

Work in Progress meeting

OIKOS research group Ancient philosophy and science

17 January 2025

Kromme Nieuwe Gracht 80, Ravensteynzaal (1.06), Utrecht

PROGRAMME

13.15-14.00

CATARINA DUTILH NOVAES (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
The Ancient Roots of Deduction

14.00-14.30

CAROLINA WELSLAU (Universiteit Utrecht)
Plato's Timaeus and Plotinus: creation and recognition of the sensible cosmos according to mathematical proportions and logoi

14.30-14.45 coffee/tea

14.45-15.15

DAAN MULDER (Universiteit Utrecht)
Plotinus and his Gnostic friends: a re-examination

15.15-15:45

DYLAN BURNS (Universiteit van Amsterdam)
Matter in Coptic Gnostica

15.45-16.00 coffee/tea

16.00-16.30

BENEDETTO NEOLA (Universiteit Leiden)
Mediatorial Christology and the Neoplatonic Doctrine of Pure Souls

16.30-17.00

FRANS DE HAAS (Universiteit Leiden)
Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Stoics: the re-appropriation of oikeiōsis for Peripatetic ethics and psychology

17.00 drinks at Bababing (Domplein)

Organizers: Teun Tieleman, Marije Martijn, Albert Jooose
To register: please email L.A.Joose@rug.nl



ABSTRACTS

CATARINA DUTILH NOVAES (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
The Ancient Roots of Deduction

It is widely acknowledged that the historical roots of our deductive practices are strongly related to ancient Greek philosophy and mathematics. The influential work of G.E.R. Lloyd and Reviel Netz, among others, has established the significance of dialogical practices for the emergence of deduction in mathematics. In *The Dialogical Roots of Deduction* (CUP, 2020), I have further developed this dialogical insight, including Socratic dialectic, Aristotelian syllogistic, and also (more briefly) ancient Indian and Chinese philosophy in my analysis. In this talk, I present some of the main arguments from the book, and present a novel analysis of uses of diagrams in geometrical proofs from a dialogical perspective.

CAROLINA WELSLAU (Universiteit Utrecht)
Plato's Timaeus and Plotinus: creation and recognition of the sensible cosmos according to mathematical proportions and logoi

In the *Timaeus*, Plato presents the sensible realm as a mixture of four elements structured according to mathematical proportions (cf. *Tim.* 53c3-57d7). The sensible reflects the structure of the soul made according to harmonic numbers (cf. *Tim.* 35b1-36b9; 41d3-7). As essential components of the soul, the mathematical proportions are of both ontological and epistemological importance: they serve as ontological and epistemological principles according to which the sensible cosmos is structured and recognized (cf. *Tim.* 37a2-b8; 43e8-44a5; 53a7-b7). Moreover, the *Timaeus* emphasizes the importance of the soul's essential components, same, different, and being, in its recognition of the sensible cosmos (cf. *Tim.* 37a3-c1).

Plotinus' cosmological and epistemological account appears to be different in that the principles according to which the soul and the cosmos are structured are not mathematical proportions but *logoi* (cf. *Enn.* II.3 [52].17,14-18,22; IV.3 [27].6,2-3); and similar in that both the *logoi*, as well as same, different, and being are essential to the individual soul and are reflected in the structure of the sensible cosmos which seems to be a condition for perceptual recognition (cf. *Enn.* IV.6 [41].3,4-8; VI.2 [43].8,25-45). However, it can be questioned 1) whether Plato's *Timaeus* and Plotinus have the same concept of perceptual recognition. Plotinus proposes a cognitively robust concept of perception (*aisthēsis*) that involves a cognitive judgment (*krisis*) (cf. *Enn.* III.6. [26] 1,1-3). In contrast, Plato's *Timaeus* suggests that the recognition of the sensible cosmos is accomplished only through opinion, which involves perception (*doxa met' aisthēseōs*, cf. *Tim.* 52a4-7). Further, it is controversial 2) whether and to what extent perceptual recognition requires essential *logoi* in Plotinus. Point 2), in particular, has been the focus of significant scholarly debate. Some scholars defend an "innatist view", according to which all *logoi* that serve as standards for perceptual recognition are essential to the soul (cf. Caluori 2015, Chiaradonna 2012, Emilsson 1988). Others are convinced that only some basic standards are innate, while most have to be acquired empirically (cf. Emilsson 2022, Magrin 2010, Remes 2007).

My talk will show that there are some differences between the *Timaeus'* and Plotinus' accounts of a) the faculties involved in perceptual recognition; and b) the nature of ontological and epistemological principles. However, I will also demonstrate that Plotinus' account of the order and recognition of the cosmos is structurally similar to

Plato's *Timaeus*. I contend that the two authors agree that the soul's essential components function as both ontological and epistemological standards. Accordingly, I aim to advocate for the "innatist view" of perceptual recognition in Plotinus.

DAAN MULDER (Universiteit Utrecht)
Plotinus and his Gnostic friends: a re-examination

The relationship between Plotinus' philosophy and Gnostic thought is a widely discussed topic. A common assumption underlying much of this research is that close relations existed between Plotinus and Gnostic 'friends' (φιλοῖ), as Plotinus calls them in *Ennead* II.9 [33] 10. This paper revisits two key passages frequently cited to support this view: apart from this paragraph from Plotinus' anti-Gnostic '*Großschrift*', also paragraph 16 of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*. Through a closer reading of these texts, I will challenge the notion that the Gnostics were true 'friends' of Plotinus. Instead, I will propose that their attitude towards Plato made it impossible for them to be in any way part of his inner circle, and unlikely to have been regularly present in his lectures.

DYLAN BURNS (Universiteit van Amsterdam)
Matter in Coptic Gnostica

Among the Coptic Gnostic texts discovered near Nag Hammadi (Upper Egypt) in 1945, we possess several texts whose titles match those listed by Porphyry as "Gnostic" books that circulated in Plotinus's seminar (*Life of Plotinus* 16). Subsequent research has shown the Coptic Gnostic corpus to be an important, and hitherto relatively untapped, source for the history of ancient philosophy. This research has focused on points where Plotinus and his Gnostic foes seem to have had the most overlap: contemplative practice and the metaphysics of transcendence. Yet there is much more to Neoplatonism than mysticism, and much work on the newly-translated Gnostic texts with respect to the main branches of Greek philosophy—physics, ethics, and logic—remains to be done. For instance, no study examines how these ancient Gnostic texts discuss matter (*hylē*) with respect to questions of ancient Platonic physics, such as whether matter is a preexistent principle or an epiphenomenon of the first principle, the relation of matter to forms and qualities, etc. As part of a larger project examining the importance of the Coptic Gnostic corpus for our understanding of later Greek philosophy, this paper will present and analyze some of the most important passages about matter in the Nag Hammadi corpus that are most salient for the study of later Greek philosophy.

BENEDETTO NEOLA (Universiteit Leiden)
Mediatorial Christology and the Neoplatonic Doctrine of Pure Souls

This paper presents my Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral project, currently underway in Leiden, which explores parallels between late antique Christological models and the Neoplatonic doctrine of pure souls—those exceptional souls, such as those of Pythagoras, Socrates, or Plato himself, believed by Neoplatonists to have been sent to earth to guide and save humanity.

While Christians universally affirmed Christ's divinity, they often diverged on how precisely to conceive of him, his divinity, and his relationship with the Father. I argue that, in some cases, portrayals of Christ strikingly resemble Neoplatonic depictions of

Pythagoras or Socrates as mediators for humanity. Given the limited timeframe, this presentation will focus on just one of the many shared issues between late antique Christology and the Neoplatonic doctrine of pure souls: the concept of “sending.” I will explore its implications—particularly in terms of “pre-existence,” “co-existence,” and causality—in both Christological debates and Neoplatonic onto-metaphysics. Through this focus, I aim to highlight significant overlaps in the intellectual frameworks employed by late antique thinkers—such as Iamblichus, Hermias, and Proclus on the Neoplatonic side, and Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Alexandria on the Christian side—to define figures like Christ and Pythagoras and the nature of their mediation on earth. Rather than providing definitive answers to the *vexata quaestio* of direct or indirect influence between Christian and Neoplatonic authors, this talk aims to spark discussion about how late antique intellectuals tackled the profound challenge of understanding the divine and its relationship with humanity.

FRANS DE HAAS (Universiteit Leiden)

Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Stoics: the re-appropriation of oikeiōsis for Peripatetic ethics and psychology

As we read Alexander’s remarks on the topics of Aristotle’s *De anima* III.2 in his own *De anima* and in *Quaestiones* III.7 and III.9, we may observe that his real interest goes beyond perceiving sensible objects and the activity of perception, towards a further kind of awareness: the awareness of the fact that it is *us* who are perceiving. This interest has strong roots in Aristotle (e.g. *EN* IX.9), who in his turn inspired the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*. Hence, it is no surprise that Peripatetics before Alexander already claimed the concept of *oikeiōsis* for Aristotelianism (cf. *Mantissa* c. 17). But Stoics like Hierocles scolded the Peripatetics for overlooking the fact that self-perception is prior to perception of external sensibles, and that self-perception is the principle of *oikeiōsis*. Does Alexander manage to preserve both Aristotle’s psychology and a Peripatetic version of *oikeiōsis*?