

ESF EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism
In memory of Vincenza Celluprica

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Executive summary

‘Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism’ – an international workshop funded by the European Science Foundation and co-sponsored by the Philosophy Department of the ‘Università degli Studi’, Milan – was held, June 22-24, 2006, at Il Ciocco (Castelvecchio Pascoli). The event was dedicated to the memory of Dr. Vincenza Celluprica (1945-2005), former director of the CNR ‘Centro di studio del pensiero antico’ (Rome) and original convenor of the workshop.

The workshop focused on Neoplatonic philosophy of nature from Plotinus to Simplicius and gathered established scholars as well as younger participants. A wide participation of specialists from 10 countries enabled an extremely fruitful intellectual exchange.

The first session (morning of June 22) was opened by Riccardo Chiaradonna, who outlined the aims of the meeting and its relationship to the objectives of the European Science Foundation. The ESF representative Ilie Parvu, then, gave an overview of the objectives of the European Science Foundation Standing Committee for Humanities.

The workshop was organised in order to maximise discussions and debates. It was divided into 5 sessions and included 11 papers of 45 minutes, each followed by a substantial discussion of 30 minutes. All papers highlighted the distinctive contribution of Greek Neoplatonism to natural philosophy. Special attention was given to the following issues:

- a) The variety of Neoplatonic approaches to the physical world
- b) The status of nature in the Neoplatonic conception of reality
- c) The relation between philosophy of nature, metaphysics and theology
- d) Nature, providence and causality

- e) The cognitive and epistemological status of the understanding of nature
- f) The role of Plato and Aristotle in the natural philosophy of Greek Neoplatonism
- g) The historical significance of Neoplatonic philosophy of Nature

A large part of the papers focused on Plotinus and Proclus (often comparing their respective philosophical views). Attention was also given to the Aristotle commentary tradition (Porphyry, Simplicius, the Alexandrian commentators) and to the relation between Neoplatonism and the Greek scientific traditions (astronomy, medicine).

The feedback regarding the workshop was extremely positive, with special attention drawn to the high level of the papers, the stimulating discussions and the overall friendly atmosphere.

Scientific content of the event

Only a few decades ago, Neoplatonism was regarded as the long decline of the Hellenic philosophical tradition. This situation has radically changed and the philosophical significance of late-antique thought is now generally recognised. Greek Neoplatonic philosophy, however, remains a research area yet to be fully explored, where texts and authors of primary importance are not always given the attention they deserve. In particular, a throughout investigation on Neoplatonic natural philosophy is a *desideratum* of scholarship. The workshop 'Physics and philosophy of nature in Greek Neoplatonism' aimed to fill this lacuna.

The first two sessions dealt with Plotinus' views on the sensible world. Frans de Haas focused on Plotinus' views on the knowledge of the physical reality. According to De Haas, Plotinus' position can properly be appreciated only in the broader context of late antique epistemology. Accordingly, De Haas compared Plotinus' assertions to several texts of the Neoplatonic Aristotle commentators. The notion of '*tekmeriodic* proof' plays a crucial role in the understanding of these problems. Christian Wildberg outlined Plotinus' doctrine of 'nature' in *Enn.* III 8. According to Wildberg, the theory of nature as contemplation sheds substantial light on Plotinus' model of causality. Wildberg analysed Plotinus' model of causality from the perspective of 'bottom up' and 'top down' approaches to knowledge. George Karamanolis' paper was devoted to *Enn.* VI 3.

Karamanolis focused on Plotinus' views on physical substances. He emphasised the Aristotelian background of Plotinus' discussion. Chiara Russi compared Plotinus' and Proclus' views on nature and causality. General analogies between the two philosophers should not lead to underestimate their disagreement on crucial epistemological and metaphysical issues.

The third and fourth sessions were mainly devoted to Proclus. Alessandro Linguiti compared Plotinus' and Proclus' views on fate and providence, giving special emphasis to the relation between 'fate' and 'nature'. This issue sheds light on how Neoplatonic intelligible causes act within the physical world. Carlos Steel focused on Proclus' reception of Plato, *Tim.*, 40b-c. The analysis of Proclus' interpretation of this passage makes it possible to outline Proclus' 'theology of earth'. Jan Opsomer's paper dealt with Proclus' *Elementatio Physica*. Opsomer highlighted how Platonic and Aristotelian elements interact in Proclus' account of nature. Gerd Van Riel traced back Proclus' views on 'nature' and 'necessity' to their Platonic sources (esp. Plato's *Timaeus* and *Laws*). Van Riel emphasised Proclus' effort to show the superiority of Plato's account of nature over the Aristotelian one.

The last session dealt with the relation between Neoplatonism and the Greek scientific traditions. Riccardo Chiaradonna focused on Galen's treatise *On proof*. Chiaradonna outlined Galen's distinctive views on logic and physics and their reception among Neoplatonic philosophers such as Plotinus and Simplicius. Marwan Rashed provided a detailed analysis of some still unpublished Greek *scholia* on Aristotle's *De Caelo*. According to Rashed, these *scholia* derive from a lost Neoplatonic Alexandrian commentary. Finally, Robbert M. Ven den Berg dealt with the reception of the Stoic theory of common notions in the Neoplatonic treatment of time (esp. in Plotinus and Proclus).

All participants agreed on the following general conclusions. Philosophy of nature plays a crucial (although often underestimated) role in Greek Neoplatonism and the analysis of the physical world is extremely important in order to understand several aspects of Neoplatonic philosophy. This topic has also a remarkable historical significance: as a matter of fact, the Neoplatonist reading of Plato's and Aristotle's natural philosophies shaped the influence of Greek philosophy in the later traditions until the rise of modern

physics in the 17th century. This does obviously not mean that Neoplatonism anticipates modern science; rather, an adequate understanding of Neoplatonist natural philosophy is extremely useful in order to appreciate properly the character and import of the modern scientific revolution *vs* the previous tradition. Finally, the research in this area has a great degree of complexity, it demands an interdisciplinary approach and involves issues, which are of great importance for both historical and philosophical researches.

Assessment of the results, contribution to future direction of the field

The participants agreed that the quality of the papers and discussion strongly recommends the publication of a volume of proceedings. These are the next stages of the work.

1. The papers of the workshop will be duly revised and submitted to the series 'Philosophia Antiqua' (Brill, Leiden). The deadline for the submission is December 31st 2006.
2. The volume will be edited by Riccardo Chiaradonna and Franco Trabattoni. They will coordinate together the mutual work of cross-reading and revision of the papers.
3. The proceedings volume will come out in 2008.

The workshop and its proceeding could well be the starting point of further, more ambitious projects on late antique thought. There is a remarkable community of scholars working on Neoplatonism all over Europe and it would be extremely important to coordinate smaller projects and teams in order to build up a stronger international research group. The workshop 'Physics and philosophy of nature in Greek Neoplatonism' aimed to be a step in this direction and the participants agreed to explore possible solutions in order to reach this result.

FINAL PROGRAMME

ESF SCH EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

**PHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE
IN GREEK NEOPLATONISM**

In Memory of Vincenza Celluprica

Il Ciocco
Castelvecchio Pascoli, Italy, 22-24 June 2006

Convened by
Riccardo Chiaradonna
C.N.R. Istituto per il Lessico Intellettuale Europeo e Storia delle Idee

Wednesday 21 June 2006

17.30 *Shuttle from Pisa Airport and Pisa Railway Station*
19.00 *Arrival to Il Ciocco and registration*
20.00 *Dinner*

Thursday 22 June 2006

09.30 - 10.00 **Meeting introduction by the convenor**
 Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)

Session 1

Chair: **Richard Sorabji**, Oxford University

10.00 - 10.45 **Frans A.J. de Haas**, Leiden University
The Status of Physics in Plotinus and its Aristotelian Background

10.45 - 11.15 *Discussion*

11.15 - 11.45 *Break*

11.45 - 12.30 **Christian Wildberg**, Princeton University
Contemplation and Nature in Plotinus

12.30 - 13.00 *Discussion*

13.00 *Lunch*

Session 2

Chair: **Christian Tornau**, Jena University

15.30 - 16.15 **George Karamanolis**, University of Crete
Plotinus on Coming to Be

16.15 - 16.45 *Discussion*

- 16.45 - 17.15 *Break*
- 17.15 - 18.00 **Chiara Russi**, University of Trieste
Causalità e genesi delle realtà sensibili. Un confronto fra Plotino e Proclo
- 18.00 - 18.30 *Discussion*
- 19.30 *Dinner*

Friday 23 June 2006

Session 1

Chair: **Franco Trabattoni**, University of Milan

- 09.30 - 10.15 **Alessandro Linguiti**, University of Siena
Physis e Heimarmene: la regolarità dei fenomeni naturali nel neoplatonismo
- 10.15 - 10.45 *Discussion*
- 10.45 - 11.15 *Break*
- 11.15 - 12.00 **Carlos Steel**, Catholic University of Leuven
The Earth in Proclus' Cosmology
- 12.00 - 12.30 *Discussion*
- 13.00 *Lunch*

Session 2

Chair: **Filip Karfik**, Charles University of Prague

- 15.30 - 16.15 **Jan Opsomer**, University of Cologne
The Integration of Aristotelian Physics in a Neoplatonic Context: Proclus on Self-Movers and Unmoved Movers
- 16.15 - 16.45 *Discussion*
- 16.45 - 17.15 *Break*
- 17.15 - 18.00 **Gerd Van Riel**, Catholic University of Leuven
Proclus on Physis and Nomos
- 18.00 - 18.30 *Discussion*
- 19.30 *Dinner*

Saturday 24 June 2006

Session 1

Chair: **Dominic O'Meara**, University of Fribourg

- 09.30 - 10.15 **Riccardo Chiaradonna**, C.N.R. Rome
Logica e fisica. Il trattato di Galeno 'Sulla dimostrazione' e il neoplatonismo

10.15 - 10.45 *Discussion*

10.45 - 11.15 *Break*

11.15 - 12.00 **Robbert M. Van den Berg**, Leiden University
*'As we are Always Speaking of Them and Using Their Names on Every Occasion':
 Language and the Philosophy of Time in Neoplatonism'*

12.00 - 12.30 *Discussion*

12.30 *Lunch*

Session 2

Chair: **Peter Adamson**, King's College London

14.00 - 14.45 **Marwan Rashed**, C.N.R.S. Paris
Vestiges inconnus d'un commentaire alexandrin au 'De caelo' d'Aristote

14.45 - 15.15 *Discussion*

15.15 - 16.00 *Plans for future developments and outputs*

19.30 *Dinner*

Sunday 25 June 2006

8.00 *Breakfast*

9.00 *Shuttle to Pisa Airport and Pisa Railway Station*

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

Age of Participants:

20-30	1
30-40	15
40-50	10
50-60	2
60-70	2

Countries of Origin (institutional Affiliation)

Italy	7
France	5
Belgium	4
Netherlands	3
Switzerland	3
United Kingdom	3
Germany	2
Czech Republic	1
USA	1
Greece	1

FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Convenor:

1. **Dr Riccardo CHIARADONNA**
C.N.R. ILIESI, Rome
- Piazza Cesare Battisti 5
 I - 00037 Segni (Rome), Italy
riccardo.chiaradonna@inwind.it

ESF Representative :

2. **Prof Dr Ilie PARVU**
University of Bucharest
- Department of Theoretical Philosophy and
 Logic
 Facultatea de Filosofie
 Universitatea din Bucuresti
 Splaiul Independentei nr. 204
 000 Bucharest VI
 Romania
parvu@fil.unibuc.ro

Participants:

3. **Prof Dr Peter ADAMSON**
King's College London
- Philosophy Dept.
 King's College London
 Strand
 London WC2R 2LS, U.K.
peter.adamson@kcl.ac.uk
4. **Dr Gwenaëlle AUBRY**
CNRS UPR 76, Villejuif
- 17, rue Emile Durkheim.
 F - 75013 Paris, France
gwenaelle.aubry@club-internet.fr
5. **Dr Mauro BONAZZI**
University of Milan
- Università di Milano
 Dipartimento di Filosofia
 Via Festa del Perdono 7
 I - 20122, Milano, Italy
mauro.bonazzi@unimi.it
6. **Prof Dr Luc BRISSON**
CNRS UPR 76, Villejuif
- 4 bis rue d'Italie
 F - 75013 Paris, France
lbrisson@agalma.net
7. **Dr Ladislav Chvatal**
Université de Fribourg
- Avenue de l'Europe 20
 CH-1700 Fribourg, Suisse
ladislav.chvatal@unifr.ch
8. **Prof Dr Frans A.J. DE HAAS**
Leiden University
- Faculty of Philosophy
 Leiden University
 Matthias de Vrieshof 4
 P.O. Box 9515
 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands
f.a.j.de.haas@let.leidenuniv.nl
9. **Dr Pieter D'HOINE**
Catholic University of Leuven
- De Wulf-Mansion Centrum
 Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte
 Kardinaal Mercierplein 2
 B 3000 Leuven, Belgium
Pieter.dHoine@hiw.kuleuven.be
10. **Prof Dr Giovanna R. GIARDINA**
University of Catania
- Via Vasta 10
 I - 95131 Catania, Italy
giardig@unict.it
11. **Dr Pantélis GOLITSIS**
E.P.H.E. V^e Section, Paris
- 7, rue Jean-François Gerbillon
 75006 Paris, France
pgolitsis@yahoo.com
12. **Dr Elena GRITTI**
Università degli Studi di Milano
- Via G. Mameli, 19
 21100 Varese, Italy
e.gritti@libero.it
13. **Dr Christoph HELMIG**
Catholic University of Leuven
- De Wulf-Mansion Centrum
 Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte
 Kardinaal Mercierplein 2
 B 3000 Leuven, Belgium
Christoph.Helmig@hiw.kuleuven.ac.be

14. **Dr George KARAMANOLIS**
The University of Crete
- The University of Crete
Campus of Rethymnon
74100 Rethymnon, Greece
georgekaramanolis@hotmail.com
15. **Prof. Dr. Filip KARFIK**
Charles University Prague
- Charles University Prague
Institute for Philosophy
Nam. Jana Palacha 2
CZ - 11638 Prague 1, Czech Republic
Filip.Karfik@ff.cuni.cz
16. **Dr Inna KUPREEVA**
University of Edinburgh
- The University of Edinburgh
Philosophy Department
David Hume Tower
George Square
Edinburgh
EH8 9JX, Scotland, U.K.
inna.kupreeva@ed.ac.uk
17. **Prof Dr Alessandro LINGUITI**
University of Siena
- Università di Siena
Dipartimento di Filosofia
Via Roma 47
I - 53100 Siena, Italy
linguiti@unisi.it
18. **Dr Marije MARTIJN**
Leiden University
- Faculty of Philosophy
Leiden University
Matthias de Vrieshof 4
P.O. Box 9515
2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands
M.Martijn@let.leidenuniv.nl
19. **Dr Pascal MUELLER-JOURDAN**
University of Fribourg
- Rue Marcello 12
CH - 1700 Fribourg, Suisse
pascal.mueller@unifr.ch
20. **Prof Dr Dominic J. O'MEARA**
University of Fribourg
- Département de Philosophie
Université de Fribourg
Avenue de l'Europe,
CH - 1700 Fribourg, Suisse
dominic.omeara@unifr.ch
21. **Prof. Dr. Jan OPSOMER**
Köln University
- Philosophisches Seminar
Universität zu Köln
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
D - 50923 Köln, Deutschland
jan.opsomer@uni-koeln.de
22. **Dr Marwan RASHED**
CNRS Centre Léon Robin, Paris
- 14, avenue du Pont-Royal
F - 94230 Cachan
rashedmarwan@yahoo.fr
23. **Chiara RUSSI**
University of Trieste
- Via Carpison 3
I - 34133 Trieste, Italy
chiara.russi@libero.it
24. **Prof Dr Richard SORABJI**
Wolfson College, Oxford
- 17 Cobden Crescent
Oxford OX1 4LJ, U.K.
richard.sorabji@philosophy.oxford.ac.uk
25. **Prof Dr Carlos STEEL**
Catholic University of Leuven
- De Wulf-Mansion Centrum
Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte
Kardinaal Mercierplein 2
B 3000 Leuven, Belgium
Carlos.Steel@hiw.kuleuven.ac.be
26. **Prof Dr Christian TORNAU**
Jena University
- Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena
Institut für Altertumswissenschaften
Fürstengraben 1
D 07737 Jena, Deutschland
christian.tornau@uni-jena.de
27. **Prof Dr Franco TRABATTONI**
University of Milan
- Università di Milano
Dipartimento di Filosofia
Via Festa del Perdono 7
I - 20122, Milano, Italy
franco.trabattoni@unimi.it

28. **Dr Robbert M. VAN DEN BERG**
Leiden University
- Opleiding GLTC / Classics
Universiteit Leiden
Postbus 9515
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands.
R.M.van.den.Berg@let.leidenuniv.nl
29. **Prof Dr Gerd VAN RIEL**
Catholic University of Leuven
- De Wulf-Mansion Centrum
Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte
Kardinaal Mercierplein 2
B 3000 Leuven, Belgium
gerd.vanriel@hiw.kuleuven.ac.be
30. **Dr. Cristina VIANO**
CNRS Centre Léon Robin
- CNRS Centre Léon Robin
1 rue Victor Cousin
F - 75005 Paris, France
cristina.viano@wanadoo.fr
31. **Prof. Dr. Christian WILDBERG**
Princeton University
- Princeton University
Department of Classics
58 Prospect Avenue
Princeton, NJ 08544, U.S.A.
wildberg@princeton.edu