



Monika Komsta

## Necessity in Philosophical Thinking as Exemplified by Porphyry’s *Sentences*

“[...] philosophers are free to lay down their own sets of principles, but once this is done, they no longer think as they wish—they think as they can.”<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In this text, I intend to illustrate the above-quoted thesis of É. Gilson using the example of Porphyry and his work *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*<sup>2</sup>. I will therefore say a few words about this work, then point out the key issues present in Porphyry’s reflections, followed by the problems he has to face once he has adopted a particular starting

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Monika Komsta, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland  
monika.komsta@kul.pl • ORCID: 0000-0003-3070-3279

<sup>1</sup> Étienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (London: Sheed and Ward LTD, 1938), 307–308.

<sup>2</sup> Porphyrius, *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, ed. Erich Lamberz (Leipzig: Teubner, 1975), hereinafter cited as *Sentences* with chapter and line number.



point. I would like to compare Porphyry's proposed solution with the position of Alexander of Aphrodisias, which is similar in some respects, and finally indicate what determines the differences between Porphyry and Alexander.<sup>3</sup>

The *Sentences* can be seen as the fulfillment of a certain commitment mentioned by Porphyry in *The Life of Plotinus*, made by Plotinus' disciples, Porphyry and Amelius—a commitment to show the originality of their Master's thought and present it in a form that is easier to read.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Porphyry's work bears the hallmarks of a certain summary or synthetic account of Plotinus' teaching for several reasons. Firstly, for each chapter, it is possible to identify the places in the *Enneads* that correspond to Porphyry's text. One only needs to look at Lamberz's critical edition which provides many such references. Admittedly, Porphyry captures the individual issues raised by Plotinus in a different way, but he leaves no doubt as to the source of his considerations. It is a source that helps to understand the condensed text of the *Sentences*. Secondly, scholars do not find significant discrepancies between the doctrine contained in the *Enneads* and the *Sentences*,<sup>5</sup> although in other works Porphyry sometimes adopts a different point of view than Plotinus.<sup>6</sup> I emphasize the connection between the two works in order to refer to Plotinus, where necessary when discussing

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<sup>3</sup> Thus, the following text is intended as an attempt to illustrate É. Gilson's thesis on the impersonal necessity governing philosophical thinking: "Philosophy consists in the concepts of philosophers, taken in the naked, impersonal necessity of both their contents and their relations. The history of these concepts and their relationships is the history of philosophy itself." Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, 302.

<sup>4</sup> Porphyry, *La vie de Plotin*, ed. Luc Brisson (Paris: Vrin, 1982–1992), 17, 25–30.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Smith, "Porphyry and His School," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 331; Steven Strange, "Porphyry and Plotinus' Metaphysics," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Studies on Porphyry* 98 (2007): 18–24.

<sup>6</sup> Strange, "Porphyry and Plotinus' Metaphysics," 17–34.

Porphyry's text, and to note that when talking about Porphyry to some extent I will also be talking about Plotinus.<sup>7</sup> Porphyry captures Plotinus' doctrine on the soul in a very synthetic way, allowing the reader to gain insight into the principles governing Plotinian philosophy. This is possible in spite of the fact that the structure of the work can cause interpretation problems, probably resulting from how the *Sentences* reached us. Their condition is incomplete because the last surviving chapter ends in the middle, and the deliberations do not develop linearly, but, in a spiral-like fashion; certain themes keep recurring, now discussed at a higher level than before. Thus, although it is not possible to point to some single compositional principle that organizes the *Sentences*, the individual parts form certain wholes in which one begins with what is essential for further decisions. What unites the work is certainly the subject matter, limited to issues related to the concept of the soul and its fate in life with and beyond the body. Thus, general issues are addressed insofar as their inclusion is necessary to understand the nature of the soul. The *Sentences*, therefore, deal only with selected issues appearing in the *Enneads*; in general, they can be assigned to metaphysics and anthropology, but the fundamental purpose of the work is to show the soul the way back to its origin, which was emphasized by publishers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century who gave the text the title *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*.<sup>8</sup> This is why some ethical issues are also discussed, namely virtues, but in the context of being a path for return. After all, it should be noted that for Porphyry, as for other Greek philosophers, the path of salvation is essentially a path of intellectual improvement. The path of virtue is then not overly exposed,<sup>9</sup> whereas the emphasis is placed on

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, one could go all the way back to Plato in discussing this issue, but such considerations would go well beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Goulet, "Le titre d'ouvrage," in *Sentences*, ed. Luc Brisson (Paris: Vrin, 2005), Vol. 1, 11–13.

<sup>9</sup> Porphyry, *Sentences*, ed. Luc Brisson (Paris: Vrin, 2005), Vol. 1–2, 11–13.

understanding what is the nature of reality.<sup>10</sup> It seems, therefore, that because of the synthetic approach to the issues considered in the *Sentences*, it will be possible to attempt to identify the starting point of the philosophy not only of Porphyry<sup>11</sup> but also of Plotinus.

### **Dualistic separation of realities**

The first chapters of the *Sentences* define the concepts of the corporeal and the incorporeal. This is a key issue for Porphyry, and he returns to it repeatedly in his deliberations,<sup>12</sup> as if he wanted to evoke these most important decisions again and again, for they determine the further development of the discourse. In a later chapter, Porphyry justifies addressing this issue when, from a meta-level, he informs the reader of the primary objective he set for himself and the reader. This objective stems from the condition of man, communing daily with corporeal beings, and it is the correct understanding of the essential difference between the corporeal and the incorporeal.<sup>13</sup> This is of great importance because it is the first stage on the path to salvation of the soul. Only understanding the true nature of reality can give one the impetus to follow the path of virtue to union with God.

The essential characteristics of corporeal beings include, first of all, occupying a specific place. Porphyry emphasizes that corporeal beings are essentially connected to a place, a fundamental determinant that

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<sup>10</sup> Porphyry notes that the starting point for the soul's return to the intelligible world is to understand what the essence of corporeal and incorporeal things is, and in particular not to attribute the properties of corporeal things to intelligible beings. *Sentences*, 33,40–60; 36,23–25.

<sup>11</sup> Of Porphyry in this work, as his views differed at different times in his life.

<sup>12</sup> *Sentences*, 1–4; 18; 33; 39; 42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

differentiates between the intelligible and the corporeal. What does it mean to be in a place? This is not specified by Porphyry, but the considerations of Plotinus may be helpful; he discusses various concepts of place but does not subscribe to any of them.<sup>14</sup> No decisions in this regard matter to him; he does not want to recognize the concepts of Aristotle or the Stoics, because his aim is not to define place but to point out that the incorporeal is not at all in any understood place. The issue may be described by pointing to those properties which, according to Porphyry, entail occupying a specific place, which can be seen as a kind of descriptive definition of place. Place and being in a place are therefore associated with having a certain mass, and therefore physical dimensions, as well as with local movement.<sup>15</sup> The next property related to corporeality—and, as it were, derived from it—is divisibility, and not only bodies but also forms of corporeal beings are divisible.<sup>16</sup> Sentence 5 mentions this explicitly, contrasting souls with forms immersed in matter, which are forms of inanimate material beings, unable to have any existence outside their relationship with the corporeal.

Corporeality, being in a place, and divisibility are also linked to experience. A thing that experiences is, in a strict sense, related to matter, because experiencing is a kind of change.<sup>17</sup> A thing that experiences is involved in a process of emergence and perishing, and must therefore be composed of matter and form.<sup>18</sup> Can the soul itself then experience, since it is an incorporeal being? This question concerns sensory perception, which implies a change taking place in the body,

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<sup>14</sup> Plotinus, “Enneades,” in *Plotini Opera*, eds. Paul Henry, Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, Vol. 1–3 (Paris: Brouwer, 1951–1973), 6.4.2.6–12.

<sup>15</sup> *Sentences*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

and perhaps also in the soul, since sensory perception implies an effect of a sensory object on the cognitive subject—the soul.

What other properties can be assigned to beings that occupy a place? Sentence 27 links corporeality to having mass and therefore physical dimensions. Occupying a place is therefore inherent in mass and having mass results in a diminishing power [δύναμις] of the being. It is an active power, a principle of creation, characteristic of those beings that can create levels of reality lower than themselves.<sup>19</sup> The power of the corporeal being, compared to the power of the intelligible, is so small that one can actually say that the body is the absence of power.<sup>20</sup> To some extent, the category of oneness and multiplicity can also be used to distinguish between the corporeal and the incorporeal, but its use requires further clarification, since both the corporeal and the incorporeal are both oneness and multiplicity, but in entirely different ways.<sup>21</sup> The One as the source of all reality is the oneness of an entirely different kind from the oneness characteristic of the corporeal. However, the One is the model of oneness for the physical world;<sup>22</sup> moreover, the physical world exists only insofar as it participates in the oneness of the One.

That which is incorporeal has properties opposite to those outlined above, such as the lack of essential connection with a place, indivisibility,<sup>23</sup> and incompositeness that is a consequence of indivisibility. Indivisible beings are simple<sup>24</sup> and therefore possess a high degree of metaphysical oneness. This group of properties can also include inde-

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 28–40.

<sup>20</sup> *Sentences*, 35,10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

structibility, which is also linked to the simplicity of the intelligibles. True beings, i.e., the intelligibles, are characterized by possessing a power that bodies lack. This active possibility, the possibility of action, allows the intelligible to create individual, lower levels of reality despite the fact that intelligible beings are not divisible. For creation does not consist in surrendering some part of oneself to the inferior, but in the gradual loss of the power of creation, until individual beings are created which have no active power.<sup>25</sup> The ability to create can also be considered a factor differentiating corporeal and incorporeal beings, since it is inherent only in the intelligible.

Porphyry thus divides the whole of reality into (a) that which is in a place and (b) that which is not in a place, a division that corresponds to the fact that the whole of reality can be divided into the corporeal (and thus connected to a place) and the incorporeal. In addition, things that are in a place can be divided into those which occupy space 1) in accordance with their nature or 2) against their nature. The most interesting is the category of beings which are in a place against their nature, but we will return to them later. The things which are in a place in accordance with their nature are corporeal beings, and therefore occupying a place is their essential characteristic.

One may ask: why does Porphyry not speak of a more obvious division into the material and immaterial? The problem here proves to be matter, which does not share the same properties with bodies, since it is deprived of all the determination that form provides. Porphyry notes that matter is incorporeal, powerless, self-contradictory and therefore chaotic, without the order that form can impose. It is, in a sense, non-being because it is the negation of all that being is. Moreover, matter is not formed by forms but can only reflect them.<sup>26</sup> Matter thus oppos-

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<sup>25</sup> *Sentences*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

es the intelligible world, but in a very different way to the corporeal, as confirmed by sentence 42 which distinguishes two senses of incorporeality: the incorporeality inherent in matter and the incorporeality of intelligible beings. In Sentence 19, Porphyry says that incorporeality does not characterize the essence of either matter or intelligible beings, but is only a negation indicating what these kinds of beings are not.<sup>27</sup> This is how the most significant properties characterizing the intelligible and the corporeal can be outlined; these are the properties that characterize the two realms as separate.

### **Consequences of radical dualism**

Let us consider the consequences of such a radical separation of the body and the intelligible by pointing only to the main difficulties Porphyry has to overcome. Opposing essential properties, such as being in a place and not being in a place, experiencing and not experiencing, preclude any interaction between the two worlds. However, this causes difficulties in explaining many facts, especially various anthropological issues, the most important of which is the relationship between the soul and the body. How does it occur when the soul belongs to the world of intelligible beings, the body to the world of corporeal beings, and an impassable boundary runs between them? Moreover, if man is a living and corporeal being, and it is the soul that is the principle of life, how is life given to the body? Doesn't this require a close union of body and soul? Other issues could probably be mentioned, such as the identity of the individual human being or sensory and intellectual cognition, so a number of issues need clarification.

An attempt to solve such problems is to point to the intermediate position of the soul between the divisible and the indivisible in relation

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<sup>27</sup> *Sentences*, 19,10.



to bodies.<sup>28</sup> It is a typically Neoplatonic method used to explain opposite phenomena, distant from each other, by something that can mediate between them. What is the intermediate position of the soul supposed to be? Has it not been said above that it possesses properties characteristic of intelligible beings, and therefore completely opposite to those of bodies? What is an intermediate position then? Above all, it lies in the fact that the soul, although inherently intelligible, can interact with bodies, not essentially, but by means of a secondary power it can produce.<sup>29</sup> This secondary power is supposed to be an intermediate level between that which cannot have anything to do with each other, between the intelligible and the corporeal.

Porphyry uses specific terms to describe this phenomenon. First of all, he says of the soul that it is present in the body;<sup>30</sup> the concept of the presence of the intelligible in the corporeal appears in various places in the *Sentences*.<sup>31</sup> What might this presence entail? It is certainly not a stoic comingling of two different substances.<sup>32</sup> Nor is the soul an act of the body, as Plotinus makes clear.<sup>33</sup> It is not present in the body either in reality or in essence. Therefore, it must always be remembered that whatever is said about the soul–body relationship, it must take into account the accidental nature of such a connection.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Sentences*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> This is the concept of Plotinus, who rejects the various other ways in which the soul could be in the body. Eventually, after discussion, Plotinus concludes that it seems more appropriate to say that it is the body that is in the soul and not vice versa, Plotinus, “*Enneades*,” 4.3.20.41–51; 4.3.21–22; 4.3.23.

<sup>31</sup> *Sentences*, 3;4. This is the same term used by Plato to describe the relationship between ideas and the material world.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Plotinus, “*Enneades*,” 4.2.1.1–7; Henry J. Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology. Doctrine of the Embodied Soul* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 8–19.

<sup>34</sup> *Sentences*, 4,1–2: Τα καθ' αὐτά ἀσώματα ὑποστάσει μὲν καὶ οὐσία οὐ πάρεστιν οὐδὲ συγκίρνεται τοῖς σώμασι.

Porphyry refers to the presence of the soul in the body as a relation [σχέσις] that depends on the soul itself. The soul may wish to descend to the body level.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the soul's relationship with the body depends only on the soul itself;<sup>36</sup> Sentence 8 even mentions that the soul can free itself from the body. An Aristotelian question may be asked about the conditions that must be met by each party for such a relationship to occur. Let us see whether such a condition can be indicated on the side of the soul. At first glance, it might seem that Porphyry would say that the soul–body relationship is simply impossible and occurs only seemingly. There is, after all, no common denominator between the corporeal and the incorporeal; the majority of the *Sentences* are intended to prove just that. However, Porphyry and the Neoplatonists do not adopt this extreme solution and indicate that there is some relationship between the soul and the body, but in a way that does not nullify the total immateriality of the soul. This seems to be the first condition for this soul–body connection. The soul must maintain its unchanging nature in it, and therefore anything that involves establishing a connection with the body will be accidental to it. Let us note, for example, that the soul, while being present in the body through a secondary power, is also present in a place. It is, however, a presence against its own nature, so it does not cause any essential change in the soul; the soul does not become corporeal by virtue of such a presence in a place. The second condition is the desire expressed by the soul<sup>37</sup>—Porphyry speaks of the inclination and of the fact that it is the soul itself that is able to imprison itself in the body.<sup>38</sup> Of course, it is difficult here to avoid the question of the reason for such a desire of the soul, but, unfortunately, Porphyry does not provide such an answer. The solution

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<sup>35</sup> *Sentences*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3; 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

may be to turn to the *Enneads* and those statements of Plotinus which speak of the necessity of a process of cosmic development, a creative process.<sup>39</sup> One may further ask whether the body has to fulfill any preconditions in order to be able to connect with the soul, a specific soul rather than any soul. It should be noted that (Porphyry speaks of this in Sentence 20) the soul can be connected with different kinds of bodies: terrestrial, spiritual or subtle; the degree of perfection of the soul determines which body it can be combined with. The more perfect the soul, the more delicate the body it unites with, a body that comes closer to the incorporeal. It must be remembered, however, that the soul that can enter into relations with different bodies is one and the same because this relationship is always accidental. In this sense, it is difficult to speak of any preconditions that the body would have to fulfill. The connection with the body depends solely on the soul and its current state of perfection.<sup>40</sup> This fact too, and the lack of a necessary match of a particular soul and a particular body, confirm the accidental nature of the soul–body relationship.

In the context of radical dualism, however, the process of sensory perception seems to be the most difficult to explain, since it must occur between the corporeal and the incorporeal soul. This is because one must answer the question of how does such cognition occur if the soul is completely independent of the body, immutable and therefore unable to experience? Meanwhile, sensory cognition is a certain kind of experience, because the cognitive subject (the soul) experiences (receives impressions) from the sensory object of cognition. Porphyry stipulates that even if the interaction between the soul and the body occurs through contact and touch (and thus very physically), this is only accidental. This clarification seems much needed, as sensory perception

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<sup>39</sup> Plotinus, “*Enneades*,” 5.4.2.

<sup>40</sup> *Sentences*, 29, 16–22.

involves a very physical connection to a sensory object, except perhaps for vision, which was considered to be most similar to intellectual cognition. The sensory object therefore induces a certain change in the sensory organ, but can one also speak of inducing any change in the soul, an intelligible being? However, the ultimate solution is the fact that it is not the soul that experiences, despite the assertions of its mediating role. What is crucial is its connection to the body, as it is the compound that can experience, not any of its elements, as separately neither of them can change. Porphyry makes this point clear in Sentence 21; the experiencing subject must be complex, because only that which is complex can be subject to change. Hence, the question of the relation of the soul to the body and the nature of such an experiential compound returns again. The existence of such a compound is not of a necessary nature for the soul, as can be seen firstly in the fact that the soul connects with different bodies, so it is not essentially bound to any, and also in the concept of intellectual cognition. The object of intellectual cognition is not dependent in any way on sensory perception, thus the body has no part, even the smallest one, in the most important activity of the soul—intellectual contemplation.<sup>41</sup> If the relationship between the soul and the body is accidental, and the soul can fulfill its essential activities—life and intellectual cognition—without the body, why does the soul want to connect to the body at all? It seems that there can only be one answer: the possession of creative power, which forms a part of the essence of intelligible beings, necessarily makes the soul create and direct the corporeal world. However, the state of the soul–body connection is not permanent, and the soul always seeks to return to its homeland, the intelligible world.

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<sup>41</sup> *Sentences*, 44.

## Starting point

One can now ask about the starting point of Porphyry's philosophy; É. Gilson defines the philosopher's starting point as the free choice of principles that will necessarily guide them further on. Will it be a dualistic separation of realities or some procedure prior to it? That is, can the mere separation of the intelligible and corporeal realms cause the consequences mentioned above? This can be resolved by comparing it with an alternative solution, but one that is somehow close to Porphyry and Plotinus. This is the Peripatetic position, contained in the treatise *On the Soul* by Alexander of Aphrodisias. This author was well-known to Plotinus and Porphyry; his works were included in the canon of readings discussed at Plotinus' school in Rome.<sup>42</sup> One might say that in Aristotelianism there is a similar juxtaposition of the corporeal and the incorporeal, or rather the formal i.e., the immaterial and the material, although Alexander could also adopt the incorporeal–corporeal juxtaposition. He begins his treatise *On the Soul* with such distinctions, precisely by defining exactly what is form,<sup>43</sup> what is matter<sup>44</sup> and what is body, since neither form nor matter in the strict sense is corporeal. Matter is formless by its very nature, so in this sense, as in Porphyry, it is incorporeal. Form, on the other hand, although incorporeal itself, can give matter the form of some body. Therefore, the corporeal is that which is composed of matter and form; here Porphyry and Alexander also agree. Since such initial findings are similar for both authors, what is the difference? It should be noted that Alexander never draws such

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<sup>42</sup> Porphyry, *La vie de Plotin*, 14,13.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander Aphrodisiensis, "De anima," in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca suppl.2.1*, ed. I. Bruns (Berlin: Reimer, 1887), 3,13–5,4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6,21–8,25.

radical conclusions from this initial characterization as Porphyry does. The soul and the body always exist together in mutual cooperation; there is an interaction between them, the explanation of which does not cause further complications and the need to explain subsequent difficulties.

The difference is that Porphyry, and thus also Plotinus, at the starting point speaks of what the intellect alone can distinguish, and what is not given to man in sensory cognition. Rather, it is the view of the soul, which is not bound to matter and can thus perceive reality, parts of reality, in pure form. On the other hand, Alexander begins with what is given to us in sensory cognition, with corporeal substance, not even with simple bodies, because their existence is discovered through reasoning. The starting point in the description of reality can only be the composite beings captured in sensory perception, composed of multiple parts, not only of form and matter, because their matter is no longer first matter, but matter that has been given some form. Alexander asks the question, can matter exist without form? It cannot, it must always be shaped by some form—after all, we have never observed such a phenomenon, and it is logically impossible. First matter is therefore something assumed, not something that realistically exists as such. Similarly, the form of a material thing does not exist by itself, it is always the form of something, although the forms of natural things are substances. At this stage of his considerations, Alexander emphasizes the same point as Porphyry: neither form nor matter is corporeal, what is corporeal is their compound.

It is important to distinguish two things: the first methodological step from the starting point of philosophy—whether it forms a system or not is irrelevant at this point. In presenting his methodological starting point, Alexander alludes to Aristotle's often-repeated postulate that we should begin with what is better known to us, rather than with what is better known in itself. In the introduction to his treatise, he outlines the method of his research (consistently in line with what the Stagirite

proposes in the problem section of his treatise *On the Soul*, i.e., from Book II onwards). This method is to explain first what is closest to our cognition, i.e., the body and its functioning, which only points to a soul given to us not directly, but in search of an answer that explains the natural functioning of the body.

On the surface, Porphyry appears to be saying something similar.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, he notes the difficulty of knowing the immaterial, which stems from the fact that we are accustomed to the corporeal. This everyday cognition does not make it easier for us to acquire knowledge of the incorporeal, but rather makes it more difficult, which is why it is necessary to set aside the habits and knowledge hitherto acquired to arrive at a grasp of the essence of the intelligible by denying what we know about the world of corporeal things. So his concept is fundamentally different—our spontaneous perception of reality cannot lead us to a knowledge of the immaterial, but causes confusion and obscures the simple and clear picture. It is therefore necessary to reject what the senses tell us and return to the testimony of the intellect itself. Only intellectual cognition can be the source of true knowledge.

Why is this difference (despite the many similarities) between Porphyry and Alexander of Aphrodisias so important? Alexander sees bodies in action and distinguishes in them the elements of being that are responsible for this action, and more generally for its existence itself. He recognizes, however, that although he must distinguish between the corporeal and the incorporeal in a thing, he cannot at the same time posit that the two are separate, independent of each other, for they exist together. Plotinus and Porphyry, on the other hand, begin with the object which is explored by the intellect, and Porphyry recommends that we free ourselves from the cognition we experience every day, i.e., sensory cognition. In Sentence 33.40–50, Porphyry outlines the very essence of the problem of not being able to grasp incor-

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<sup>45</sup> *Sentences*, 33,40.

corporeal being with our senses, and living among bodies we tend to understand everything in a similar way. However, it is not possible to grasp intelligible beings through bodies; this must be done with the imagination, which is a higher power than the senses and presents images of things to the intellect. In Sentence 34.1–10, Porphyry also refers to the imagination, inviting his reader to imagine an intelligible being as completely different from the corporeal, transcending physical dimensions in every aspect. Porphyry therefore proposes a thought process in which one breaks with the corporeal completely. The *Sentences*, with their constant juxtaposition of the corporeal and the incorporeal, fit into such reasoning. On the other hand, Alexander, like Aristotle, wants to start from what is better known to us and explain a corporeal being that can only be understood if one assumes that some part of it is immaterial.

So this logical starting point, the assumption that existence is to be understood primarily as something intelligible, results in an anthropological dualism that is difficult to accept. And finally, it is fitting to quote É. Gilson again:

The most tempting of all the false first principles is: that thought, not being, is involved in all my representations.<sup>46</sup>

This is perhaps the best summary of Neoplatonic anthropology.

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<sup>46</sup> Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, 323.





Necessity in Philosophical Thinking  
as Exemplified by Porphyry's *Sentences*

SUMMARY

The text presented aims to illustrate the thesis of É. Gilson derived from his work “The Unity of Philosophical Experience” on the impersonal necessity linking philosophical ideas, as exemplified by Porphyry and his work *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*. É. Gilson puts forward a thesis that the philosopher is free at the moment of choosing the first principles of their philosophy, then they must accept the consequences that necessarily follow from these principles. Porphyry's *Sentences* are a fairly synthetic account of Plotinus' metaphysics and allow for a quite clear grasp of both the starting point and the above-mentioned consequences. In addition, for contrast, the paper presents the position of Alexander of Aphrodisias, similar in several points to that taken by Porphyry, but ultimately completely different.

**Keywords:** Porphyry, Plotinus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Étienne Gilson, soul, body, dualism

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