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other late Neoplatonic authors

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1. Origin of the saying “everything is full of gods” in ancient Greek thought

The renowned claim “everything is full of gods” goes back to the origins of Greek thought. As is known, in book 1 of *De Anima*¹ Aristotle attributes the expression πάντα πλήρη θεῶν, namely “all things are full of gods”, to Thales, in reference to the view that the soul, the divine life-giving principle, is intermingled and entangled with the whole universe. Furthermore, in book 2 of *De partibus animalium* he reports a significant anecdote concerning Heraclitus: according to the tale, he invited the foreign visitors – who had come to meet him and found him warming himself by the kitchen hearth – to enter, claiming that there were gods there too (εἶναι γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεοῦς)².

¹ Cf. Aristotle, *de An.* I 5, 411 a 8. On Thales’ claim that “all things are full of gods” see, e.g., Pinto (2016).

² Cf. Aristotle, *PA* I 645 a 17 ff. It is worthwhile to quote the passage in translation (all translations given are my own.). “Therefore, research on the humblest animals should not be disdained in a childish way. For in every realm of nature there is something wonderful. And as it is told of Heraclitus, who – addressed to the strangers who, having come with the intention of meeting him, stopped when they saw him warming himself by the kitchen oven – urged them not to hesitate and to enter, saying “there are gods here as well”, in the same way one should turn to the study of every kind of animal without aversion, considering that in every being there is something natural and beautiful”. Διὸ δεῖ μὴ δυσχεραίνειν παιδικῶς τὴν περὶ τῶν ἀτιμωτέρων ζῴων ἐπίσκεψιν. Ἐν πᾶσι γὰρ τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἔνεστί τι θαυμαστόν· καὶ καθάπερ Ἡράκλειτος λέγεται πρὸς τοὺς ξένους εἰπεῖν τοὺς βουλομένους ἐντυχεῖν αὐτῷ, οἱ ἐπειδὴ προσιόντες εἶδον αὐτὸν θερόμενον πρὸς τῷ ἰπῶ ἔστησαν (ἐκέλευε γὰρ αὐτοὺς εἰσιέναι θαρροῦντας· εἶναι γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεοῦς), οὕτω καὶ πρὸς τὴν ζήτησιν περὶ ἐκάστου τῶν ζῴων προσιέναι δεῖ μὴ δυσωπούμενον ὡς ἐν ἅπασιν ὄντος τινὸς φυσικοῦ καὶ καλοῦ. On this anecdote in Aristotle see Gregoric, (2001). It is worth pointing out that, curiously enough, Michael of Ephesus (11th-12th century) attributes the saying πάντα πλήρη θεῶν to Heraclitus: τὸ γὰρ ‘πάντα πλήρη θεῶν’ Ἡρακλείτειον ἐστὶ δόγμα. In his

The notion that the universe by virtue of its intrinsic vitalism is filled with gods is attested in Plato as well, most notably in book ten of *Laws*.³ In this passage the Athenian, in the form of a rhetorical question, points out that necessarily all things are to be considered as full of gods (θεῶν εἶναι πλήρη πάντα). Furthermore, in the *Timaeus* Plato, by conceiving the sensible cosmos as a living god made in the image of the fully perfect Intelligible Living-Thing (τὸ παντελὲς ζῶον),⁴ takes up the archaic conception that the universe is not only a manifestation of the divine but also includes, in its own nature, the divine and is in some way filled with it.

Based on these references, it becomes evident that the conception of the universe as full of gods is to be traced back to the animate nature of the cosmos, insofar as everything that is ἔμψυχον, i.e., ensouled/animate, implies in itself a divine connotation. We could speak of pan-psychism that is simultaneously a sort of pantheism and panentheism. According to this perspective, the universe is conceived as alive and living by virtue of a divine principle that animates it. Indeed, as far back as Thales and Heraclitus, a closed and inseparable relationship between the notion of life and of the vitalizing divine principle comes to the fore in Greek thought. In this perspective, consequently, everything that is alive and living implies a link with the dimension of the divine, as if the life principle of the cosmos could only be explained by a reference to its divine origin and its connection with it.

2. The reworking of the conception that “everything is full of gods” in late Neoplatonism

It is especially within the late pagan Neoplatonic tradition that the notion “everything is filled with gods” comes to take on not only a metaphysical but also a profoundly theological significance⁵. Indeed, one of the fundamental assumptions of the late Neoplatonic theological perspective is the presence and manifestation of the divine in the totality of the universe. There is no level of reality that is not in some way permeated by the divine and therefore determined by it. The belief that

commentary on Aristotle's *De partibus animalium*, p.22. 32 f. [*In libros de partibus animalium*, ed. Hayduck, Berlin: Reimer, 1904], he attributes this statement to the philosopher of Ephesus based on the anecdote reported, as mentioned, by Aristotle about Heraclitus inviting foreign visitors to join him in his hearth.

³ Cf. Plato, *Lg.* X 899 b 5-9.

⁴ Cf. Plato, *Ti.*, e.g., 31 a 8 ff.

⁵ On this topic see, e.g., Smith (2004), 77-89.

the cosmos is full of gods appears fully and explicitly attested in the early post-Plotinian authors, beginning with Porphyry, as can be seen for instance from what he states in the *De antro nympharum*: nature and cosmos are a single reality determined by the presence of human beings and gods, which are interconnected in an original and constitutive way: as Porphyry states, “the whole cosmos is filled with men and gods”.⁶

On the other hand, it should also be pointed out that in the *Enneads* and specifically in treatise V 1 (the tenth according to chronological order), Plotinus closely relates the beauty of the intelligible Forms (πᾶν μὲν τὸ τῶν ἰδεῶν κάλλος) with the totality of the intelligible gods (πάντας δὲ θεοὺς νοητούς) insofar as they are all generated by the Nous, that is, the second hypostasis filled with all that it generates (πλήρη δὲ ὄντα ὧν ἐγένησε). Based on this conception, the god Kronos – pure and perfect intellect according to the etymology suggested in Plato’s *Cratylus* – is identified by Plotinus with the Nous.⁷ It is also necessary to bear in mind the fundamental ontological-metaphysical significance that the concept of ζωή, life, takes on in Plotinian thought: this concept permeates every level of reality from the intelligible dimension down to the phenomenal dimension, whose vitality is the image of life in its purest and most authentic form, i.e., life at the intelligible level⁸.

If we consider the centrality that Neoplatonic authors attribute to the doctrine set forth in Plato’s *Timaeus*, i.e. that our cosmos, the image of the fully perfect Intelligible Living Thing, is itself a sensible god,⁹ we can understand the reason why according to this perspective the phenomenal world can be conceived as a reality filled with the divine: it is indeed a sensible manifestation of the divine. In view of what has been said, it becomes clear that, in the Neoplatonic perspective, the dimension of the divine cannot but permeate the whole of reality in all its different articulations and levels.

It is however especially in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism that the presence of the divine in every realm of reality determines, from a

⁶ Cf. Porphyry, *Antr.* 2.9: ἀνθρώπων γὰρ καὶ θεῶν ὁ πᾶς μὲν πλήρης κόσμος.

⁷ See Plotinus, *Enn.* V 1 (10), 7, 29 ff. For the interpretation of the theonym “Kronos” to which Plotinus refers in this passage, cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 396 b 6 f.

⁸ On the notion of ζωή in the Plotinian conception of *Nous*, see Lo Casto (2017), 93-144.

⁹ On the phenomenal cosmos as a visible god, image of the intelligible god, cf. Plato, *Ti.* 92 c 7: εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεοῦ αἰσθητός. Furthermore, in *Ti.* 34 b 7-8 Plato states that the Demiurge generated the cosmos and made it a happy god (εὐδαίμονα θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐγενήσατο).

theoretical point of view, a fundamental speculative consequence: starting with Iamblichus, metaphysical reflection ends up flowing into theology. The supreme principles of reality and with them the intelligible dimension are identified with specific levels of deities, also through the systematic reworking (especially in Iamblichus and Proclus) of the Orphic and Chaldean mystery traditions.¹⁰

In comparison to the archaic perspective of Thales and Heraclitus, within the Neoplatonic tradition an original foundation that determines the divine nature of all reality in its various articulations is clearly identified: the One-Good, the First Principle and first God. This is especially evident from what Proclus states in an emblematic passage of his *Commentary on the Parmenides*:

“If God and One are the same thing, since there is nothing superior to God and One, it follows that being unified is the same as being deified”.¹¹

It is precisely the fundamental assumption of the complete identification of the One-Good with the first God (or even God-in-itself, *αὐτόθεος*) that underlies the shift from metaphysics to theology: this shift coincides in Proclus with a systematic theological understanding of all reality.¹² The Proclean philosophical perspective can indeed be understood as a form of theology based on the notion of the first Principle/first God as the absolutely original and transcendent foundation of every realm of reality. The All, therefore, by virtue of its original foundation, manifests itself at every level as permeated by the divine: this character represents the essential bond of unity and harmony of the multiplicity embedded in the totality of reality. The different articulations of the All are consequently conceived as divine orders arranged according to a strict hierarchical concatenation based on their specific degree of unity and transcendence, directly proportional to their proximity to the One-Good. From the intelligible level down to the sensible cosmos, the whole of reality is structured according to divine

¹⁰ This issue can only be touched upon here. On the reworking in Iamblichus and Proclus of the Orphic and Chaldean mystery traditions, cf., e.g., Brisson (1987); Alexidize (2010-2011); Brisson (2016); Brisson (2017) esp. 209-213; Spanu (2021) 166-169; Abbate (2021). On the agreement between the various theological traditions in the Neoplatonic perspective, see Saffrey (1992).

¹¹ Cf. Proclus, *in Prm.* I, p. 641, 6-8 [ed. Steel]: εἰ γὰρ θεὸς καὶ ἐν ταυτόν, διότι μήτε θεοῦ τι κρείττον ἐστι μήτε ἑνός, τὸ ἠνωσθαι τῷ τεθεῶσθαι ταυτόν.

¹² On the theological conception of reality in Proclus, see Abbate (2012), 77-80.

orders (διάκοσμοι) that unfold from a maximum level of unity to gradually more articulated and complex forms of ontological differentiation and determination. From this perspective, it is possible to understand the meaning of what Proclus states in *De arte hieratica* about the divine character that pervades the sensible cosmos:

“Thus, all things are filled with gods, those on earth with celestial gods, those in heaven with supercelestial gods, and each [divine] chain proceeds increasing in number down to those of the lowest level”.¹³

According to Proclus’ Neoplatonic conception the phenomenal universe is populated by encosmic gods, i.e., the gods who operate within the physical cosmos, and further divine entities of a lower degree ordered according to a precise hierarchical structure: to a first level belong the universal and divine souls, to which the Cosmic Soul itself belongs in the first place. Then follow three types of semi-divine beings: angels, intermediaries and messengers between men and gods; then, *daimones*, who embody the forces present in nature; finally, heroes, endowed with powers that are capable of directing “by emulation” lower-ranking entities towards higher divine orders. After heroes come individual souls, then animals and plants. At the absolute lowest level belong inanimate things, such as stones and rocks¹⁴. Even these, however, hold a “sympathetic connection” with the divine realm: by virtue of their specific properties, on which theurgical rites are based, they can act as mediums and vehicles for the evocation of divinities in the sensible world.¹⁵

Hence in Proclus’ metaphysical-theological perspective the divine pervades every realm of reality and stands as the supreme foundation and guarantee of the harmonic unity that governs the Whole in its differentiated and manifold facets. This explains the sense in which Proclus, especially within the *Platonic Theology* and *Commentary on*

¹³ Cf. Proclus, *De arte hieratica* 149, 28-150, 1: Οὕτω μεστὰ πάντα θεῶν, τὰ μὲν ἐν γῆ τῶν οὐρανίων, τὰ δὲ ἐν οὐρανῷ τῶν ὑπὲρ τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ πρόεισιν ἐκάστη πληθυσμένη σειρά μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων.

¹⁴ On the overall hierarchical structure of encosmic realm in the Proclean perspective cf. Proclus *Theol. Plat.* VI, 4, 24,2-7. See also Abbate (2019), LI f.

¹⁵ On the conception and function of theurgy in Proclus, see Van den Berg (2017), Van den Berg (2020), Spanu (2021). On the role of theurgy especially in Iamblichus, see Finamore (1999) and Addey (2016), in particular 280-282.

the *Timaeus*, takes up and understands the claim “everything is full of gods”.

Moreover, it should always be borne in mind that, according to the doctrine of the *Timaeus*, our cosmos is itself in its totality a visible and perceptible god, constituted in the image and likeness of the fully perfect intelligible Living-Thing. This conception recurs repeatedly in both Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* and *Commentary on the Timaeus*. As Proclus states in book 6 of the *Platonic Theology*, the cosmos is itself a divine living-being, since it is an image of the eternal intelligible gods.¹⁶ He also develops this concept in his commentary on the *Timaeus*, where he explicitly states that “the cosmos is an image of intelligible gods”.¹⁷ In this context, Proclus highlights how the whole cosmos, at every level, is constitutively filled with gods of different kinds.

“<Plato in the *Timaeus*> states that the cosmos has been generated as an “image of eternal gods” [*Ti.* 37 c 6] – not that it is an image of encosmic gods (for he does not speak only of the corporeal-formed aspect of the universe, but also of the living being “endowed with soul and intellect” [*Ti.* 30 b 8], which certainly includes within itself the encosmic gods), but rather that it is an image of the intelligible gods. Indeed, it is filled up with the divine character coming from them, and the processions of the encosmic gods into it can be understood as a kind of canals and as radiations of the intelligible gods, and the cosmos receives these processions not only in virtue of its celestial part, but also in virtue of its own wholeness. Indeed, in the air, earth and sea there are presences of earthly, aquatic and aerial <gods>.¹⁸ Therefore, in accordance with the whole of itself the cosmos is filled with the divine character and for this reason it is an image of intelligible gods in accordance with the whole of itself...”¹⁹

¹⁶ On this cf., e.g., *Theol. Plat.* VI 3, 16, 22.

¹⁷ Cf. Proclus, *In Ti.* IV, p. 5, 14: the cosmos... τῶν νοητῶν ἐστὶ θεῶν ἄγαλμα. The expression echoes Plato’s *Ti.* 37 c 6 f.: τῶν αἰδίων θεῶν... ἄγαλμα.

¹⁸ A very similar conception, according to which every realm of the physical cosmos is filled with gods, is also significantly present in Iamblichus’ *De mysteriis*: cf. *Myst.* I 9, 30, 2-3. Indeed, even in Iamblichus the statement “that everything is full of gods” underpins the fundamental function attributed to theurgy. On the relation between theurgy and material world in Iamblichus see e.g., Shaw (2012).

¹⁹ Cf. Proclus, *In Ti.* IV, p. 5, 9-22: τῶν δὲ αἰδίων θεῶν ἄγαλμά φησι γεγενῆσθαι τὸν κόσμον, οὐχ ὅτι τῶν ἐγκοσμίων ἐστὶν ἄγαλμα θεῶν (οὐ γὰρ περὶ τοῦ

This passage clearly shows that in Proclus' perspective the divine character of the cosmos is to be traced back to its being an image of the intelligible Living-Thing. At the same time, it makes clear why the universe is permeated in all its parts by different species of divine entities. We could say that just as the cosmos in its entirety is a living god by virtue of the divine intelligible model, so each of its parts participates in this divine character in a specific way. Within this metaphysical-theological perspective it is possible to understand the actual significance that the expression "everything is filled with gods" takes on in Proclus, especially in his masterpiece, the *Platonic Theology*.²⁰

All this also highlights how the divine character permeating the universe in its various parts is the image of the fully perfect intelligible god, i.e., the Intelligible Living-Thing. Moreover, in Proclus' perspective, the whole intelligible order – of which the intelligible Living-Thing constitutes a specific level, as it corresponds to the third intelligible triad²¹ – consists of gods who transmit the divine nature to the lower levels. On the other hand, according to the metaphysical-theological structure of Proclus' philosophical system, in their turn the intelligible gods derive their divine nature from the First Principle of the

σωματοειδοῦς μόνου λέγει τοῦ παντός, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἐμψύχου καὶ ἔννου ζώου, ὃ δὴ καὶ τοὺς ἐγκοσμίους ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιέχει θεούς), ἀλλ' ὅτι τῶν νοητῶν ἐστι θεῶν ἄγαλμα: πληροῦται γὰρ ἐξ αὐτῶν θεότητος, καὶ εἰσιν αἱ εἰς αὐτὸν πρόοδοι τῶν ἐγκοσμίων θεῶν ὡσπερ ὄχγετοί τινες καὶ ἐλλάμψεις τῶν νοητῶν θεῶν, καὶ ταύτας ὁ κόσμος ὑποδέχεται τὰς προόδους οὐ μόνον κατὰ τὸ οὐράνιον αὐτοῦ μέρος, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ πάντα ἑαυτὸν· καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἀέρι καὶ ἐν γῆ καὶ ἐν θαλάττῃ θεῶν εἰσι παρουσίαι χθονίων καὶ ἐνυδρίων καὶ ἀερίων. καθ' ὅλον οὖν ἑαυτὸν ὁ κόσμος πληροῦται θεότητος καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἄγαλμά ἐστι καθ' ὅλον ἑαυτὸν τῶν νοητῶν θεῶν, κ.τ.λ.

²⁰ On this see, e.g., Proclus *Plat. Theol.* III 27, p. 98, 23: πάντα πλήρη θεῶν. As seen (*De arte hieratica* 149, 28, cf. footnote 13 above), this maxim also occurs in Proclus in the variant μεστὰ δὲ πάντα θεῶν: cf. Proclus, *Inst.* 145, p. 128, 20 and *In Ti.* III, 47, 11-12. It should also be pointed out that the expression concerned, in all the contexts in which it occurs, suggests that every sphere of the universe is constitutively permeated by the divine.

²¹ According to the Proclean conception, the intelligible order consists of three triads in the following order: the One-Being, Eternity or Intelligible Life, and finally the Intelligible Living One. On the triadic structure of the intelligible order, see Chlup (2012), 92-99, and d'Hoine (2017).

whole reality, i.e., the One Good, which, as mentioned, is identified by most Neoplatonic authors with the First God (ὁ πρῶτος θεός).²²

Therefore, in view of the theoretical assumptions on which the Proclean metaphysical framework rests, it must be concluded that the All, deriving from the First Principle, Good-One and First God, is necessarily characterised in itself by an overall unity and by the divine character that permeates it. Every level of reality – even the most remote from the First Principle in an axiological-hierarchical sense – retains within itself a divine trace of the One. At the same time, if the First Principle/God is absolutely transcendent and ineffable, insofar as it is above everything and is the authentic origin of everything, it is the ensemble of the intelligible gods that, in Proclus’ theological perspective, somehow reveals the nature of the absolutely transcendent first Principle.²³ This is explained in an interesting passage in the third book of the *Platonic Theology*:

“With good reason, then, we say that the intelligible gods reveal the ineffable Principle of all things, its admirable superiority and unity, since they themselves subsist in a concealed manner, encompass the forms of multiplicity in a simple unitary way, and finally reign over the totality of things and are disjointed from all other gods in a transcendent manner”.²⁴

²² On the identification of the One-Good with the First God, it is emblematic what Proclus states in Dissertation XI of his commentary on the *Republic*, where he traces this identification back to Plato himself. Cf. Proclus, *In R.* I, p. 287, 17: τὸ ἄρα ἀγαθόν ἐστιν ὁ πρῶτος κατὰ Πλάτωνα θεός, i.e., “therefore the Good is the First God according to Plato”.

²³ On the absolute transcendence and ineffability of the principle, which can only be hinted at here, see Proclus, *Theol. Plat.*, e.g., II 4, p. 31, 6 f., where reference is made to the ineffable supereminence of the One and its reality that transcends the totality of things (τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρρητον ὑπεροχὴν καὶ τῶν ὄλων ἐκβεβηκυῖαν ὑπαρξιν).

²⁴ Cf. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* III 28, p. 101, 16-21: Εἰκότως ἄρα τοὺς νοητοὺς θεοὺς λέγομεν τὴν ἄρρητον ἐκφαίνειν τῶν πάντων ἀρχὴν καὶ τὴν θαυμαστὴν ἐκείνης ὑπεροχὴν καὶ τὴν ἕνωσιν, κρυφίως μὲν καὶ αὐτοὺς ὑποστάντας, μονοειδῶς δὲ τὰ πλήθη καὶ ἐνιαίως περιέχοντας, ἐξηρημένως δὲ βασιλεύοντας τῶν ὄλων καὶ ἀσυντάκτους ὄντας πρὸς ἅπαντας τοὺς ἄλλους θεοὺς. Therefore, according to Proclus, the intelligible gods are able, by virtue of their specific level of transcendence, to disclose the absolutely transcendent and original nature of the first Principle: although they are not as transcendent as the First Principle, their specific level of transcendence allows a glimpse, as it were, of the extent to which the First is placed above all ontological determination. Indeed, multiplicity is not

The intelligible gods, precisely because of their proximity to the First Principle, are able, albeit indirectly, to show the level of its ineffable pre-eminence throughout their own unitary and transcendent character: as the universal causes of all things, the intelligible gods potentially contain within themselves, in a hidden and inexpressible way, every form of multiplicity, since they transcend not only the totality of all that is ontologically determined and actually manifold, but also all the other divine orders, which in turn depend on the intelligible gods. However, as mentioned, even these gods owe their divine character to the absolutely transcendent Principle or First God. Indeed, we must remember that, as Proclus explicitly states in book 2 of the *Platonic Theology*, the original cause of all gods is the One:

“For since the One is the cause of all gods, it is placed above them all. And since it transcends them by its pre-eminence, it therefore bestows on all their authentic substances”.²⁵

On the other hand, if the First God is the supreme principle that originally transmits the divine character to every transcendent being, the god who infused and disseminated the divine presence within the sensible cosmos is the Demiurge, i.e., according to the doctrine of the *Timaeus*, the god who shaped the cosmos by moulding it.

3. The metaphysical-theological role of the Demiurge as giver of the cosmic *sympàtheia*

From Proclus' perspective as well as that of other exponents of late Neoplatonism the divinization of the sensible cosmos in all its various articulations is a consequence of the demiurgic action. The divine nature permeating the cosmos is transmitted into it by the Demiurge, who moulds it, gives it life through the World Soul and unceasingly exercises a form of providential care (*prònoia*) towards the phenomenal universe. Precisely in light of the demiurgic action and the resulting divinization of the whole cosmos, Proclus takes up the expression attributed to Thales “all is full of gods” with specific reference to the nature of the phenomenal world.

yet fully unfolded in the intelligible gods, but is present in a hidden/secret manner (κρυφίως), i.e., we might say, in an essentially potential form.

²⁵ Cf. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* II 10, 62, 2-4: Καὶ γὰρ διότι πάντων ἐστὶ τῶν θεῶν αἴτιον τὸ ἓν, ἐκβέβηκεν ἀπάντων· καὶ διότι καθ' ὑπεροχὴν αὐτῶν ἐξήρηται, διὰ τοῦτο πᾶσιν ἐνδίδωσι τὰς ὑποστάσεις.

For, according to the doctrine expounded in the *Timaeus*, the universal Craftsman, contemplating the intelligible model, builds the cosmos in the image of the intelligible Living-Thing and provides it with a well-defined, harmonious structure and order. The nature of demiurgic activity is described by Proclus in the fifth book of his *Platonic Theology* in the following terms:

“The Demiurge of the universe shines upon it order, delimitation and structure, making the Whole an image of the intelligible beings through the participation of forms”²⁶.

Therefore, the divine Craftsman governs the entire universe in such a way that it resembles its intelligible paradigm as closely as possible. Indeed, as can be seen in particular from the *Platonic Theology*, the *Commentary on the Timaeus* and the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, it is precisely thanks to the demiurgic action that the cosmos appears as a single and unitary living being, connected in all its parts to the higher divine levels by a universal *sympàtheia*, i.e., by a common and unitary affinity of feeling. The very essence of theurgy and its mystical rituals – which can only be mentioned here – is based on this cosmic *sympàtheia*.²⁷ For as is stated in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, the Demiurge, through his own shaping actions, and in light of what is handed down in the verses of the *Chaldean Oracles*, scattered the cosmos with divine signs and symbols, of which the divine names themselves are a part as well.²⁸ Therefore, based on this conception, even by means of these theonyms it would be possible to grasp the inherently divine nature of the entire universe in all its various articulations and facets. For the divine names themselves are equivalent to direct manifestations of the divine within the cosmos. This emerges from what Proclus states in his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*:

²⁶ Cf. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* V 17, p. 61, 30 - 62, 3: ὁ δὲ τοῦ παντὸς δημιουργὸς τάξιν καὶ ὄρον καὶ διακόσμησιν ἐπιλάμπει καὶ τὸ ὅλον ἀπεργάζεται τῶν νοητῶν εἰκόνα διὰ τῆς τῶν εἰδῶν μεταδόσεως.

²⁷ On the tight and essential connection between *sympàtheia* and theurgy in Neoplatonism and especially in Proclus, see, e.g., Chlup (2012) 198 f., Addey (2016) 28 ff., Spanu (2021) 163. On the fundamental connection between theurgy and demiurgic activity in Proclus' theological-philosophical perspective, see Tanaseanu-Döbler (2013) 243-251. On the relation between theurgy and demiurgy in Iamblichus, see Shaw (1995), 45-57.

²⁸ On this, see Proclus, *in Cra.* LII, p. 20, 23-21, 2. On the correlation between divine names and theurgy, see Tanaseanu-Döbler (2013) 237-242.

“The gods have therefore filled the whole cosmos with themselves and their own names”.²⁹

The presence of the divine in different realms of the cosmos is the key explanation for universal *sympàtheia*, whereby all beings turn out to be harmoniously united with one another in a universal entanglement and linked together to form one living, sentient being. It must also be remembered that, as it is stated again in the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge entrusts the task of shaping the bodies of living mortals to the so-called “young gods” (*Ti.* 42 d 5 ff.). Proclus identifies the young gods with the encosmic gods, who belong to the phenomenal universe and harmoniously govern it under the guidance of the Demiurge.³⁰ It can therefore be concluded that, according to Proclus’ metaphysical-theological perspective, everything is filled with gods because the whole reality in its various facets maintains and preserves a constitutive correlation with the divine from which it is animated and at the same time deified. It is essentially a cosmic affinity that unites the totality of reality in a kind of harmonious vibration by virtue of all-pervading divine presence.

4. The claim “all is filled with gods” in later Neoplatonic authors

The assumption that “everything is full of gods” also occurs in other later Neoplatonic authors. A very significant reference to this saying can be found in a fragment of the *Commentary on the Phaedo* attributed by some scholars to Damascius and to Olympiodorus by others. As is explicitly stated in this excerpt, the earth itself is a full manifestation of the divine presence permeating the universe.

“The earth that is the fullness of the universe is a god. For if the universe is god, it is evident that its parts too are gods, by which this god is filled. Moreover, if the earth is a whole but not cut off part, it is evident that the earth is a god. For how can the utterly perfect part of the cosmos not be a god? Indeed, what makes the universe a god is the same thing that makes its complete part a god, since it is filled with all species. Moreover, if the earth embraces gods, then it is *a fortiori* a god, as the *Timaeus* also states

²⁹ Cf. Proclus, *in Alc.* 150, 10-15: *πεπληρώκασιν οὖν οἱ θεοὶ καὶ ἑαυτῶν καὶ τῶν οἰκείων ὀνομάτων τὸν σύμπαντα κόσμον.*

³⁰ On the identification of the young gods with the encosmic gods and their function in Proclus, see Opsomer (2003).

[40b8-c3], so that an intellect and a rational soul is attached to it”.³¹

This passage is particularly interesting in that it sheds light on a central doctrinal facet of late pagan Neoplatonism. That the All is filled with gods is not a matter of debate but is presented as an indisputable fact. What is emphasised is that the earth as an integral part of the whole cosmos is itself a god. Like the cosmos, the earth is not only filled with gods but is itself a god. At the same time, the divine character of the earth, as well as that of the whole cosmos, is traced back to the intelligible paradigm, i.e., the fully perfect Living-Thing, in whose image the cosmos and with it the earth were shaped.

A similar perspective, namely that it is sure and indisputable that the All is full of gods, occurs also in the commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima* attributed to Simplicius but considered by some scholars to be the work of his contemporary Priscian of Lydia³². The author, commenting on the reference to Thales in Aristotle’s *De anima* I 5, 411 a 8, considers it indisputable that the All is full of god.

“It is perhaps for this reason that Thales also thought that all things are full of gods.

That all things are filled with god, insofar as he produces them, makes them good and holds them together, no one could doubt it.”³³

³¹ Cf. Damascius, *In Phaed.* 115: ριε’. —“Ὅτι ἡ γῆ πλήρωμα οὔσα τοῦ παντὸς θεός ἐστιν. εἰ γὰρ τὸ πᾶν θεός, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὰ μέρη θεοί, ἐξ ὧν οὗτος ὁ θεός συμπληρῶται. ἔτι εἰ ὅλον μέρος ἡ γῆ, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀποτετμημένον, δῆλον ὅτι θεός ἡ γῆ· πῶς γὰρ δύναται μὴ εἶναι θεός ἡ παντελής τοῦ κόσμου μερίς; ᾧ γὰρ τὸ πᾶν θεός, τούτω καὶ τὸ ὀλόκληρον μέρος, πάντων ὃν τῶν εἰδῶν πεπληρωμένον. ἔτι εἰ θεῶν περιεκτικὴ ἡ γῆ, πολλῶ πρότερον αὐτῆ θεός, ὡς καὶ ὁ Τίμαιός φησιν, ὥστε καὶ νοῦς ἐξῆπται αὐτῆς καὶ ψυχὴ λογικὴ. On the divine character of the earth and its significance in Proclus’ theological perspective as well, see Steel (2009).

³² In the last decade, several scholars have argued for the attribution of the commentary to Simplicius himself. On the topic, see de Haas (2010); Hadot (2020), in particular pp. 183-188; Gabor (2020). Among those who are convinced that Simplicius is not the author of the commentary, while not going so far as to propose an alternative attribution, see Bluementhal (1987). For the attribution of the commentary to Priscian of Lydia see, e.g., Steel (1997).

³³ Cf. [Ps.-] Simplicius, *In de An.* 11, p. 73, 19 ff.:

411a8: Ὅθεν ἴσως καὶ Θαλῆς φήθη πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι.

Ὅτι μὲν πλήρη πάντα θεοῦ, δημιουργοῦντος, ἀγαθόνοντος, συνέχοντος αὐτά, οὐδεὶς ἂν ἀμφισβητήσειεν.

This brief passage highlights how the presence of the divine in all things is to be traced back to the demiurgic, shaping and ordering activity of god. Things are filled with god because they are made good by god. It should also be pointed out that such a metaphysical-theological perspective and the reference to θεός in the singular form appears compatible with the Christian conception of creation and God's goodness.

In light of the references given here, it then becomes quite clear in what sense the entire cosmos in the Neoplatonic perspective is filled with the divine: it is the living, vital nature of the universe which implies that the divine is present and manifest in the All.

As we have seen, in Proclus' perspective, very similar to that of Iamblichus, the notion that all things are filled with gods is also the underlying basis of theurgy and theurgical rituals. The presence of the divine in all levels of reality explains and justifies the cosmic *sympatheia* that permeates the universe, making it a harmonious and unitary whole by virtue of a sort of all-pervasive interweaving and entanglement. Indeed, the sensible cosmos itself is a living god shaped by the action of the divine Demiurge, whose divinity, in turn, ultimately derives from and depends on the First Principle, i.e., the First God, ὁ πρῶτος θεός.

Certainly, the conception of reality as full of gods appears in perfect agreement with the worldview of pagan Neoplatonism and essentially incompatible with Christian theology. Indeed, in the context of Christian Neoplatonism, God manifests Himself in the creation, pervading the Whole with His own activity. In this perspective, the presence of the divine cannot be understood in any way as a direct and material entanglement-connection between God and cosmos, which can be fully revealed through specific magical-theurgical rituals. At the same time, according to Christian doctrine, no form of pantheism or even panpsychism is conceivable, both of which seem broadly compatible with the Neoplatonic pagan conception.³⁴ In this regard, it is worth examining what the Christian Neoplatonic commentator John Philoponus states in his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* regarding

³⁴ On the all-pervasive presence of the divine according to the Neoplatonic perspective see, e.g., Proclus, *Inst.* 145, p. 128, 1-21. Moreover, an essentially panpsychist perspective can be inferred from what Proclus states in *Inst.* 109, p. 96, 26-28: καὶ πᾶσα σώματος μερικὴ φύσις διὰ τε τῆς ὅλης φύσεως καὶ μερικῆς ψυχῆς μετέχει τῆς ὅλης ψυχῆς, "and every particular corporeal nature partakes of the universal Soul both through the universal Nature and through a particular soul".

the maxim attributed to Thales “everything is full of gods” (*De an.* I 5, 411 a 8).³⁵ Philoponus first asserts that the conviction underlying the claim “everything is full of gods” is that the universe is an ensouled body (πᾶν εἶναι σῶμα ἔμψυχον).³⁶ Then immediately afterwards he points out:

“Of this opinion, namely that everything is full of gods, was also Thales, who assumed that the divine is everywhere in a spatial sense, because he believed either that the soul itself was a god or that it was part of a divine share”.³⁷

This conception, as Philoponus specifies, is the same as that characterising the Stoic thought: for the Stoics thought that the divine is a body (σῶμα γὰρ τὸ θεῖον ἐνόμιζον).³⁸ What in Philoponus’ view is absurd and contrary to reason is the conception of the divine as “omnipresent in a spatial sense” (τοπικῶς ... πανταχοῦ).³⁹ According to him, one must instead say:

“God’s activities are everywhere, since it has been demonstrated that He is the cause of everything”.⁴⁰

Therefore, from Philoponus’ Christian perspective, the presence of the divine in the universe is to be traced back to the activities (ἐνέργειαι) of God, who through creation brings the cosmos into existence. The universe is therefore also for Philoponus somehow filled with the divine, but not of course in the sense that every level of reality is intertwined with specific divine levels as in the pagan Neoplatonic perspective, but rather because the whole cosmos and its ordered structure is a

³⁵ Cf. Johannes Philoponus, in *De An.* 188, 12 ff. For an overview of John Philoponus’ Christian philosophical-theological perspective, see Perkams (2018).

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.* 14 f.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 15-17: ἐκ δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης δόξης καὶ τὸν Θαλῆν νομίσαι πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι, τοπικῶς ὑπονοοῦντος τοῦ Θαλοῦ πανταχοῦ εἶναι τὸ θεῖον, ἢ τῷ αὐτῇ τὴν ψυχὴν θεὸν ὑπονοεῖν, ἢ θείας μοίρας αὐτῇ εἶναι. On the references to Thales in Philoponus, see Schwab (2018).

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.* 20.

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.* 20-22: τοπικῶς μὲν οὖν πανταχοῦ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ὑπονοεῖν ἄτοπον καὶ παράλογον, εἴ γε μὴδὲ σῶμα εἶναι τὸν θεὸν οἶόν τε, ὅποτε καὶ ἡ αἴσθησις ἀσώματος ἀποδέδεικται, “well then, to assume that God is everywhere in a spatial sense is absurd and contrary to reason, since God cannot be a body, given that even sensible perception has been shown to be incorporeal”.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.* 23 f.: ταῖς μέντοι ἐνεργείαις πανταχοῦ εἶναι ἀνάγκη, εἴ γε πάντων αἴτιος εἶναι ἀποδείκνυται.

manifestation of God's will and omnipotence. Precisely because God is the cause of everything, his divine activity reveals itself in everything that exists. Such a conception is perfectly consistent with the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Albeit in the Christian theological perspective there can obviously be no room for theurgical summoning rituals, nevertheless even for a Christian philosopher like Philoponus the cosmos is necessarily pervaded by the divine activity flowing directly from God Himself.

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