strong. This conviction was equally strong in roughly contemporary Christian Neoplatonists who supported the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, such as Gregory of Nyssa or Evagrius, but with the difference that in their view – which is directly based on Origen’s view – this was not simply a metaphysical necessity, but depended on Christ’s incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection<sup>32</sup>.

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Indeed, Macrobius was by far not the only Neoplatonist and supporter of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* who “corrected” Plato in regard to the universality of the *apokatastasis* itself. The Christian Greek Middle-Neoplatonist<sup>33</sup> Origen of Alexandria († 256ca. CE), who was among the very first who consistently and explicitly supported this theory<sup>34</sup>, had already done so. Origen not only praised methodologically Plato’s myths on the *arkhē* and the *telos*, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>35</sup> and as Clement also had done<sup>36</sup>, but he did not hesitate to rectify them at times. With respect to the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, he corrected Plato’s eschatological myths, in order to affirm the restoration of all souls, whereas Plato only admitted of the restoration of some, perhaps most, but not all: he excluded the *ἀνίατοι*. Therefore, Origen correct-

<sup>31</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2007a and 2013.

<sup>32</sup> See demonstration in I. RAMELLI, 2011, and 2013 for the other supporters of *apokatastasis*.

<sup>33</sup> He is probably identifiable with Origen the Neoplatonist. See I. RAMELLI, 2009a and 2011b.

<sup>34</sup> Origen may have been preceded by Bardaisan of Edessa – and there are hints of this doctrine in Clement of Alexandria as well; see I. RAMELLI, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2011a, and more specifically 2014.

<sup>36</sup> See RAMELLI, forthcoming b.

ed Plato's aforementioned postulation of the existence of some "incurable" souls, a notion that made universal *apokatastasis* impossible and thus had to be rejected by Origen the Christian Platonist.

Let me briefly return in more detail to Plato's position, with which Origen was perfectly well acquainted. According to Plato, some people have committed too much injustice (ἀδικία), that is, evil, in their earthly lives, and therefore become "incurable". This means that, after their death, their souls cannot be healed through suffering and restored to the contemplation of the Ideas, but must remain in hell ("Tartarus") forever. This notion of people who are "incurable", on earth and/or in hell, occurs frequently in Plato. In particular, it is useful to briefly take into consideration the three above-mentioned passages from Plato's descriptions of otherworldly punishments in *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*. In *Phaed.* 113E2 Plato claims that those who are "incurable" because of the gravity of their sins are destined to Tartarus, and will never go out:

Those who seem to be in an *incurable* condition [ἀνίατος ἔχειν] due to the enormity of their sins, having committed, for instance, many grave profanations of temples, or many illicit murders against the law, or other similar crimes, well, the appropriate Fate throws these people into Tartarus, from where they *never* [οὔποτε] *exit*.

Likewise, in *Resp.* 615E3 Plato remarks that tyrants, the worst sinners in his opinion, and other people who committed dreadful sins are "incurable" and thus will never be allowed to leave their place of torment:

We suddenly saw him down there, and others – most of them tyrants, but there were also some private citizens who had committed terrible sins –, who believed they were finally about to go up, but whom the opening did not receive, but it moored every time one of these people who were in such a situation of *incurability* [οὕτως ἀνίατος ἐχόντων] in respect to wickedness, or one who had not paid enough, attempted to go up.

Here Plato, piling up therapeutic and debt metaphors, distinguishes those who finish paying their debt to justice and can exit the place of punishment at a certain point, in that they have been cured, and those who are utterly "incurable" and will never finish paying; in this way, they will never leave their place of punishment.

Moreover, after remarking that only through suffering is it possible to be purified from evil, in *Gorg.* 525C2 Plato claims that those who committed extremely serious sins have become "incurable," and their torments, which are explicitly described as eternal, do not purify them, but are simply retributive and useful for other people, as a deterrent paradigm, and not for these sinners themselves:

As for those who commit the most extreme kinds of injustice and because of such crimes *become incurable* [ἀνίατοι γένωνται], these people provide examples to others. They are no longer useful to themselves in anything, precisely because *they are incurable* [ἄτε ἀνίατοι ὄντες], but they are useful to others, who see them endure the greatest and most painful and dreadful sufferings *perpetually* [τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον], due to their sins.

Besides these passages, there are several others in which sin is depicted by Plato as an illness of the soul that may become incurable, in contexts in which he is speaking of human justice.

Faced with Plato's conviction that some sinners are "incurable," Origen decided to "correct" Plato on this point by stating that no being is "incurable" for its creator. His argument is based on Christian revelation, which was unknown to Plato. In Origen's view, Christ-Logos, who is God, having created all creatures, will be able to heal all of them from the illness of evil: *Nihil enim omnipotenti impossibile est, nec insanabile est aliquid factori suo* (*Princ.* 3.6.5). Origen, who inserts this declaration in the context of a discussion of the eventual conversion and salvation of the devil on the grounds that he is a creature of God, is in fact arguing on the basis of God's omnipotence, which comes, not from Greek philosophy, but from Scripture<sup>37</sup>. His conclusion is that those who are incurable by humans or by themselves – those whom Plato labeled "incurable" – are not incurable for God. The consequence of such a position is that, in Origen's view, universal *apokatastasis*, which would be humanly impossible, will in fact be a miracle performed by the Godhead in its omnipotence.

Macrobius, who had a very good command of Greek (and in whose day, moreover, Latin translations of Origen were available), may have been influenced by Origen's "correction" of Plato's postulated incurable souls, a correction which was taken over by other Christian Neoplatonists such as Gregory of Nyssa. If this is the case, this would be a further, extremely interesting instance of osmosis between "pagan" and Christian Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity. There are many other examples, which are progressively emerging from research<sup>38</sup>.

If Macrobius had Plato support universal restoration even if Plato did not do so, and if he integrated this view in his own astral doctrine of the ascent and descent of the soul and its eschatological destinies, then he strongly believed in universal restoration. This conviction was equally strong in slightly earlier Christian Neoplatonists who upheld *apokatastasis*, such as Gregory Nyssen or Evagrius<sup>39</sup>, who inherited this

<sup>37</sup> E.g., Matth 19:25-26; Mark 10:26-27.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., I. RAMELLI, forthcoming.

<sup>39</sup> See I. RAMELLI, 2013, the chapter on Gregory and forthcoming a for Evagrius.

doctrine from Origen. Macrobius composed his Commentary shortly after two other Christian Neoplatonists who embraced apokatastasis: Victorinus, and Augustine in the late 380s and early 390s, during his anti-Manichean phase. A theory of universal restoration like Origen's was espoused by Macrobius; he might thus have embraced a Christian, Origenian doctrine, but ascribing it back to Plato: he would have felt uneasy about acknowledging a philosophical debt to *Christian Platonism*<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> The same was done by Porphyry when he ascribed Origen's theory of the three divine hypostases to Plotinus; he tried to attribute this doctrine to Plato, whereas in fact it was a Christian Platonic theory: Origen's doctrine. See I. RAMELLI, 2012b.



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