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TIME AND SOUL: *PHYSICS* IV 14.223A21-29 IN NEOPLATONISM FROM PLOTINUS TO SIMPLICIUS

Abstract

This article examines the Neoplatonic reception of a few lines by Aristotle (*Ph.* 223a21-29) on the relationship between the soul and time. This reception begins with Plotinus, who engages critically in the debate between Boethus and Alexander. According to *Treatise 45* (*Enn.* III 7), the Aristotelians do not adequately conceive of the links between the soul and time: the soul does not measure time, but generates it in a demiurgic manner, through its own movement of thought. Rejected by Plotinus, the Aristotelian notion of measurement is reinstated by Iamblichus: Aristotle's error lies solely in failing to attribute ontological and demiurgic power to the soul and to its act of measuring time. Proclus goes even further in reinstating Aristotle: whilst criticising his lack of rigour (he does not move far enough up the chain of causes), he argues perfectly in *Ph.* 223a21-29. Proclus's reception is essential, paving the way for Simplicius's praise: in contrast to Iamblichus, he commends Aristotle for having elevated time beyond the sensible world, up to the soul. The Neoplatonic reception thus illustrates the complexity of the relationship with Aristotle among the Platonists of late antiquity: like Plato's demon, he is both an indispensable authority and a limited thinker who must be put in his place. The conceptual challenge, then, is to place the Aristotelian account of time in the service of *Timaeus* 37c-d.

Keywords

Aristotle, Neoplatonism, Time, Plato's *Timaeus*, Plotinus

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Introduction and Context

In a text as famous as it is challenging, Aristotle explores the relation between time and the soul. This passage appears at the end of *Ph.* IV 14, following the definition of time as the “number of motion with respect to before and after.”¹ Within the overall structure of the *Physics*, it seems logical that the question of the soul should arise at this point. If time is a number, and even more a counted number (τὸ ἀριθμούμενον),² it seems necessary to posit a counting principle at its origin. Hence the question: must the existence of time depend on a soul that measures (or counts) it?

One might find it a difficult question, whether if there were no soul there would be time or not. For it is impossible that there should be something to do the counting (τοῦ ἀριθμῆσοντος), it is also impossible that anything should be countable (ἀριθμητόν τι), so that it is clear that there would be no number either (οὐδ’ ἀριθμός), for number is either that which has been counted or that which can be (ἢ τὸ ἡριθμημένον ἢ τὸ ἀριθμητόν). But if there is nothing that has it in its nature to count except soul, and of soul [the part which is] intellect (νοῦς), then it is impossible that there should be time if there is no soul, except that there could be that X which time is, whatever X makes it what it is; as for example if it is possible for there to be change without soul. The before and after are in change, and time is these *qua* countable (ἢ ἀριθμητὰ) (Arist. *Ph.* IV 14.223a21-29. Trans. Hussey 1993, p. 52).

The text is not entirely clear and has generated quite divergent interpretations within Aristotelian tradition.³ The main controversy, as reconstructed by Marwan Rashed, Riccardo Chiaradonna and Johannes Zachhuber, sets Boethus of Sidon against Alexander of Aphrodisias.⁴

Boethus defends the idea that the number of time exists in itself, independently of the soul: “nothing prevents there being the enumerable (τὸ

¹ *Ph.* 219b1-2.

² *Ph.* 219b7-8.

³ My interpretation would be as follows: since change can exist without the soul, since time exists alongside the order of change (the before and the after), and since there is a before and an after within change itself (“the before and after are in change”), time exists independently of the soul. But since time is the before and after insofar as it is ‘countable’, and since the soul, through its intellect, has the power to count, time has a special relation with the soul. Aristotle therefore refuses both to make time a reality produced by the soul and to render time heterogeneous with the soul.

⁴ See Rashed (2011) pp. 69-74 and Zachhuber (2022) pp. 22-40. On Boethus’ doctrine of time, see Chiaradonna and Rashed (2020) pp. 232-4.

ἀριθμητόν) quite apart from an enumerator (τοῦ ἀριθμοῦντος), as there can be the perceptible (τὸ αἰσθητόν) without a perceiver (τοῦ αἰσθανομένου).⁵ Even though, according to Themistius, Boethos claims that “no measure is produced by nature, but measuring and counting are from the outset our own work”, he attributes only to rational beings “the act of measuring and counting (τὸ μετρεῖν καὶ τὸ ἀριθμεῖν).”⁶ Nature generates no measure: the measure of time exists essentially in the order of motion, which the human soul measures only *a posteriori*, through a specific act. This can be described as a kind of essentialist position: the soul does not produce time, but rather measures a temporal number that already exists in the world (prior to any act of counting). Alexander, on the other hand, rejects this view: he accepts that the substrate of time can exist without the soul, but this is not the case for time considered as something counted. The issue here concerns the category of relatives, to which “being counted” belongs:

Perhaps the enumerable (ἀριθμητόν) will not exist, but that which is contingently capable of being enumerable (τὸ μὲν ὃ συμβέβηκεν ἀριθμητῷ γίνεσθαι) will exist, such as horses or men, but not the enumerable *qua* enumerable (οὐ μὴν ἀριθμητόν ὡς ἀριθμητόν). For in the case of other relatives, if, for instance, there is nobody on the right, he who was on the left, Socrates perhaps, will exist, but a person on the left will not. So, if time were enumerable (ἀριθμητός) as the before and after are enumerable (ὡς ἀριθμητά), if there were nothing to enumerate (μὴ ὄντος τοῦ ἀριθμήσοντος) there would be no time. But nothing prevents the substrate of time (τὸ μέντοι τῷ χρόνῳ ὑποκείμενον), which is change (ἡ κίνησις), from existing (Alex. *apud* Simpl. *In Phys.* 759, 29-760, 3. Trans. Urmson 2014, p. 173).

Socrates can remain Socrates even if no one stands to his right, but he cannot be “on the left” without a relation to something else. In the same way, the substrate of time can exist without a soul to measure it, but time as *counted* cannot exist independently of such an act of measurement. Moreover, in §16 of his treatise *On Time*, Alexander suggests that without a world-soul there would be no change at all:

⁵ Boeth. *apud* Simpl. *In Phys.* 759, 18-20. Trans. Urmson 2014, p. 173.

⁶ ὥσπερ γὰρ φησι Βοηθός, οὐδὲν μέτρον ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως γίνεται, ἀλλ’ ἡμέτερον ἤδη καὶ τὸ μετρεῖν καὶ τὸ ἀριθμεῖν ἔργον ἐστίν (Boeth. *apud* Themist. *In Phys.* 163, 5-7). See Chiaradonna and Rashed (2020) p. 232.

If the soul, which numbers movement, were done away with, time would be done away with. And if the soul were done away with the heavenly sphere would not be moved; and if this were not moved all movements would be done away with, since it is the cause of all movements, and so of time (Alex. *On Time* §16, 95, 11-15. Trans. Sharples 1982).

One might therefore say that what Alexander calls “the substrate of time (τὸ [...] τῷ χρόνῳ ὑποκείμενον)”⁷ depends on the world-soul, whereas time as counted arises from the measuring activity of individual souls.

Plotinus was aware of these debates and, in his own way, adopts a position within them. What I would like to show is that these few lines from Aristotle (*Ph.* IV 14.223a21-29) received sustained and particular attention within the Neoplatonic tradition, from Plotinus to Simplicius. In appearance, this Aristotelian text had everything needed to appeal to thinkers who elevate time above the sensible world and bodily reality. However, as we will see, the reception is more complex than expected. I will try to understand the Neoplatonic resistance, and even their underlying mistrust. I will also show how the Neoplatonic reception differs from the Peripatetic one, particularly that of Boethus and Alexander. Finally, I will try to demonstrate that, since Proclus, the Neoplatonic conception of time has positively incorporated this text. Proclus’ mediation thus plays a crucial role and prepares the way for the judgment of Simplicius, who admires Aristotle for having elevated time to the level of the soul.

1. The Soul as the Demiurge of Time (Plotinus)

In *Treatise 45, On Eternity and Time* (*Enn.* III 7), Plotinus argues that the problem has been wrongly formulated:

Why indeed can time not exist even before the soul is there to measure it, unless one claims that it owes its generation to soul (Εἰ μὴ τις τὴν γένεσιν αὐτοῦ παρὰ ψυχῆς λέγοι γίνεσθαι)? For there is absolutely no need for time to owe its existence to the soul’s measuring it. For a thing exists as the size it is, even if no one measures it (Plot. *Enn.* III 7, 9, 79-82. Trans. Gerson 2018, p. 346).

⁷ Alex. *apud* Simplicius. *In Phys.* 760, 3.

Plotinus clearly has in mind the Aristotelian lines we have just read. But rather than treating Aristotle as a predecessor to be extended, he rejects the very terms of the debate. The mistake, for Plotinus, lies in trying to derive time from the soul's act of *measurement*. Thus, he opposes the logic of *genesis* to that of *metron*. As long as one conceives the soul as a measuring power, as Aristotle does in *Ph.* IV 14, one fails to understand how time could arise from it. For the object of measurement – the magnitude – exists prior to, and independently of, the subject who measures it. One cannot therefore say that the soul brings time into existence by measuring it.

Rather than asking whether time can exist without being measured by the soul, the real question is whether the soul generates time and, if it does, how. This is precisely what Plotinus asks in *Treatise 45* (*Enn.* III 7). As he explains, the world-soul, in producing the cosmos and translating intelligible Forms into the sensible realm, unfolds itself in thought, and this very unfolding is time:

The soul [...] as it produces (ποιεῖσα), in imitation of the intelligible world, a sensible universe which moves not with the motion found in the intelligible world, but one that aims to have the sameness of an image (ἐθέλουσαν εἰκόνα ἐκείνης εἶναι), temporalized itself (ἐαυτὴν ἐχρόνωνσεν) by creating (ποιήσασα) time in place of eternity (*Enn.* III 7, 11, 27-30. Trans. Gerson 2018, p. 348).

Plotinus therefore does not exactly attempt to solve the Aristotelian aporia; he shows instead that the aporia is misconceived and, adopting a different conceptual framework, presents his own doctrine as an interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* (37c-d). Aristotle's mistake was not to have followed Plato in positing a *demiurgy of time*, namely an efficient cause underlying time itself. Although he comes close to identifying the cause of time (the soul), he nevertheless fails to conceive it as a demiurgic power. This, however, is precisely what Plotinus accomplishes (following Plato): he claims that, in bringing forth the world, the world-soul temporalizes its own thought and, in temporalizing its own thought, gives rise to the time of the world. The world-soul is thereby identified with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, while primordial time is understood as the (psychic) movement of its thought – a movement within which the sensible world comes into existence and from

which it derives its own mobility. The soul does not measure time, it produces time without any preconceived plan, but simply by transposing the eternal Forms into the sensible realm, thereby imitating eternity.

The critique of *Ph.* IV 14 is thus representative of the main objection Plotinus raises against Aristotelian accounts of time: the reduction of *Chronos* to measure and number. For Plotinus, number and measure are only manifestations of time, not its essence, which is *demiurgic* – time, as born from a demiurge, is produced by the world-soul and, as itself demiurgic, develops the eternal Forms – and *psychic* (time is the thinking life of the soul). As suggested in *Treatise* 45, they are derived expressions of it and this is precisely what *Timaeus* 47a indicates: time is made visible through the movement of the stars and the sun, produced by the Demiurge, but it is not essentially what the soul measures when it observes the heavens.⁸

Time, for Plotinus, is thus a psychic and demiurgic motion.⁹ According to him, Aristotle situates the question of soul and time on a *superficial* level – namely that of measurement – which is ultimately secondary and derivative. Plotinus may be read as responding to crucial questions that Peripatetic interpreters in Roman time addressed in different ways, while at the same time subverting their very terms. From this perspective, what is required is a genuine account of how the soul generates time, because measurement alone is insufficient to constitute it – that is, to make time what it is as time.

This criticism – that the approach isn't ontological enough – is something Iamblichus, a Syrian Neoplatonist philosopher and contemporary of Porphyry, also directs at Aristotle.¹⁰ At the same time, though, unlike Plotinus, he revalues the Aristotelian ideas of measure and number. This represents a decisive step in the Neoplatonic reception of *Ph.* IV 14.

⁸ Plot. *Enn.* III 7, 12, 25-43. See Michalewski (2021).

⁹ And we might add that it is a dynamic movement. Time is indeed generated by a power of the soul (*Enn.* III 7, 11, 20-21). See Michalewski (2022).

¹⁰ On Iamblichus, see Chiaradonna and Lecerf (2023).

2. *The Ontological Power of Measurement (Iamblichus)*

From Iamblichus onward, we see a revival of Pythagoreanism within Neoplatonism.¹¹ He argues that Aristotle's entire account of time ultimately derives from the Pythagorean thinker Archytas of Tarentum. According to Iamblichus, Archytas (in fact pseudo-Archytas) has written a treatise titled *On Categories* or *On the Reason of the Universe*, which Aristotle's *Physics* would imitate.¹² In that treatise, Archytas defines time as the number of a certain kind of motion, and identifies that motion with the substantial motion of the soul:

In conveying the nature of time more theoretically, Iamblichus again chooses as his guide (ἡγεμόνα) Archytas, who says that "time is the number of a certain movement (κινάσιός τινος ἀριθμός) or, more generally, the extension of the nature of the universe too" [...]. He [*scil.* Archytas] did not say that time is the number of *all* movement (κινήσεως ἀριθμὸν τῆς πάσης), as Aristotle defined it, but rather [the number] of a *certain* movement (κινήσεως τινός) – not [the movement] of one of the *particulars*, such as the [movement] of the heavens or that of the sun or of some other definite thing among the particulars, since on that basis time would not be of the nature of a principle (ἀρχοειδής), nor would it extend commonly to everything, nor would it deserve to be defined among the primary genera. Instead, by means of this [definition], [Archytas] altogether expresses a movement which is of the nature of a principle (ἀρχοειδῆ) and is the cause of being (τοῦ εἶναι αἰτίαν) for the other movements. [...] In consequence it is plausible that [Archytas] is, by means of theses [characterisations], expressing the substantial movement of the soul (τὴν οὐσιώδη τῆς ψυχῆς κίνησιν), and the projection [into the world] of the principles belonging to it by virtue of its substance (τὴν τῶν κατ' οὐσίαν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῇ λόγων προβολήν) (Iambl. *apud* Simpl. *In Cat.* 350, 10-30. Trans. Gaskin 2013, p. 83).

On this view, Aristotle ends up weakening Archytas' doctrine. For Archytas, time is the number of a motion internal to the substance of the world-soul, understood as self-moving and self-constituting.¹³ Time as number is generated within the very being of the world-soul, which constitutes itself through its own motion, according to a Pythagorean doctrine that Plato expresses in the *Phaedrus*. The number of time is therefore fundamental

¹¹ O'Meara (1989).

¹² See Hoffmann (1980) and Macris (2002).

¹³ On the (substantial) self-motion of the soul, see Opsomer (2012) and Taormina (1997).

and determining: it brings about the order of change in the world, structuring and organizing it. In that sense, it has a kind of demiurgic power. In constituting itself through a substantial self-motion, the world-soul generates a primordial and ordering form of time. Time is therefore itself substantial: it confers being upon sensible motions and grounds the measure and order governing those motions. It makes the world possible in its very nature as a cosmos. The Pythagorean conception of time thus possesses an ontological (or demiurgic) power – it brings ordered movements into existence – whereas the Aristotelian conception of time emerges from movements that are already ordered and structured. Whereas, in Archytas, time brings into being the “before” and “after” of motion, in Aristotle these “before” and “after” arise from the continuity of sensible motion itself, which is taken as given:

And he [*scil.* Archytas] says that its number is the one which is at this moment generative (γενεσιουργόν), proceeding to the creation (προϊόντα εἰςποίησιν) of the things in the world [...]. This differs considerably from the number [of movement] referred to by Aristotle: for he considers it to be an externally supervening measure (μέτρον [...] ἔξωθεν ἐπιγιγνόμενον) of what is continuous, whereas Archytas establishes it as a measure of movement itself, inherent [in it] (αὐτοφύεος) and not external [to it] (οὐκ ἔξωθεν), as Aristotle [thinks] (Iambl. *apud* Simpl. *In Cat.* 350, 32-351, 4. Trans. Gaskin 2013, pp. 83-4).

For Archytas, the number of time is *genesourgos*, producer of becoming. The world-soul thus generates the number of time by generating itself, and this number of time is the origin of all temporal measures – or orders of development – in the world. It is, for example, what accounts for the succession of life stages: first childhood, then adolescence, and finally adulthood. Aristotle instead conceives of time as emerging from motion insofar as motion exhibits a determinate before and after. Motion, with its inherent continuity, pre-exists the number of time; it is not the number of time that generates this continuity.

Iamblichus thus reproaches Aristotle for lacking an ontological conception of the relation between measure, soul, and time. The issue is not the notion of measure itself, as Plotinus believed. Rather, the problem is that Aristotle does not grant measure any ontological power – any generative capacity. He treats number and measure as attributes that result from motion,

rather than as principles that make motion possible. Aristotle, though inspired by Archytas, thereby weakens the Pythagorean doctrine of number:

The Peripatetic opinion seems to have deviated (*παρατετράφθαι*) from the Pythagorean instruction. The reason for this is that the recent [thinkers] (*οἱ νεώτεροι*) have not held the same view of number and movement as the ancients, but think that they are accidents (*συμβεβηκότα*), and consider them to be externally adventitious, whereas [the ancients] regard them as substantial (*οὐσιώδη*) (Iambl. *apud* Simpl. *In Cat.* 351, 4-8. Trans. Gaskin 2013, p. 84).

From this perspective, when Aristotle asks whether time exists by virtue of being measured by the soul, this reveals the weakness of his conception of number. As Archytas saw, the soul ought to have been introduced from the outset, at the very moment of defining time. For Archytas, time is the number of the substantial motion of the world-soul. It exists in its *ousia* and, as such, is a principle of the order of motion. Like in Plotinus, it possesses a demiurgic power.

For Iamblichus, then, the *aporia* of *Ph.* IV 14 is fundamentally misformulated. Aristotle and the Peripatetics attempt to derive time from the soul's act of measurement, but without an ontological conception of number and measure. Neither Boethus nor Alexander is correct, since both presuppose that measure applies to an already ordered change that would pre-exist it. This is not the case for Iamblichus as a reader of Archytas: the number of the soul – i.e. time – is a substantial principle that brings into existence ordered change according to before and after.

Aristotle would have conceived both the soul and time in a superficial manner. But through this critique, Iamblichus reintroduces into his concept of time the Aristotelian notions of measure and number, which Plotinus had relegated to a secondary role. From Iamblichus onward, in late Neoplatonism, measure and number belong to the very essence of time, and not merely to its manifestation. Thus, he reintegrates the Aristotelian concepts, and terminology, incorporating them into the Neoplatonic conception of time.

This tendency (to reappropriate the Aristotelian thought of time while simultaneously criticizing it) becomes even stronger in Proclus. Proclus takes up much of what is said by Aristotle, and his critique no longer targets the terms of *Ph.* IV 14, but only his softness, his lack of metaphysical ambition.

3. *Aristotle's Softness and Rightness (Proclus)*

In his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Proclus, in reference to *Ph.* IV 14, accuses Aristotle of *malakia*, softness.

Now Aristotle defined time as the number of motion, not the number *with which* we count (κατὰ τὸ ἀριθμοῦν), but that which *gets counted* (κατὰ τὸ ἀριθμητόν). Given this definition he quite plausibly inquired what it is that does the counting, since time is that which gets counted (for these things are relatives and if the one exists, then so too does the other), but his resolution of this problem is insufficiently bold (καὶ ἔλυσε μαλακῶς) since he said that some *soul* is that which does the counting, for it is necessary for there to be that which *does the counting* eternally prior to the eternal number [that gets counted] in order that it should always make it, since what comes to be [as a result of the counting] always exists (Procl. *In Ti.* III 9, 21-10, 2. Trans. Baltzly 2013, p. 53).

Proclus analyses the reasoning of *Ph.* IV 14 as follows: since time is counted, there must be a counting principle. Proclus does not at all reject this Aristotelian reasoning, as will be seen. He merely reproaches Aristotle for not having ascended high enough in the hierarchy of reality. Aristotle, in fact, stops at the level of the soul: the principle that numbers time would thus be the soul. Proclus condemns this resolution of the aporia – namely, that the soul brings time into being by numbering it – as *malakia* (softness). Aristotle, in his view, does not sustain the philosophical effort far enough; he does not rise high enough in the chain of causes.

Proclus is therefore more appreciative of Aristotle's inquiry than Plotinus and Iamblichus. Aristotle is right in his reasoning: if there is counted time in the world, there must be a counting principle at its origin. Elsewhere, Proclus even goes further by taking up the Aristotelian reasoning for his own account:

Third, if time is something that is in fact subject to being counted, it is necessary that what does the counting (τὸ ἀριθμοῦν) should pre-exist prior to what gets counted (πρὸ τοῦ ἀριθμητοῦ [...] προϋπάρχειν) (for these things are said to be [what they are] in relation to one another and what does the counting pre-exists prior to that which gets counted). That which potentially counts is prior to what is potentially counted, while that which actually counts is prior to what is actually counted. Accordingly, this is what time is in reality (ἐκεῖνο τοίνυν ὁ τῷ ὄντι χρόνος): the Number Itself (αὐτοαριθμός) which [counts] each of the numbers of all the periods [of time found within the cosmos] (Procl. *In Ti.* III 32, 21-27. Trans. Baltzly 2013, p. 86).

The counting principle from which time proceeds is not the soul, but Number-in-itself, of which Socrates speaks in the *Republic* (VII 529d):

But since visible time (ὁ χρόνος ὁ ἐμφανής) revolves according to number (κατ' ἀριθμόν), as the *Timaeus* [38a7-8] says, the number of revolutions would be prior to this (πρὸ τούτου), since it concerns the return of the whole cycle [to its starting point]. If that [Perfect Number] were in the realm of generation, it will again be so in accordance with another number and [so on] into infinity. If, however, there is a number that independently always exists and is a cause of time that revolves in accordance with number, since this number is intellective (νοερός) and is thus a king of time that is like an Intelligible choreographer, it will be the cause of the dance for the cosmos since the circular return to its starting point <is called> a dance. In the seventh book of the *Republic* Socrates <named> it 'the true number' (ἀληθινὸν ἀριθμόν) (Procl. *In R.* II 17, 17-18. Trans. Baltzly, Finamore and Miles 2022, p. 222).

Proclus implicitly uses Aristotelian reasoning to clarify the claim, in the *Timaeus*, that time is measured according to number. If the time of the world is visible and measurable through the movement of the stars, this number must nevertheless pre-exist cosmic time itself, as Aristotle showed. But, according to Proclus, this Number-principle, or Number-in-itself, cannot arise together with the soul, since the soul – even the soul of the world – requires time to carry out its activity.¹⁴ The soul depends on Time and cannot generate it. For Proclus, this Number is “intellective” (*noeric*): it is an intellectual power inscribed within the series of the Demiurge.¹⁵ It organises the intelligible Forms by providing them with measures, thereby making them models for sensible motions. The text of *Ph.* IV 14 is thus used to demonstrate the existence of a substantial and Platonic conception of time, in terms that Aristotle would never have accepted.

We thus see how Proclus represents a double and somewhat ambiguous moment in the reception of the aporia in *Ph.* IV 14. On the one hand, he reproaches Aristotle for his softness: like Plotinus and Iamblichus, Proclus holds that Aristotle does not go far enough. On the other hand, he considers Aristotle's reasoning to be correct: if the time of the world is a counted number, there must be a counting principle at its origin. This number-in-itself is intellective and substantial Time, of which Plato speaks

¹⁴ See Procl. *In Ti.* III 22, 13-28.

¹⁵ See Procl. *In R.* II 17, 17-18, 14, and *In Ti.* III 89, 32-90, 17.

in the *Timaeus* (37c-d, 38a) and in the *Republic* (VII 529d). Aristotle's argument is thus placed in the service of a thought that claims to be Platonic. This status of Aristotle – as serving or assisting Plato – is consistent with the place Proclus assigns him, namely that of Plato's "daemon".¹⁶ Like any daemon, Aristotle is an auxiliary, a mediating figure between gods and humans, here between the divine Plato and us. This praise of Aristotle becomes even stronger in Simplicius.

4. "I Admire the Following Feature of Aristotle's Sagacity" (Simplicius)

We thus arrive at the position of Simplicius, the only Neoplatonist commentator to explicitly praise Aristotle for having related time to the soul:

But I admire (θαυμάζω) the following feature of Aristotle's sagacity, namely how he too posited the soul as the proximate cause of time (αἰτίαν τοῦ χρόνου προσεχῆ): for in seeking what it is which *numbers* [time], he talked of the soul. For if the soul is the origin and cause of all movement – whether *qua* self-moving, as Plato thought, or *qua* unmoved, as Aristotle thought – it will also, in all probability, be the cause of *temporal* movement (Simpl. *In Cat.* 351, 8-13. Trans. Gaskin 2013, p. 84).

Simplicius here opposes Iamblichus, who (as we have seen) judges the Aristotelian doctrine to be weakened and derivative in comparison with that of Archytas. Rather than opposing Aristotle to Platonic truth, the two must be reconciled: Aristotle "himself," like Plotinus and like Archytas, makes the soul the cause of time. Simplicius interprets *Ph.* IV 14 in the following way: if the soul produces motions, it must also be the cause of temporal motion. He relies on a particular passage to argue that, for Aristotle, there can be no change without the soul:

So Aristotle reasonably says that, if the soul *qua* enumerator is abolished time will be abolished *qua* enumerable; but he shows that, if it were abolished *qua* the principle of coming to be and change (ἀρχῆς γενέσεως καὶ κινήσεως), both change and coming to be would be abolished, by "if it is possible for there to be change without soul" (εἰ ἐνδέχεται κίνησιν εἶναι ἄνευ ψυχῆς). But not only is time, being an aspect of change abolished together with the

¹⁶ See Procl. *In Ti.* III 54, 33 and 262, 19.

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abolition of change, but, since it itself has its being essentially in becoming, it will be abolished together with the abolition of soul, which is the acknowledged cause of all change and becoming (Simpl. *In Phys.* 760, 33-761, 5. Trans. Urmson 2014, p. 174).

This interpretation runs counter to the very wording of Aristotle's text. In the context of the latter, the line quoted by Simplicius ("if it is possible for there to be change without soul") forms part of an argument designed to show that change exists independently of the soul, so that time, which is the before and after of change, itself exists independently of the soul. In a manner at once explicit and open to debate, Simplicius strives to reconcile Aristotle (*Ph.* 223a27-28) and Plato (*Phdr.* 245c):

Note how here, also, Aristotle wrote in accord (σύμφωνα) with our leader. He himself wrote "if it is possible for there to be change without soul", i.e. without the changer, while the other said that for other things that change the soul is the "source and principle", and that from this principle everything in becoming comes to be (Simpl. *In Phys.* 761, 5-9. Trans. Urmson 2014, p. 174)

According to this original interpretation of Aristotle's text, the soul is the ontological cause of all changes in the world. However, since Aristotelian time has its being in becoming, it cannot exist without the soul. From this perspective, the *Physics* would maintain both that there is a soul that brings about changes in the world and that this soul brings about time. The only (but major) difference between Plato and Aristotle is that the Platonic soul is self-moving, whereas the Aristotelian soul does not move itself. According to Simplicius, there would be an Aristotelian world-soul, cause of all the changes in the universe, and that soul would be the ontological cause of time. The (individual) soul's measurement of time would only be the cause of measured time. Aristotle would thus be closer to Plotinus' *Treatise 45* (*Enn.* III 7) than himself thought.

In a way that is both more assertive and more explicit, Simplicius thus seeks to reconcile Aristotle with the Neoplatonic conception of time. He insists less on Aristotle's softness, as Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus do, and more on the importance of having understood the role of the soul in the constitution of time.

Conclusion

To sum up, Plotinus and Iamblichus both remain wary of *Ph.* IV 14 because they consider this text insufficiently *ontological*. For Plotinus, the problem lies in the notion of psychological measurement: it says nothing about the nature of time and does not allow anything to come into being. For Iamblichus, the issue likewise concerns measurement, though not in itself. Aristotle is right to define time as a measure; however, he weakens the doctrine of Archytas by treating number not as a principle, but as an attribute or accident of motion.

These critiques play a positive role in the Neoplatonic reception of this text. Plotinus is the first to discuss it and thereby enters the Boethus-Alexander debate. Iamblichus, in turn, rehabilitates the notions of measure and number to think the constitution of time through the soul.

One final barrier to the praise of Aristotle remains: the objection that he is not sufficiently ontological.

This objection disappears with Proclus, who reads this text in an explicitly ontological way. He reproaches Aristotle only for his softness. Moreover, he even uses *Ph.* IV 14 to demonstrate the existence of a substantial, demiurgic, and, in his view, Platonic Time.

This tradition therefore culminates in Simplicius' praise of Aristotle. In the end, Neoplatonism comes to view Aristotle as an ally – not someone who fully grasps the whole truth about time or reaches its highest principles, but still a philosopher far superior to earlier schools like Stoicism and Epicureanism, which, as Proclus puts it, reduce time to a mere accident of motion.¹⁷

It therefore seems fair to say that, in Neoplatonism, criticising Aristotle was itself a way of receiving his thought. By criticising *Ph.* IV 14 and entering the Boethus-Alexander debate, Plotinus brings these few Aristotelian lines into the Neoplatonic tradition and begins an ongoing dialogue with them. Over the centuries, that dialogue becomes increasingly sophisticated and, through a series of critiques, eventually turns into genuine praise.

¹⁷ See Procl. *In Ti.* III 27, 13-18.

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