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SYRIANUS

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I SYRIANUS' LIFE AND WORKS

Information about the life of Syrianus, son of Philoxenus, is scarce, and is limited to what can be deduced from what we know about the life of Proclus, Syrianus' disciple, who became much more famous than his master. Nevertheless, one date is certain: Syrianus became head of the Platonic school at Athens in 432 CE, after the death of his master, Plutarch. As to Syrianus' own death, the date which is often given, of 437 CE, is only conjectural, if probable, but it is certain that he died before 439 CE, when Proclus wrote his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*; the past tense verbs in this text indicate that Proclus' master had already passed away.

Among Syrianus' numerous works, only his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* has survived, and that in an incomplete form comprising only books 3, 4, 13 and 14. A commentary on two treatises by Hermogenes of Tarsus, an orator of the second to third century CE, *On Types of Style* and *On Argumentative Stances*, has also been transmitted under Syrianus' name. However the most recent editor of these commentaries, H. Rabe, has expressed doubts concerning their authenticity.

But we know that Syrianus gave lectures, not only on works by Aristotle other than the *Metaphysics*, but also on Platonic dialogues. As regards the latter, we have a commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, written by Syrianus' disciple Hermias: he wrote this commentary on the basis of notes taken during his master's lectures. In addition, Syrianus is known to have produced exegeses of poetic and theological works such as the *Orphic Poems*.

Again, we know that Syrianus did not confine his writing to commentaries; he also wrote systematic treatises such as *The Agreement Between Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato and the Chaldaean Oracles*, a work consisting of ten books.

To understand Syrianus' written works correctly, we must place them in the context of his teaching in the Platonic school at Athens. The curriculum here was organized into three distinct stages: (a) the reading of Aristotle's works,

(b) the reading of Plato's dialogues, and (c) the reading of Orphic and Chaldaean theology. The study of Aristotle's works, which would culminate in study of the *Metaphysics*, considered as a theological treatise, was deemed preliminary to the study of Plato's dialogues. These had already been selected and arranged in a pedagogical reading order some centuries before, in the so-called 'Iamblichaeon canon' which culminated in reading of the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*, works considered to be the highest synthesis of Plato's physical and theological doctrines respectively.

The extant works

(1) Portions of the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, namely those on books B, Γ, M and N. At present the standard edition is *Syrianus. In Aristotelis 'Metaphysica' commentaria*, ed. W. Kroll, G. Reimer, Berolini 1902 (CAG VI.1), but a new edition is planned by Les Belles Lettres, Paris.

The commentary consists of four books. The first book (pp. 1–53) expounds *Metaphysics* B. Here Syrianus concerns himself with the aporetic nature of the Aristotelian text, not only underscoring this characteristic, but also with some confidence assuming the position of arbiter, dispensing his judgement on how the *aporiai* should be resolved. His declared purpose is to supply a succinct answer for each of the various *aporiai* which Aristotle presents but fails to resolve, and this purpose he duly fulfils. Most of these *aporiai* concern the identity of the primary science and its objects.

The second book (pp. 54–79) is devoted to *Metaphysics* Γ, and consists of a short introduction, three main sections and a short concluding *précis*. Of the main sections, the first discusses the claim that the 'first philosopher' studies being *qua* being; the second discusses the claim that he studies *per se* attributes of being *qua* being; the third discusses the claim that he studies the principles of demonstration. At the beginning of the book (Syrian. *In Metaph.* 54.12–15), Syrianus warns that he does not intend to provide continuous commentary of *Metaphysics* G, since Alexander of Aphrodisias has already done this so thoroughly. Accordingly, the second book does not read as continuous commentary. Rather, Syrianus' purpose is to provide detailed discussion of the three above-mentioned central claims only. Thus he gives us only straightforward paraphrase of the rest of the text, where it deals with other matters. In this way, he guarantees a certain continuity of exposition, but, of course, sets aside some of Aristotle's arguments.

The third book (pp. 80–165) expounds *Metaphysics* M and the fourth *Metaphysics* N. Both books deal with the ontological status and epistemic value of Forms and Numbers, together constituting a continuous whole. (Exactly at

what point Aristotle's book M ends and his book N begins was a matter of controversy; Syrianus adopts the division proposed by Alexander, 165.22–3.) The third book is crucial because it contains Syrianus' testimony concerning Aristotle's *peri ideōn* (from p. 103.13 onwards).

On this matter, Syrianus' polemic against Aristotle is fiery, since he is determined to defend the status of the Forms and the Numbers as intelligible substances existing separately from sensible things and as knowable by human beings through discursive thought. Here, where agreement between Plato and Aristotle seems impossible, Syrianus chooses loyalty to Plato and the Platonic tradition.

(2) The *Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus* has been transmitted under the name of Hermias of Alexandria, but it seems to consist of lecture notes taken by Hermias during lessons given by Syrianus on Platonic dialogue. The question of how much originality there is in this work remains open. The standard edition is *Hermiae Alexandrini in Platonis <Phaedrum> scholia*, ed. P. Couvreur, Paris 1901.

The *Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus* consists of three books. The first book (pp. 1–81) expounds *Phaedrus* 227a–243e (the opening encounter between Socrates and Phaedrus, 'Lysias' speech', Socrates' first discourse and the introduction to the 'palinode'). The second book (pp. 83–172) provides a thorough interpretation of *Phaedrus* 244a–249c (Socrates' second speech up to but excluding the discussion of erotic madness, comprising the division of madness into four kinds; the proof of the immortality of the soul; the comparison of the soul to a chariot pulled by two horses and guided by a charioteer; the description of the ascent and descent of souls – their gaining and losing of wings, their ascents and their falls and incarnations, their ways as ways of gods characteristic to them, their contemplation of Forms at the apotheosis, their choice between nine types of earthly lives). The third book (pp. 173–266) is devoted to *Phaedrus* 249d–279c (the definition of the erotic kind of madness, the contrast between the lover who uplifts and the one who degrades, the further development of the chariot metaphor to explain the love relationship, the suggestion that Lysias also should compose a 'palinode' and the prayer to Eros, the dialectical discussion of rhetoric, the final evaluation of Lysias in contrast to Isocrates, the closing prayer to Pan and the gods of the place). All three books are of roughly the same length but, as the above details of Platonic subject matter show, the ratio of Platonic text to Hermian explication varies widely. In particular, Hermias' second book considers in great detail a very short section of the *Phaedrus* which, despite its brevity, he considers of paramount importance and deserving of full discussion. By contrast the third book contains a rushed discussion of the largest portion of the dialogue, while the ratio as regards the first book is intermediary.

Syrianus' influence

Syrianus had a significant influence on his pupil Proclus, especially concerning the elaboration of his theology, as is testified by the evidence in Proclus' own works (see above on the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* commentaries). Concerning Aristotelian exegesis, Syrianus is, along with Alexander of Aphrodisias, the other source of Asclepius' commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. However, reading Asclepius one gets the general impression that he lacks Syrianus' depth. He does not display the same problematic relationship to Aristotle's doctrine; unlike Syrianus he does not waver between an attitude of respect and a polemical tone. This milder approach might suggest that the assimilation and conciliation between Plato and Aristotle had further progressed in the school at Alexandria by his day.

On the other hand, the author of the pseudo-Alexander *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* is committed to Aristotelian doctrine – the pseudo-Alexander *Commentary on Metaphysics* E–N follows upon Alexander's *Commentary on Metaphysics* A–D in the manuscripts – but most likely Syrianus is his source as well (and not *vice versa*). According to the convincing reconstruction developed by C. Luna, which rehabilitates a thesis of K. Paechter (with the addition of much new material), this pseudo-Alexander should be identified with Michael of Ephesus (twelfth century).¹ Be that as it may, Syrianus' interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* certainly went on to have an important influence on the theology of his disciple, Proclus and, through him, on much later metaphysical philosophy.

2 SYRIANUS' DOCTRINES

(a) Theology

Although there has been no direct transmission of Syrianus' theological teaching, most of it can be read in Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides* and his *Platonic Theology*. In these works, Proclus often mentions the teaching he received from Syrianus, indicating this with the expression 'our guide' (*ho hēmeteros kathēgemōn*).² It was indeed under Syrianus' 'guidance' that Proclus was introduced first to Aristotle (the 'little mysteries') and then to Plato (the 'great mysteries'). With regard to the latter, a correct understanding of Plato's *Parmenides* was of prime importance because this dialogue was considered to express the apotheosis of Plato's theology, just as the *Timaeus* was considered to express the

¹ See Luna 2001.

² Proclus acknowledges his debt to Syrianus in several places, as in *In Parm.* 618.3 ff., 1061.20–31, *Theol. Plat.* 83.10–18. On the expression *ho hēmeteros kathēgemōn*, see now the remarks by Luna and Segonds 2007: lxvi–lxviii.

apotheosis of Plato's physics. Thanks to Proclus, it is possible to reconstruct Syrianus' exegesis; he saw the second part of the *Parmenides* not merely as a logical exercise, but as a representation of the descending pattern of different levels of reality.

The crucial passage is to be found in the sixth book of Proclus' commentary (*In Parm.* 6.1061.20 ff., above all 1063.20–1064.13 Cousin). Here Proclus tells us that, according to Syrianus, the first hypothesis of the Platonic dialogue (137c4 ff.) concerns the transcendent One, about which it is possible to speak only in negative terms. In this hypothesis, all possible characteristics of the One are examined and rejected as properties of the One.

The *Parmenides*' second hypothesis (142b1 ff.), by contrast, concerns the One-which-is, and it introduces the henads, the causes of the intelligible world. Here we move from negations to affirmations: each of the pairs of attributes considered (e.g., 'equal' and 'unequal') is said to belong to the One-which-is.

However not all the fourteen pairs of attributes are to be regarded as being on the same level: they correspond, in a hierarchical descending pattern, to different levels of the intelligible world. Thus, according to Proclus, in the second hypothesis Syrianus identified the following levels: the intelligible gods, the intelligible-intellectual gods, the intellectual gods, the Demiurge, the hypercosmic gods, the encosmic gods, the universal souls, and finally the class of angels, *daimones* and heroes.

The hierarchy is arranged according to movements from causes to effects, where the cause is always more uniform than its product(s), and there are more, and more multiple, products the further away we move from the One. Here the notions of the henad and the triad play an important role. The henad is the unitary and transcendent cause of each level of intelligible reality which is distinguished.³ The triad is the internal organization proper to each level of intelligible reality, which is accordingly articulated into Unity, Potency and Being.⁴

Finally, the third hypothesis (*Parm.* 155e4 ff.) concerns the souls assimilated to gods, the fourth (*Parm.* 157b6 ff.) forms in matter, and the fifth (*Parm.* 159b2 ff.) matter, which is the last effect we reach in descending from the One.

So if you would like to hear the subjects of the hypotheses in order according to this [scil. Syrianus'] theory also, the first he declares to be about the One God, how he generates and gives order to all the orders of gods. The second is about all the divine

³ 'The way Syrianus sees it (cf. Proclus, *in Parm.* 1049.37 ff.), the uniform premiss, "If there is a One", symbolizes the henad at the head of each order of gods, while the conclusion, which varies in each case, represents the particularity (*idiotēs*) of the class of gods (or superior beings) envisaged in each case,' Dillon 2009: 236.

⁴ This corresponds to the triadic way of organizing the intelligible world, from Porphyry onwards, in Being, Life and Intellect.

orders, how they have proceeded from the One and the substance which is joined to each. The third is about the souls which are assimilated to the gods, but yet have not been apportioned divinized being. The fourth is about Forms-in-Matter, how they are produced according to what rankings from the gods. The fifth is about Matter, how it has no participation in the formative henads, but receives its share of existence from above, from the supra-essential and single Monad; for the One and the illumination of the One extends as far as Matter, bringing light even to its boundlessness.

(Proclus, *in Parm.*, 6.1063.18–1064.12, trans. Morrow–Dillon)

There are four further hypotheses in the Platonic dialogue, but Syrianus does not say that, or how these hypotheses discuss further levels of reality; it is left to Damascius to make these further connections.

Now it is a fair assumption, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, and given his explicit acknowledgement of a doctrinal debt, that Proclus has taken over the substance of his master's teaching. But of course we cannot assume that Syrianus would have systematized his doctrines in exactly the same way as Proclus does. The only indisputably authentic Syrianian work we possess, the incomplete commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, is in a style quite different to Proclus'. Here Syrianus employs vivid and polemical language and cuts straight through to the crux of each question or problem. Unlike Proclus, he does not become embroiled in the detail of an answer or a solution, nor does he pause to embroider his ontological hierarchies. Thus, even if, as is quite likely, Syrianus and Proclus were in substantial agreement on central matters of doctrine as regards interpretation of the *Parmenides* (at least), it is unlikely that they would have extracted these from the text in quite the same way.

Syrianus' interpretation of the *Parmenides* as outlined above develops and elaborates upon a pattern that Iamblichus had already pioneered.

(b) *Physics and theology*

The shadow which Syrianus casts over Proclus' work is especially evident in the Proclean *Commentary on the Timaeus*. Proclus was only twenty-eight years old when he wrote this work, and Syrianus had died only a few years previously, doubtless leaving behind a vivid memory of his teaching. So it is unsurprising that we find in this commentary explicit references to Syrianus' lectures and to his own *Commentary on the Timaeus*, which has been lost to us (cf. Proclus, *In Timaeum* 2.96.6–7; 273.23–6; 3.35.25–6 Diehl). On many occasions Proclus mentions Syrianus' position on various controversial issues, so we are able to infer that Syrianus did not only give a physical interpretation of the Platonic *Timaeus*, but also gave a theological one, here following Iamblichus' exegesis. Moreover Syrianus' position was in agreement with the theologians (Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, the *Chaldaean Oracles*). Syrianus would begin with a literal

explanation of Plato's text, but he would usually then go on to find a more profound meaning buried in it, which is to say a theological meaning.⁵ For example, he thought that the division of time into day and night was to be interpreted according to the phenomenal reality that we perceive daily, but he also saw in these phenomena the image of a higher reality, so that Day and Night belonged to the class of demiurgic entities and were the criteria for measuring not only the visible world, but also the invisible one (Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.35.25 ff., cf. 3.318.13 ff. also on Time).

Among the more important aspects of Syrianus' exegesis of the *Timaeus*, one in particular is worthy of mention. This is that he considered that there was only one Demiurge of the world, who occupied the last level among the intellectual Gods and used his power to create the world (Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.310.4–15). This Demiurge, identified with Zeus (Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.314.22–315.4), acts in agreement with a model placed above him, yet which he can see inside himself (Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.322.18–323.22).

The World Soul, however, Syrianus described as existing and acting on many different levels. Its highest faculty is hypercosmic and transcendent (this is the faculty which keeps in touch with the Intellect, what Plato calls 'head' in *Phaedrus* 248a3). The rest of the World Soul's multiple faculties run through all the world in such a way as to be appropriated by each different portion of the world as they animate it (Proclus, *In Tim.* 2.105.26–106.9). Again, the World Soul contains in itself the copy of all divine classes above it (Proclus, *In Tim.* 2.273.23 ff.).

As to human souls, Syrianus maintained that they had (1) an eternal vehicle (*ochēma*), produced by the Demiurge himself; (2) a pneumatic vehicle, produced by recent gods (this vehicle had a life longer than that of the sensible body, but it was nevertheless destined for dissolution); (3) a sensible body. When the sensible body dies, the pneumatic vehicle survives to undergo punishments in Hades meted out for the person's past wrongdoings, or to choose a form of life at the beginning of a cycle of embodiments. But when the human soul arrives at the end of such a cycle and is totally purified, it abandons its pneumatic vehicle and retains only its eternal vehicle. The soul needs the pneumatic vehicle only in order to have a position in the world and, especially, to descend into the sensible world. Such a vehicle is strictly bound to the soul's irrational life, which is why when the soul has been completely purged, there is no reason for it to persist.

⁵ Cf. Syrianus' opinion concerning the claim that the number of listeners diminishes as the discourse treats of higher themes (Proclus, *in Timaeum* 1.20.27–21.8); Syrianus' dual literal and allegorical explanation of Atlantis' war (Proclus, *in Timaeum* 1.77.26 ff.); Syrianus' agreement with the theologians, in looking at things from above when he interprets the mixing-bowl (Proclus, *in Timaeum* 3.247.26–248.5); Proclus' presentation of his master as the most theological among the Platonic interpreters (Proclus, *in Timaeum* 3.14.18–19).

Attempts to reconstruct Syrianus' interpretation of the *Timaeus* encounter the significant problem that in any given case, whereas it is easy to identify where Proclus begins to present his master's opinions – expressions like 'according to our guide' or 'according to our master' usually settle the matter – it is by contrast quite difficult to decide when he has finished reporting Syrianus' position and begun developing it or presenting a view of his own. We might go so far as to say that distinguishing Syrianus' position from that of his (at the time of writing) young pupil, or distinguishing their different developments of an existing position, is a somewhat moot exercise simply because there is such extensive general agreement between the two.⁶

(c) *Ontology*

In his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Syrianus formulates his doctrine of the three levels of substance: (1) intelligible substances, (2) dianoetic substances, and (3) sensible substances (see especially the prologue to the exegesis of book M).

The divine Pythagoras, and all those who have genuinely received his doctrines into the purest recesses of their own thought, declared that there are many levels (*taxeis*) of beings . . . They declared that there were, broadly,⁷ three levels of being, the intelligible, the dianoetic, and the sensible, and that there were manifested at each of them all the forms, but in each case in a manner appropriate to the particular nature of their existence.

(Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 81.31–82.2; trans. Dillon 2006: 32–3)

In maintaining this doctrine of three levels of reality, Syrianus presents himself as a disciple of Pythagoras and Plato. On his version of Pythagoreanism/Platonism, sensible substances are not the only substances, nor the most important. In fact they belong to the lowest level of reality, below not only the intelligible but also the 'intermediate' substances (the dianoetic ones). All reality is derived from the intelligible world by a dynamic process of descent (the *proodos*) and the action of otherness, but in the course of this process, the derived entities gradually lose their unity, until we finally arrive at the sensible world. The whole of reality is thus ordered and continuous, but, at the same time, multiple and separated into different levels.

⁶ However Proclus at least once says explicitly that he disagrees with Syrianus; unlike his master, he does not believe that Eternity rests in the Good, considering instead that Eternity rests in the Being-One. But Proclus does his best to downplay the disagreement with his master and accompanies it with a fulsome compliment; this is where he calls Syrianus the most theological interpreter (Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.14.18 ff.).

⁷ Syrianus elsewhere presents more sophisticated versions of his doctrine of the levels of substance where reality has more than three levels.

Yet according to the principle that 'all exists in all, but in a way appropriate to each',⁸ Ideas are everywhere, even in the sensible world; they exist at all levels, but in each level they have peculiar characteristics and functions. There are Ideas in a divine world superior to the psychic world, including that of human souls, and here they play a causal role in relation to all the other things that exist. These are the intelligible Ideas, the Ideas strictly so called. But there are also Ideas in the psychic world, in particular in human souls. Here they have no power to cause things, but only to know those that already exist. These are the dianoetic Ideas. Finally, there are Ideas immanent in the sensible world. These ideas are married to and inseparable from matter, except by an act of abstraction in thought. These Ideas belong to the third level.

Let us consider, in turn, the status of the Ideas at these three levels, beginning with the Intelligible ideas at the first level.

And the intelligible forms are at the level of the gods, and are efficient and paradigmatic and final causes of what is below them. . . [they are the] best causal principles of all things, which are productive of all things by reason of their generative and demiurgic power, while by reason of the fact that their products revert towards themselves and are assimilated to themselves they are models (*paradeigmata*) for all things; and since they create of themselves also their own goodness, as the divine Plato says [*Tim.* 29e], how would they not manifest also the final cause? The intelligible forms, then, being of this nature, and being productive of such great benefits to all things, fill the divine realms, but are most generally to be viewed in connection with the demiurgic level of reality, which is associated with Intellect proper (*peri tēn demiourgikēn taxin tēn noeran*).

(Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 82.2–13)

First, then, intelligible or first-order Ideas are productive causes, paradigmatic causes and final causes⁹ of derived entities, and all other reality is derived from intelligible Ideas in this way. That is, Ideas in the intelligible world in their demiurgic role produce all reality, in their paradigmatic role are the model of all reality, and in their role as final causes attract all reality, thus beginning the process opposite to the *proodos*, namely the 'reversion' (*epistrophē*) to the origin.

The discursive forms (*ta dianoēta*) on the one hand imitate what is above them and assimilate the psychic realm to the intelligible, while on the other they embrace all things in a secondary way, and those of them which are viewed by the divine and daimonic

⁸ Syrianus affirms that the Ideas (= 'forms' in Dillon's translation) are present at all levels of reality (cf. above *In Metaph.* 82.2–4), but in a way appropriate to each level. The general claim that 'all exists in all, but in a way appropriate to each' is explicitly made by Proclus (*Elements of Theology*, prop. 103).

⁹ For Syrianus, Ideas are 'final causes' in that, being the best things in the world, they are also, in virtue of their most superlative goodness, the highest objects of desire. He mentions a passage of Plato, probably *Tim.* 29e.

souls are demiurgic, whereas those of them which are found among us [humans] are only capable of cognition, since we no longer possess demiurgic knowledge, by reason of our 'moulding' (*pteroorrhūēsis*).

(Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 82.14–18)

Next, then, the dianoetic or intermediate/second-order ideas of the psychic world below the intelligible world are discursively apprehended by rational souls. In general, their function is to mediate between the intelligible and psychic worlds, thus imitating the intelligible Ideas and thereby assimilating rational souls, including the lowest rational souls, human souls, to them. However, when apprehended by the World Soul, they retain a derivative demiurgic power, whereas when apprehended by human souls, they cannot produce things, but only allow us to know them.

For the great Hephaistos inserted all things also in the sense-world, so far as that was possible, as the divine Poem asserts [Homer, *Iliad* 18.400–2]. . . and these are the third level of forms, which the Pythagoreans considered to be inseparable (*akhōrista*) causes of sensible objects, being the ultimate images of the separable forms, and for this reason they did not think it improper to call them by the same name as these latter. It is by these that the soul which is fallen into the realm of generation is roused and stirred up. And thus comes to reminiscence of the median [*scil.* the *dianoētic*] forms, and raises its own reason-principles to the intelligibles and primary paradigms. And thus do sight and hearing contribute to philosophy and the conversion of the soul.

(Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 83.1–11)

Finally, then, at the lowest level Ideas are immanent in sensible things and not separable in existence from them. This last notion is Aristotelian in origin: each sensible thing is composed of matter and form (*eidōs*), the matter and form being (in the case of natural, sensible things) inseparable. Immanent third-order Ideas organize nature from within and act on individuals with residual demiurgic powers (the *logoi*). Their function is to awaken human souls to recollect the second-order or intermediate Ideas, by recollecting which they will finally recollect the first-order or intelligible Ideas. From this perspective, even perceptions can be useful, in that they begin the process which will transform a simple human being into a philosopher, that is, someone whose soul has the capacity to rise from the sensible to the intelligible world.

(d) Epistemology

Syrianus' epistemology is tightly bound together with his ontology. In particular, the second-order or dianoetic Ideas in rational souls play a crucial role in producing the sciences. These Ideas are the universals that exist in human

souls prior to their incarnation and which constitute the object and basis of all scientific knowledge. Thus Syrianus agrees with Aristotle that there can be no science without universals, and that individuals can be apprehended only by reference to universals.

Since however he [*scil.* Aristotle] frankly admits that it is not possible to acquire knowledge without universals, we must seek to learn from him what universals he has in mind.

(Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 161.4–5)¹⁰

However, Syrianus' universals are fundamentally different from those of Aristotle. For Aristotle, the universals that constitute and are the basis of scientific knowledge are obtained by abstraction from observation of sensible things. In Syrianus' terms, this would mean that we get at universals that produce and guarantee scientific knowledge when we extract the formal or Ideal constituent of sensible things (i.e., when we grasp third-order Ideas). But in fact, Syrianus thinks, the universals that produce and guarantee scientific knowledge are *second-order* dianoetic Ideas, those which exist eternally in human souls and, in particular, which exist prior to any incarnation. Human souls possess such universals from eternity and continue to possess them during their embodiment.

Why does Syrianus think science-generating universals must be second-order dianoetic Ideas? On the one hand, first-order Ideas are beyond the capacity of discursive thinking in human souls to grasp and therefore cannot be used in producing human science. They may be contemplated, but only momentarily, and they are not articulated by successive stages, i.e., discursively, but rather grasped, if at all, only by direct apprehension.

On the other hand, Syrianus takes it that science-generating universals must not only have a special logical status, but also a special ontological status; they should be substances with causal power and principles that are prior and with a nature intrinsically appropriate to their effects, namely the knowledge of the conclusions drawn from them by demonstration. But this means that the Ideas immanent in sensible things lack the necessary credentials.

For while immanent Ideas possess an essential unity, they are present in an unlimited number of individuals, and so are themselves, to that extent, multiple; they are, so to speak, divided among individual entities, becoming themselves individual by this 'division into a thousand pieces in enmattering'. Hence, when it comes to immanent Ideas, individuality prevails over universality as the Idea becomes merely a part of an individual sensible thing. It is thus no longer a genus overarching specific differences. Again, immanent ideas do not produce nature but are, rather, posterior to nature. But, Syrianus thinks, if they are ontologically

posterior, then they must be logically posterior as well. But the principles of demonstrations must not be posterior to the conclusions drawn from them, otherwise the demonstrations are not sound. Thus for Syrianus immanent Ideas have neither the causal power nor the ontological priority necessary for them to be the type of universal that can produce and guarantee scientific knowledge by demonstration.

Does he [Aristotle] mean inseparable [universals] ones? But these are mere parts of sensible objects, and fill the role of matter in relation to them, and are neither prior nor posterior to them; but we have emphasized the fact that demonstrative proofs and scientific knowledge arise from causal principles which are both prior and more general . . . that which is predicated universally [*scil.* the separable universal] is something different from what pertains to individual [*scil.* the inseparable universal] as part of it, and could not ever become identical with it. If, then, all proofs are derived from universal predicates, they would not then derive from what inheres in particulars.

(Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 161.7–16).

But are we to make the means of proof separable on the one hand, but 'later-born' (*husterogenēs*) and devoid of substance on the other, like the concept of man which derives its existence in our imaginative or opinative faculties on the basis of abstraction from sensibles? But in this case once again proofs will derive not from prior entities nor from causes, but from posterior bones and from effects, and furthermore it will result that we will come to know beings on the basis of non-beings, which is of all things the most irrational.

(Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 161.24 ff.)¹¹

As regards *Metaphysics* M and N, then, it is appropriate to speak of a genuine dispute between Syrianus and Aristotle or the Aristotelian tradition concerning certain key theses. This dispute is essentially centred on two issues: (a) that of the eternal existence of axioms in human souls, and the reception of these universals from Intellect; (b) that of the existence in human souls of Ideas and mathematical substances that exist separately from and independently of sensible things. (Ideal Numbers, of course, also exist in the intelligible world separately from and independently of human souls, but, as previously noted, being intelligible Ideas they will not be used in producing scientific knowledge.)

The first point of contention concerns the status of the axioms of science, (a). Syrianus is certainly opposed to the thesis that human beings themselves produce the axioms by induction from observation of sensible objects. For Syrianus, human beings do not cause axioms to exist, but receive them from Intellect by nature; their rational souls have been, by their very essence, eternally suitable for receiving these axioms from Intellect. There was never a time at which human souls did not possess such axioms directly. Rather than producing

¹⁰ Cf. also Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 53.2–3 and 163.1–2.

¹¹ See also Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 91.20–9.

the axioms, induction and abstraction merely allow human beings to recollect the axioms they already possess in their own souls.

For Syrianus, of course, this origin of the axioms has important epistemic consequences, for the axioms' eternal existence in souls and their derivation from Intellect guarantee the necessary logical priority of the axioms over the conclusions derived from them by scientific demonstration. This, in turn, guarantees that the axioms, *qua* premisses in demonstrations, really are the causes of the conclusions derived from them; they are immediate, true, prior and clearer than the conclusions inferred from them. As far as Syrianus is concerned, one who denies the ontological priority of this type of universal also denies that it can really fulfil the logical function it is supposed to. For if such universals were not ontologically prior, then they could no longer be principles of demonstration, since the conclusions derived from them would no longer be posterior to them.

Moreover, with the axioms' ontological priority and their truth established, it now becomes possible for Syrianus to take on the second point of contention with Aristotle or the Aristotelian tradition, (b). If an axiom is true, this means that it is true of something in a primary way; that is, it is true of that thing first and foremost and true of it in every case without exception. But according to Syrianus, an axiom is not thus true of sensible things, but of *logoi* in souls, which are universal entities, existing independently of sensible things. Hence, since there are mathematical axioms, there are mathematical substances in human souls which exist independently of sensible things, namely the *logoi* of which true mathematical axioms are true. (As noted earlier, mathematical substances will also exist independently of human souls, but only in the intelligible order above the psychic-dianoetic order.)

In the context of this polemic regarding mathematical substances, Syrianus speaks directly to Aristotle using the 'you' form. This may perhaps indicate that a certain tension surrounded this particular dispute, because of its important consequences for the viability of Platonism. In keeping with the high stakes, Syrianus' strategy is subtle: he tries to use Aristotle against Aristotle, purporting to show that Aristotle's denial of the existence of independent mathematical substances is incompatible with each of two of his own theses: (a) that a cause of demonstration (a starting-point of demonstration or something which guarantees a demonstration) is about something which has the same extension as the cause; and (b) that a science and its object coincide. From (a), as Syrianus interprets it, it will follow that an axiom, being a cause of demonstration, is, in a primary way, about some reality that is equally universal, and this must be a mathematical substance. From (b), as Syrianus interprets it, it will follow that if the axiom represents the science, then it must have an object with which to coincide. But the only available candidate is a universal that has existed

eternally in human souls, i.e., a dianoetic universal, and this will have to be a mathematical substance independent of sensibles. Thus Aristotle is inconsistent with himself as regards both (a) and (b), if he denies the existence of independent mathematical substances.

In sum, then, Syrianus tries to establish that if Aristotle is to have a coherent philosophical system, in which ontology and epistemology are well coordinated, he must accept that there are intermediate substances that exist separately from and independently of sensible things, namely dianoetic ones. It will be these dianoetic Ideas, images in human souls of corresponding intelligible Ideas, that produce and guarantee human scientific knowledge. We have seen in Syrianus, then, an attachment to the doctrine of independent Ideas and a related critique of abstraction as a method of generating axioms, and here we may doubtless recognize the influence of Iamblichus. In his *On General Science on Mathematics* Iamblichus had already criticized the Aristotelian method of abstraction and defended the existence of Ideal Numbers. Iamblichus is also Syrianus' intermediary for Pythagoreanism, especially in his exegesis of *Metaphysics* M and N.

(d) Logic

Three times Syrianus refers explicitly to some principles (plural) of non-contradiction, indicating that he did not recognize only one such principle.¹² In one of these passages (where he is commenting on Aristotle's introduction of the principle of non-contradiction in *Metaphysics* Γ), Syrianus indicates that he counts two 'principles of non-contradiction'. One of these principles states that it is impossible for two contradictory propositions both to be true ('it is impossible that both parts of a contradiction are true at the same time'); the other states that it is impossible for two contradictory propositions both to be false ('it is impossible that both parts of a contradiction are false at the same time'). This mention of more than one principle of non-contradiction is quite exceptional – thus far I have not found a single parallel in ancient philosophy¹³ – the more so when we recall that not only does Aristotle himself not mention any such plurality,¹⁴ but other ancient commentators of *Metaphysics* do not either.

¹² Cf. Syrianus, *In Metaph.* 71.13–15; 78.22–5 and 79.15–17.

¹³ For a comparison between Syrianus and Łukasiewicz on the principles of non-contradiction see Longo 2005.

¹⁴ Aristotle mentions several *versions* of one principle of non-contradiction, but this does not mean that he thinks that there is more than one such principle.