

Causality at Lower Levels: The Demiurgical Unity of the Second and Third God according to Numenius of Apamea*

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1. Introduction

The *Timaeus* may be considered the leading dialogue in Middle Platonism.¹ Its impor-

* I wish to thank my colleague, Maria Pavlova, who professionally proofread my text in English and other scholars who helped me to develop some important theoretical aspects of the present contribution.

¹ To the best of my knowledge, the most important and systematic study on the role of the *Timaeus* in the Platonic tradition is still Baltes 1976.

tance is likely due to the fact that the Imperial Age was characterized by the tendency to interpret Plato's doctrine as a unified philosophical system, possibly in competition with the Stoics' institutional model.² The *Timaeus* can be regarded as the most suitable text among Plato's dialogues to be interpreted systematically for two main reasons. Firstly, the *Timaeus* deals with various elements concerning aspects of human knowledge, including, for example, physiology and providence, along with several central themes of Plato's metaphysics. Secondly, it is not a "classic dialogue, because a significant portion of the text consists in a lengthy narrative about the origin of the universe and its characteristics, and hence the dialogue resembles a naturalistic treatise."³

For these reasons, the *Timaeus* has given rise to many philosophical difficulties, and it was already commented upon and interpreted in the old Academy.⁴ We know that Plato's students used to comment upon their teacher's works and provide *support* (βοήθεια) to the texts of the dialogues, especially when certain doctrines appeared obscure. Among the greatest difficulties arising in the interpretation of the *Timaeus*, two main aspects of the text stand out: 1) understanding the cosmogony,⁵ and 2) identifying the figure of the demiurge, introduced by Plato in the prologue to the ἐκὼς λόγος.

From a Middle Platonic systematic perspective, one of the most troublesome issues for the ancient interpreters was determining the realm of reality that the demiurge must be identified with. Philosophers like Plutarch and Atticus, for example, identify Plato's demiurge with the Idea of Good as it is expressed in the *Republic*,⁶ while Numenius⁷ distinguishes the demiurge from the first principle.

For Numenius there is a first and a second God whose essence is to some extent shared with the third God. I will revisit this latter point shortly.⁸ Many scholars have

² The development of systematic Platonism as an anti-Stoic tendency, in contrast to the scepticism of the Academy, has been highlighted by Donini (1994). According to Donini, the strength of the Stoic model would have given the decisive impetus for Platonism to establish itself as a systematic philosophy, deriving a precise metaphysical scheme from the doctrines of the Platonic dialogues. Donini's thesis is shared by Ferrari (2010: 56–72 and 2012), who emphasizes, from the point of view of Platonism, the various exegetical strategies deployed by ancient interpreters in the exegesis of the *Timaeus*. A different perspective on the origin of systematic Platonism is that of Hadot (1987), who attributes the existence of the dogmatic Platonism to the closure of the Academy in 88 BC and the necessity to interpret the Platonic thought as a system in the absence of a physical scholastic institution.

³ See Ferrari (2010: 71–72).

⁴ On this topic, see Centrone (2012: 57–80).

⁵ On the one hand, ancient interpreters found it challenging to establish whether the generation of the world described by Plato in the *Timaeus* should be conceived of as an event *in tempore* or, on the contrary, if the cosmogonic process should be reduced to a mere causal dependence of the sensible world on the intelligible. For a general discussion on this topic, see Bonazzi (2017: 3–15). Ferrari (2014a) focuses on Plutarch's and Atticus' literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*, while an excellent resume of the διδασκαλίας χάριν (didactical purpose) interpretative tendency is provided by Petrucci (2019).

⁶ See Procl. *in Ti.* 1.305.6–11 Diehl; On Plutarch and Atticus' account of the demiurge, see also Ferrari (2017/2018: 67–78).

⁷ Perhaps Alcinous as well might have distinguished between a first and a second intellect, but the question is still debated. Alcinous' distinction between a first and a second Intellect is a subject of debate among scholars. According to Mansfeld (1988) and Donini (1988: 130–131), Alcinous distinguished between two Intellects, while Giusta (1986: 170–200) and O'Brien (2017: 171–182) disagree with this position.

⁸ See fr. 20 (des Places 1973).

noted how difficult it is to find a clear distinction between the second and the third God in Numenius, as they are described as “one.”

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the unity between the second and the third God must be understood in terms of a demiurgical unity. In other words, my intention is to demonstrate that the second and the third God are two different entities strongly connected by the demiurgical process they both undertake. Firstly, I will discuss fr. 52; then I intend to focus on frs. 19F and 24F (11 and 16 des Places), and finally on frs. 29T and 30T (21 and 22 des Places)⁹ to describe the different ways in which Numenius depicts the unity between the second and the third God.

2. Numenius’s dualism: From the Matter to the Cosmos

To understand Numenius’s account of demiurgy, it is helpful to recall some crucial aspects of his dualist theology. First, it is appropriate to briefly describe the monad/dyad relationship that is explained in fr. 52. Our main source on Numenian dualism is Calcidius’s *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, which reports his thoughts on the matter.¹⁰

It is well-known that Numenius belongs to the so-called dualistic Neopythagorean tendency within Middle Platonism.¹¹ Essentially, for Numenius, the entirety of reality does not derive from a supreme principle but rather from the interaction between two main original principles that he respectively calls the monad (*singularitas* or *deus digestor*) and matter (*silva* or *dyad*).¹² As matter is described as chaotic and disordered,¹³ the monad’s action upon it provides order and ontological determination. According to what we learn from fr. 52, it is the monad-God (i.e., the demiurge) that interacts with matter and, as a result, the cosmos is generated as an intermediate reality that comprises both material and intelligible features.¹⁴ As the first God does not participate in the demi-

⁹ In this paper I will use the numbering of the last edition of the fragments of Numenius edited by Fabienne Jourdan (2023). However, for readers’ comfort, I will put in brackets the name of the fragments according to des Places’ edition as well.

¹⁰ The most important testimony on Numenius’ conception of matter is fr. 52, which corresponds to Calcidius’ *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*. In a recent study, Gretchen Reydam-Schils discusses the possibility that Calcidius might have interpreted Numenius’ doctrine his own perspective. However, the author efficiently shows that Calcidius is a trustworthy source for understanding Numenius’ opinion on matter. See Reydam-Schils (2020: 161–171).

¹¹ See Dillon (1996: 341–344). See also Bonazzi (2015: 225–240, in part. 231–236) who affirms that the dualistic views were already present in the pythagorizing Platonism.

¹² See fr. 52 des Places.

¹³ The chaotic nature of matter is mentioned by Numenius also in fr. 4a. Important remarks on the role of matter in Numenius are provided by Jourdan (2014).

¹⁴ In lines 1–12, which I do not cite here, Numenius describes the differences between the first and the second God, arguing that it is necessary to use appropriate language to express the respective natures of the two highest Gods.

urgic process,¹⁵ the demiurge projects an ontological order onto matter by introducing his intelligible character into the material substrate.

The cosmos, arising from these two principles, has a sort of “mixed nature,” being both evil (corporeal/ material) and divine (intelligible).¹⁶ While this question, which deserves more detailed attention, cannot be discussed here, suffice it to say that, in my interpretation, we can consider the cosmos as a product, whose essence derives from the intelligible order that the demiurge instils into matter.¹⁷ We can deduce that the monad of fr. 52 is to be identified with the demiurge, who “acts on behalf” of the first God and generates the cosmos through the interaction with matter. It seems to me that Numenius describes a process where initially we have both matter and the demiurge in their original states, and *then* the cosmos, which comes to be after these two principles have interacted with each other.¹⁸

These premises based on fr. 52 are, in my view, useful because they help us better understand the processes Numenius describes in fr. 19F and 24F and in fr. 19T.¹⁹

3. Numenius’s Conception of double Demiurgy according to Fragments 19F and 24F (= fr. 11 and 16 des Places)

It is worth beginning our investigation with some passages from Numenius’s work *On the Good*. The following passage corresponds to ll. 12–21 of fr. 19F:

[...] The first God, being in himself, is simple (ἀπλοῦς), and being together with himself throughout can never be divided. The God who is the second and third, however, *is* one (εἷς). He metaphysically encounters matter, but it is dyadic and, although he unifies it, he is divided by it, since it has an appetitive and fluid character. Because he is gazing on matter, he is not intent on the intelligible (for in that case he would have been intent on himself); and by giving his attention to matter he becomes heedless of himself. And he gets to grips with the perceptible

¹⁵ See fr. 12. The identification of the first God with a king depends on the exegesis of the second Platonic letter 312e1–4.

¹⁶ See fr. 52, 77–79 des Places: *Igitur iuxta Platonem mundo bona sua dei tamquam patris liberalitate collate sunt, mala vero matris silvae vitio cohaeserunt.*

¹⁷ See Reydam-Schils (2020: 163–171).

¹⁸ It is unclear if Numenius describes the generation of the cosmos temporally or not. According to Baltes (1975: 262) Petrucci (2018: 112–115) and Reydam-Schils (2020: 168) Numenius is a temporalist, while Dodds (1960: 16) and then O’Brien (2015: 154–155) propose an emendation to fr. 16 that rejects the temporal lexicon Numenius uses.

¹⁹ The question of whether or not Proclus is a trustworthy source to understand Numenius was addressed by Tarrant (2004), who argues that Proclus did not directly read Numenius but received information via Porphyry, some reflections are provided also by Michalewski (2021: 145).

and is absorbed in his work with it, and by devoting himself to matter he takes it up even into his own character.²⁰

The fragment begins with an argument in favour of the unitary nature of the first God, who is totally simple and indivisible; consequently, he does not participate in the demiurgic process,²¹ and hence it is the second God who acts demiurgically.

Of paramount importance for our purpose is the affirmation that defines the second and the third God as “one.” Through his encounter with matter, the second God is also described as being “split” (σχίζεται) into two; consequently, this interaction between matter and the demiurge results in the third God. It seems to me that the demiurgic process that Numenius describes here can be linked to the dualism of the principles that we have already discussed with regard to the monad/dyad relationship. We shall now investigate what this division between the second and the third God effectively means.²²

The use of the verb σχίζω suggests a process that entails a derivation of something new from a previous unity.²³ However, the second God is defined as “one” with the third in a strong ontological unity. Should we therefore conceive of two different entities, or just one? On the basis of these remarks, we can deduce that the duplicity Numenius theorizes deals with a twofold demiurgic process influenced by the active role of matter. Matter, upon encountering the second God, divides it into two distinct figures (or Gods),²⁴

²⁰ Fr. 11 des Places (1973: 12–21): ‘Ο θεός ὁ μὲν πρῶτος ἐν ἑαυτοῦ ὧν ἐστιν ἀπλοῦς, διὰ τὸ ἑαυτῷ συγγινόμενος διόλου μὴ ποτε εἶναι διαρετός· ὁ θεὸς μέντοι ὁ δεῦτερος καὶ τρίτος ἐστὶν εἰς· συμφερόμενος δὲ τῇ ὕλην δαδά οὖση ἐνοί μὲν αὐτήν, σχίζεται δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς, ἐπιθυμητικὸν ἦθος ἐχούσης καὶ βρεύσης. Τῷ οὖν μὴ εἶναι πρὸς τῷ νοητῷ (ἦν γὰρ ἄω πρὸς ἑαυτῷ) διὰ τὸ τὴν ὕλην βλέπειν, ταύτης ἐπιμελούμενος ἀπεριόπτως ἑαυτοῦ γίγνεται. Καὶ ἅπτεται τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ περιέπει ἀνάγει τε ἔτι εἰς τὸ ἴδιον ἦθος ἐπορεξάμενος τῆς ὕλης. Engl. transl. Boys-Stones (2018: 190).

²¹ This is also confirmed in fr. 12, 13. Further details on the stability of the first God in Numenius can be found in Runia (1991: 47–51).

²² It is hard to determine if we can talk about two or three gods in Numenius, and the literature on this topic is extensive. In my view, the second God, insofar it is divided by matter, produces the cosmos, which can be referred to as *God* in the same way that the cosmos is described as divine in the *Timaeus*. According to Frede (1987: 1055 ff.), Numenius might have had in mind the Second Platonic letter, where the author talks about three Gods. Frede also suggests that Numenius might have included this doctrine to remain faithful to the Platonic background, even if he did not fully agree with it. Holzhausen (1992: 250) also supports the idea of the doctrine of the three Gods. Zambon discusses a differentiation between a noetic and a psychic aspect of the demiurgy (see Zambon 2002: 228), while according to Boys-Stones, it is incorrect to talk about three Gods because this is entirely inconsistent with Numenius’ thought. For Boys-Stones, the way matter acts upon the second God must be read within the context of Numenius’ emphatic language: this process must not be understood as an attraction of the demiurge towards matter, but, on the contrary, as a “bottom-up” process that elevates matter from its evilness to a state of order through the power of the intelligible. See Boys-Stones (2018: 190–191).

²³ The verb σχίζω refers to a process that concerns a division into parts from an original unity; see *s.v.* σχίζω LSJ (1940: 634).

²⁴ According to a recent study by Fabienne Jourdan, the cosmos in fr. 29T may be considered as the material world, but it must not be confused to what Numenius says in fr. 19F where the third God is not the world, but the cosmos as the thought and “planned” by the demiurge. See Jourdan (2023: 100–102). According to the scholar, in fact, it is possible to say that the third God is the cosmos, but this cannot be deduced by fr. 19F and, for this reason, she does not consider appropriate to force a harmonisation of the texts. In my view, on the other hand, I think that in 19F Numenius alludes to the third Gods as the ruling principle of the cosmos as the matter plays an active role in dividing the demiurge in his two functional aspects.

whose unity must be understood within the demiurgic process. Matter's power is determined by its "passionate character" (ἐπιθυμητικόν) corresponding to its evil nature, as we have already seen in fr. 52. Matter, since it acts as a principle, has the power to "come into contact" with the intelligible. As a result, the demiurge is metaphysically split into the second and the third God. On the one hand, the second God, i.e., the demiurge as a contemplative intellect, represents the paradigmatic aspect of demiurgy, the demiurge *stricto sensu*; in fact, he is close "to the noetic" (πρὸς τῷ νοητῷ), remaining apart from contact with the matter.²⁵

On the other hand, the third God, insofar as he has contact with matter, represents the ruling and ordering aspect of demiurgy, which Numenius identifies with the cosmos as a rationally ordered entity.²⁶ What about matter? In my interpretation, matter no longer exists in its original state, but once it receives ontological determination from the demiurge, it becomes the cosmos through this process.

We can, therefore, conclude that for Numenius the second and third God are distinguished in the sense that they represent two different levels of reality. However, at the same time, they are "one" as they constitute two moments of a unitary demiurgical process: the paradigmatic-causative demiurgy of the second God and the "operative" demiurgy of the third, i.e., the intra-cosmic order. Thus, Numenius is not referring to two demiurges and the most plausible explanation of this "double demiurgy" is a description of a single demiurgical process articulated through two different demiurgical aspects.²⁷ In addition to this, Numenius states that the second God *is* one with the third God, so we must conceive, in my interpretation, a single demiurgic process that unfolds through two levels of reality. However, the existence of a third God is due to the presence of the matter which plays an active role in dividing the essence of the demiurge.

In order to better understand Numenius' conception of demiurgy, it may also be helpful to consider an important section of fr. 24F (=16 des Places), from which we learn more about the relationship between the second God and the cosmos.

[...] For if the creator is the god of becoming, it seems right that the Good should be the principle of *essence*. The creator stands in relation to the Good, which he imitates, just as becoming stands in relation to essence: he is its image and imitation. And if the demiurge of becoming is good, well of course the demiurge of the essence will be the good itself, an innate feature of essence. For the second [God], being double, is personally responsible both for self-producing

²⁵ It is worth specifying that Numenius' hierarchy has both a theological and an ontological aspect. On the one hand, we distinguish between a first, second and third God; on the other hand, we should assume that these three gods must also be respectively identified with the (Platonic) ideas of good and the intelligible and, finally, with the cosmic order. See also *infra*.

²⁶ See Frede (1987: 1057). On the identity of Numenius' third God see Dodds (1960: 13–15). See also Opsomer (2005), Ferrari (2014) and Jourdan (2021). We must keep in mind that Plato, in the *Timaeus*, defines the cosmos as a "blessed God". Thus, in my view, to say that for Numenius the cosmos is divine due to its intrinsic order is a position that fits well with what Plato states in the *Timaeus*.

²⁷ On the demiurge governing matter, see also fr. 26F (=18 des Places).

the idea of himself, and for producing the cosmos; he is on the one hand a creator, and then wholly absorbed in contemplation. Since our arguments have led us to name four entities, let there be four of them: (1) the first god, the good itself; (2) the imitator of this, the good creator; (3) then substance: one which is that of the first [god], and another that of the second; (4) the imitation of this is the beautiful cosmos, made beautiful by participation in the Beautiful.²⁸

Numenius asserts that the first God is “the principle of essence,” (ἀρχή οὐσίας) implying that he acts causally as a principle in relation to the second God, performing a role similar to that of the Idea of Good in Plato’s *Republic*.²⁹ The second God is the imitator, which means that he derives his intelligible power from contemplating the nature of the first. Insofar as the first God is the supreme form of being (see fr. 13 and 17), Numenius can conclude that he is the “demiurge of essence,” which the “demiurge of generation” imitates.³⁰

Defining the second God as the “demiurge of generation” means that he is the paradigmatic cause of the sensible world, consistent with the cosmogonic process we have previously described. Similarly, the *Timaeus*, where the demiurge’s purpose is to order the cosmos and the World Soul according to mathematical schemes, Numenius’ demiurge is an intellect acting on matter.

Firstly, the second God self-determines the idea of himself and the cosmos. Since he has an intelligible nature, he can be directed toward himself, therefore ontologically determining his own essence. In addition to his self-determination, the demiurge produces the cosmos, which is the reason why his essence is dual, in the same way as we discussed earlier with reference to fr. 52 and 11. This generation of the world, caused by the activity of the demiurge entails and justifies his duality. Though contemplation and imitation of the Good, the demiurge can establish himself as a “secondary God.”

At the same time, the demiurge is also described as being double insofar as he determines himself through his own thought and, in turn, acts as the cause of the cosmos through his demiurgical action.³¹ If we bear in mind what we have learned from fr. 11, we

²⁸ Fr. 24F (=16, 8–17 des Places): Καὶ γὰρ εἰ ὁ μὲν δημιουργὸς θεὸς ἐστὶ γενέσεως, ἀρχεῖ τὸ ἀγαθὸν οὐσίας εἶναι ἀρχή. Ἀνάλογον δὲ τούτῳ μὲν ὁ δημιουργὸς θεός, ὦν αὐτοῦ μιμητής, τῇ δὲ οὐσία ἡ γένεσις, <ἢ> εἰκὼν αὐτῆς ἐστὶ καὶ μίμημα. Ἔπειτα δὲ ὁ δημιουργὸς ὁ τῆς γενέσεως ἐστὶν ἀγαθός, ἢ που ἔσται καὶ ὁ τῆς οὐσίας δημιουργὸς αὐτοάγαθον, σύμψυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ. Ὁ γὰρ δεῦτερος διττός ὦν αὐτοποιεῖ τῆν τε ιδέαν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὸν κόσμον, δημιουργὸς ὦν, ἔπειτα θεωρητικὸς δὴλως. Συλλελογισμένων δ’ ἡμῶν ὀνόματα τεσσάρων πραγμάτων τέσσαρα ἔστω ταῦτα· ὁ μὲν πρῶτος θεὸς αὐτοάγαθον· ὁ δὲ τούτου μιμητὴς δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός· ἢ δ’ οὐσία μία μὲν ἢ τοῦ πρώτου, ἕτερα δ’ ἢ τοῦ δευτέρου· ἢς μίμημα ὁ καλὸς κόσμος, κεκαλλωπισμένος μετουσίᾳ τοῦ καλοῦ. Engl. transl. Boys-Stones (2018a: 181) with modifications; italics are mine. See also the substantial commentary on this fragment provided by Jourdan (2023: 345–466) and the considerations in Bonazzi (2004: 80–81).

²⁹ I endorse the view of Baltes (1997) about the role of the Idea of Good in Plato. The scholar compares the relationship between the Idea of Good and the ideas to a king ruling over his subjects.

³⁰ See also fr. 18 des Places, in which Numenius says that the second God contemplates the first God and derives creative power from this activity. A systematic commentary on this fragment is Jourdan (2023: 345–466).

³¹ The way the demiurge generates the cosmos through his self-contemplation has been widely discussed by scholars. The use of the verb αὐτοποιεῖω has created some difficulties for interpreters of Numenius. Rossi (2020: 89) underlines the fact that this term occurs only in Numenius, while Petty (2012: 165) discusses the possibility that the αὐτοποιεῖ might be a sort of anticipation of the Neoplatonic concept of hypostasis.

can conclude that the demiurge and the cosmos, i.e., the second and the third God, are both involved in a unitary cosmogonical process; this is why in fr. 11 Numenius states that the second and the third God are “one” and in fr. 16 that the demiurge is “double.”

In the next section, I intend to focus on what Proclus says about Numenius’ system and about the latter’s account of demiurgy in fr. 29T and 30T.

3. Numenius’ Theory of the Three Gods according to Proclus’ *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*. Fr. 29T and 30T (= fr. 21 and 22 des Places)

The lines that Proclus devotes to Numenius in his *Commentary to Plato’s Timaeus* are significant for our purpose because Proclus’ work in this section (1.303.24–310.2 Diehl) deals explicitly with his predecessors’ conception of the demiurge and demiurgy. Regarding Numenius, Proclus underlines the distinction between the second and the third God, describing a clearly defined hierarchy:

Numenius *celebrates* three gods. He calls the first father, the second maker and the third *product* – for according to him the cosmos is the third God. According to him, then, the creator is double, the first God and the second, while what is created is the third.³²

This excerpt from the *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* is one of the most well-known and commented upon of Numenius’ fragments. It is immediately clear that this description of the three Gods theory differs significantly from Eusebius’ text.³³

Proclus criticizes Numenius for considering both the first and the second God as a “demiurge.” Additionally, Proclus says that Numenius calls the first two Gods “father” and “maker,” respectively, in accordance with a theological reading of *Timaeus* 28c3–5. While Plato in the *Timaeus* uses the terms “maker” and “father” to refer generally to the cause of the universe, Numenius interprets them in a hierarchical sense, rendering the text of the dialogue compatible with his theological view.³⁴

Furthermore, in this passage Proclus also attributes demiurgic qualities to Numenius’ first God. Since Numenius understands the first God as an intellect, this first deity can also be considered as a cause, albeit in the supreme way, as we have seen previously in fr.

³² Fr. 29T (= 21 des Places): Νουμίνιος μὲν γὰρ τρεῖς ἀνυμνήσας θεοῦς πατέρα μὲν καλεῖ τὸν πρῶτον, ποιητὴν δὲ τὸν δεῦτερον, ποιήμα δὲ τὸν τρίτον· ὁ γὰρ κόσμος κατ’ αὐτὸν ὁ τρίτος ἐστὶ θεός· ὥστε ὁ κατ’ αὐτὸν δημιουργὸς διττός, ὃ τε πρῶτος θεός καὶ ὁ δεύτερος, τὸ δημιουργούμενον ὁ τρίτος. Engl. transl. Boys-Stones (2018a: 182), with modifications; italics are mine.

³³ According to Michalewski (2021: 137), Proclus reads Numenius “through the lens of Plotinian theology”.

³⁴ See Pl. *Ti.* 28c 3–5. The inversion of the terms in the expression ποιητῆς καὶ πατῆρ serves to distinguish between two different levels of reality in a hierarchical sense: the father, who is the highest principle, and the maker, who acts as “secondary” to the father. On the Middle Platonic strategy of term “inversion” in *Ti.* 28c ff., see Ferrari (2014). All these aspects have been correctly highlighted by Müller (2009: 52): “Numenio es probablemente el exponente más claro dentro del platonismo medio de una tendencia exegética jerarquizante de la teología platónica.”

24F. In other words, from Proclus' perspective, Numenius' first God is not "sufficiently" transcendent due to his ontological determination. However, this does not mean that the first God plays an effective demiurgic role, but rather, as we saw earlier when we discussed fr.16, that his demiurgic nature must be understood as an ontological priority, which is to say that he acts like a cause despite being totally simple and inactive.

I think it is worth focusing on the definition of the third God as a "product" (ποίημα).³⁵ In my view, this passage fits with what was said earlier about the nature of the third God. The third God is referred to as a "product" as he originates from the action of the second God on matter. This is why, even though the third God possesses a divine nature, his essence is somewhat contingent on a "previous" interaction between the intelligible and matter. By asserting that the third God is a ποίημα, Proclus here underlines that he is ontologically dependent on the action of the second God, therefore implies that the third God is produced by the demiurge, i.e., the cosmos.³⁶

I shall now consider Numenius' account of the nature of the third God, according to Proclus. The main information is derived from fr. 30T:

Numenius lines his first intellect up with 'living being' and says that it thinks by using the second. His second intellect he lines up with 'intellect', and says that this, again, creates by using the third. His third he lines up with '*the one who thinks discursively*'.³⁷

In this passage, Numenius is commenting on *Timaeus* 39e, in which Plato states that the divine intellect contemplates the intelligible paradigm in order to bring order and form to reality.³⁸

It is widely accepted that Numenius' definition – as we learn from Proclus – of the first God as the "living being" leads to an identification with the paradigm of the *Timaeus*. Defining the first God as living seems to contrast with the inactivity first God. Nevertheless, we should consider the living essence of the first God as linked with his being a Νοῦς.³⁹

Finally, I intend to focus on Numenius' conception of the third God as a "discursive intellect" (τὸ διανοούμενον). This definition has given rise to much debate among schol-

³⁵ See Jourdan (2023: 270–276) for further remarks.

³⁶ According to Jourdan, the cosmos as reported by Proclus in 29T must not be considered as the third God Numenius mentions in 19F. See Jourdan (2023: 100–102).

³⁷ Fr. 30T: Νομήνιος δὲ τὸν μὲν πρῶτον κατὰ τὸ 'ὄ ἐστι ζῶον' τάττει καὶ φησιν ἐν προσήσει τοῦ δευτέρου νοεῖν, τὸν δὲ δεύτερον κατὰ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τοῦτον αὐτὸν ἐν προσήσει τοῦ τρίτου δημιουργεῖν, τὸν δὲ τρίτον κατὰ τὸν διανοούμενον. Engl. transl. Boys-Stones (2018a: 238) with modifications; italics are mine. I do not intend to focus on the so-called doctrine of the πρόσχησις, since it is a wide and complex question that does not entirely align with the theme of this paper. For a very good analysis of this problem, see Müller (2015) and Jourdan (2023: 306–314).

³⁸ Baltus (1975: 257–259); Frede (1987: 1061 ff.) and Spanu (2013).

³⁹ See, fr. 24F, 25F.

ars, some of whom have suggested that Numenius' conception of the third God could be close to the Plotinian World-Soul.⁴⁰

In Proclus' view, to say that the third God is a discursive intellect means that, insofar as Numenius refers to him as the cosmos, he possesses a sort of intrinsic immanent rational principle as well. We must constantly keep in mind that the third God is derived from the original interaction between the material and the intelligible. For this reason, the third God should be identified with the cosmos, as it represents the aspect of demiurgy that deals with the intrinsic ordering principle of the sensible world. Numenius might have had in mind this passage of the *Timaeus* when he theorised his conception of the cosmos as "God." A number of scholars, such as Jan Opsomer and Franco Ferrari, even though they have some reservations, admit that the third God may be considered as a sort of World Soul *ante litteram*;⁴¹ Fabienne Jourdan, on the other hand, does not share this view, maintaining that there are no clear textual hints about the presence of a cosmic Soul in Numenius' *De Bono*.⁴²

While it is true that Numenius never expresses himself in terms of a third God as the World Soul, it is also true that it has all the characteristics of a cosmic soul. This is the reason why I think we can conclude that Numenius' third God is the cosmos as material but, at the same time, as rationally ordered as well. Thus, I would speak neither of a third God as purely material, nor of a World Soul *stricto sensu*, but rather of the rational principle immanent to the cosmos that only insofar as it is present in matter activates – so to speak – its ordering function. The origin of this cosmos can be found in the original process that involves both the demiurge and the matter. For this reason, the immanent principle of the cosmos is to some extent demiurgic as well.

3. Some Conclusions

I have analyzed the structure of Numenian theology, dwelling on the relationship between the second and third God. We saw in fr. 52 how the cosmos derives from the ontological relationship between the original principles – the demiurge and matter – as a kind of product between these two realities. Indeed, the essence of the cosmos lies in being material and rationally ordered. This aspect also emerges, in my view, from fr. 19F, in which Numenius claims that the second and third God are "one," that is, one

⁴⁰ For example, see Dodds (1960: 14). While one of the main characteristics of the Plotinian third hypostasis is discursive thought, it is also important to specify that Numenius never explicitly states that the third God is a (World) Soul, even though the third God's function seems to be quite similar to the Plotinian third hypostases. Nevertheless, it is possible that Numenius anticipated some crucial aspects of the Plotinian Soul. On this aspect, see Emilsson (2007: 176 ff.). According to Jourdan (2023: 311–312) it is not appropriate to force a harmonisation between 29T and 30T because Proclus might have referred to two different aspects of the Numenian argumentation as it happens for the terms οὐσία and ὄν in the *Περὶ τὰ γενεῶν*.

⁴¹ See Ferrari (2014: 61) and Opsomer (2005: 69). O'Brien (2015: 140–141) agrees with the identification of the third God with the World Soul.

⁴² See Jourdan (2021) and (2023: 100–102).

reality. I believe that this sort of unity in multiplicity can only be understood if one interprets the unity between the second and third God as two aspects of a single demiurgical process. The second and third God are distinct, yet they are one in the sense that they are two aspects of the same demiurgic process, comprising the paradigmatic and the poietic moment. This perspective emerges in fr. 24F, where the demiurge is described as double insofar as he determines himself and the cosmos.

The fundamental difference between the testimonies from Proclus and Eusebius lies in the fact that Proclus emphasizes the distinct characteristics of the second and third God, while Eusebius, quoting Numenius *per litteram*, precisely reports the ontological continuity between the two realities. Proclus takes greater care in systematically distinguishing the different aspects of reality, assigning to the third God a kind of “ontological autonomy,” which, however, is not found in the other fragments. Nevertheless, I think that we can conclude that a distinction between the second and third God may be upheld within Numenius’ thought because a secondary God that mediates between the first God and the cosmos makes sense.

In my interpretation, the divinity of the third God aligns well with the text of the *Timaeus*. Therefore, Numenius underlines the theological value of the different levels of reality, while also focusing on the strong unity between the second and the third Gods, striving to demonstrate that even though the demiurge is one, his activity cannot be confined merely to the role of a paradigm. Instead, he must also act as “real” demiurge by providing order to the cosmos. For this reason, a more systematic difference among demiurgic aspects into two different levels of reality can be found only in Plotinus but still not in Numenius.

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Causality at Lower Levels: The Demiurgical Unity of the Second and Third God according to Numenius of Apamea

Numenius is an author who straddles the line between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. In this contribution, I focus on the differences between the second and the third God, which emerge from analyses of the relevant fragments. Numenius emphasizes, on several occasions, how the second God (i.e., the demiurge) has a dual nature. In this paper, I investigate the role of the demiurge in Numenius and examine in what sense the second and third God are “one.” On the one hand, Numenius seems to be stressing the unity of the second and third levels of reality, but on the other hand, he also appears to be differentiating them. The present analyses concentrate on fragments 19F, 24F, 29T and 30T (respectively 11, 16, 21, and 22 in des Places’ edition). My purpose is to demonstrate that, according to Numenius, the second and the third God are one because they both can be regarded as demiurgic. Thus, Numenius conceives a kind of “double demiurgy,” which preserves the distinction between the second and the third God, who are distinguished from an ontological point of view, but who, at the same time, share a demiurgic function. The second God is then the paradigm, whereas the third God is immanent *in* matter as a ruling principle of the cosmos, which is similar to the World Soul, as he operates on matter in order to make it rationally ordered.

KEY WORDS

Numenius, demiurge, cosmos, matter, theology