

Roger Bacon on Translation (13th Century)¹

Sed longe error major accidit in philosophia translata. [...] Nam ad hoc quod translatio fiat vera oportet quod translator sciat linguam a qua transfert, et linguam in quam transfert, et scientiam quam vult transferre.

But a far greater error occurs in translated philosophy. [...] For, that a translation should be accurate, the translator ought to know the language from which he translates, and the language into which he translates, and the body of knowledge which he wishes to translate.

Chalcidius' Latin Translation of the Timaeus, ca. 400 A.D., the only text of Plato's at all widely known in Europe before the Renaissance.

Chalcidius. "Platonis Timaeus". *Corpus Corporum. repositorium operum Latinorum apud Universitatem Turicensem*. Zurich http://www.mlat.uzh.ch/MLS/xanfang.php?table=Chalcidius_cps10&corpus=10&lang=0&allow_download=

Ioannes Mavropous (11th Century, teacher of Michael Psellos) Metropolitan of Euchaita in the Pontus. Poem 43, On Plato and Plutarch.²

Εἶπερ τινὰς βούλοιο τῶν ἀλλοτρίων
τῆς σῆς ἀπειλῆς ἐξελέσθαι, Χριστέ μου,
Πλάτωνα καὶ Πλούταρχον ἐξέλοιο μοι.
ἄμφω γὰρ εἰσὶ καὶ λόγον καὶ τὸν τρόπον
τοῖς σοῖς νόμοις ἔγγιστα προσπεφυκότες.
εἰ δ' ἠγνόησαν ὡς θεὸς σὺ τῶν ὅλων,
ἐνταῦθα τῆς σῆς χρηστότητος δεῖ μόνον,
δι' ἣν ἅπαντας δωρεὰν σῶζειν θέλεις.

If, my Christ, Thou shouldst wish to exempt any of the pagans from Thy threats, choose for me Plato and Plutarch. For both these in thought and deed showed how very near they were to Thy laws. They may not have known that Thou are the God of all, but this is only a further claim on Thy mercy, the gift through which Thou desirest to save all men.

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- 1 Brewer, J.S. (ed.). *Fr. Rogeri Bacon, Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*. Longman 1859. Vol. 1. III. Compendium studii, p. 471. Roger Bacon speaks in the context of a criticism of the many problems in translations from Greek to Latin of Aristotle's works. See *ibid.* p. 469 for details.
 - 2 Greek: *Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae quae in codice vaticano graeco 676 supersunt*, ed. P. de Lagarde (Abh. d. König. Gesell. d. Wiss. zu Göttingen, xxviii), Göttingen, 1882, p. 24, Poem 43. English tr. Hussey, Joan. *Church and learning in the Byzantine empire*, 40 Oxford and London, 1937. p. 40.

Petrarch (14th Century). From “On His Own Ignorance and that of Others.”³

Petrarch, arguing for Platonism and Greek scholarship in general, and especially against the most conservative Aristotelians, claims to have a manuscript in his possession. Sadly, if he had, he couldn't read it because, as he admits, he took only a few Greek lessons from Baarlam of Calabria before the latter died.

Neque hic errant: multa enim scripsit procul dubio, plura etiam quam cogitent, quippe quorum aliqua nondum habeat lingua latina. At Platonem, prorsum illiset incognitum et inuisum, nil scripsisse asserunt, preter unum atque alterum libellum ; quod non dicerent, si tam docti essent, quam me predicant indoctum. Nec literatus ego, nec Grecus, sedecim uel eo amplius Platonis libros domi habeo; quorum nescio an ullius isti unquam nomen audierint. Stupebunt ergo si hec audiant. Si non credunt, ueniant et uideant. Bibliotheca nostra, tuis in manibus relicta, non illiterata quidem illa, quamuis illiterati hominis, neque illis ignota est; quam totiens me tentantes ingressi sunt, semel ingrediantur, et Platonem tentaturi, an et ipse sine literis sit famosus. Inuenient sic esse ut dico, meque licet ignarum, non mendacem tamen, ut arbitror, fatebuntur. Neque Grecos tantum, sed in latinum uersos aliquot nunquam alias uisos aspicient literatissimi homines. De qualitate quidem operum iure illi suo iudicent ; de numero autem nec iudicare aliter quam dico, nec litigare litigiosissimi homines audebunt. Et quota ea pars librorum est Platonis, quorum ego his oculis multos uidi, precipue apud Barlaam Calabrum (247), modernum Graie specimen sophie ; qui me latinarum inscium docere grecas literas adortus, forsitan profecisset, nisi michi illum inuidisset mors(248), honestisque principijs obstitisset, ut solita est.

Nor are they wrong in this, for beyond a shadow of a doubt [Aristotle] wrote a lot, much more than they think, certainly more than what is available in Latin. But they assert that Plato, utterly unknown as he is and hated, wrote nothing, except one or two little books⁴; which they would not say if they were as well educated as they make me out to be uneducated. Though I am neither literate [in Greek], nor a Greek, I have in my house sixteen books of Plato's other than that one, of which I have no idea whether any of their names may have ever been heard. They will therefore be staggered when they hear this. If they don't believe me, let them come and look. My library, which I have left in your possession, is certainly not illiterate, no matter no matter if it be the library of an illiterate man, nor is it unknown to them; when they were arguing with me, they often entered it. Let them now enter again and test Plato to see whether he too may be famous without letters. They

3 Latin from Petrarque, Edited by Capelli, Luigi Mario. *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, Paris, 1906. p. 76. Translation is mine, but a complete translation of the whole text can be found in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) pp. 47 – 134 tr Hans Nachod. docplayer.net/26757019-Petrarch-on-his-own-ignorance.html.

4 The Timaeus and perhaps the Phaedo?

may then discover it to be as I say, and they will have to admit that even if I am ill-educated, I am nevertheless no liar, as I believe. These most literate of men will observe not only several of his Greek writings, but also some translated into Latin, none of which they have ever seen anywhere else: They may make their own judgment of the value of these works: but of their number they cannot judge other than as I say, nor can they dispute it, however litigious they may be. And how small a part of the books of Plato is this? For I have seen many more with my own eyes, especially in the possession of Barlaam of Calabria, the modern example of Greek wisdom, who, although I am ignorant of Latin letters, once began to teach me Greek, and perhaps would have made a success of it if death had not stolen him away from me, preventing honest beginnings, as is his custom.

Petrarch to Boccaccio about the same MS.⁵

Boccaccio can come and read Petrarch's Plato at his home, but not borrow it. Since Petrarch was living in Milan at the time, this was hardly an option.

Anche quel volume di Platone, che mi riuscì salvo ritrarre dall'incendio della mia villa transalpina, voi chiedereste che vi mandassi: ed io ne lodo lo zelo vostro: e vi prometto che l'avrete a suo tempo, nè certamente per fatto mio verrà meno d'aiuti la vostra nobile impresa. Badate però che male non si convenga mettere assieme in un fascio questi due sommi principi della greca sapienza, e che ad omeri mortali incomportabile non sia il peso ad un tratto di ambedue quegli ingegni divini.

You have asked me to send you the manuscript of Plato that I rescued from the fire at my house in France. I admire your enthusiasm, and I promise you that you may use the manuscript yourself at my home whenever you want to; that is the least I can do to encourage you in your noble project. But do be careful. Your idea of bringing face to face the two greatest princes of Greek civilization could easily turn out disastrously. The shoulders of a mere mortal may not be able to bear the weight of two divine geniuses at the same time.

5 Petrarca. *Lettere*. Edited by G. Fracassetti, vol. 5, Florence, 1867. Letter 25, pp. 297-305. https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_e5PNwYiPhhsC. Translation by Jayne, Sears R. in *Plato in Renaissance England*, Springer, 1995. p. 4.

George Gemistos Plethon (15th Century) on the Differences of Aristotle from Plato.⁶

PG Praef. 889⁷ Οἱ μὲν ἡμῶν παλαιότεροι καὶ Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ῥωμαίων Πλάτωνα Ἀριστοτέλους
Lagarde p.321 πολλῶ τῶ μέσῳ προετίμων· τῶν δὲ νῦν καὶ μάλιστα τῶν πρὸς ἐσπέραν οἱ πολλοὶ,
Woodhouse 1 ἄτε ἐκείνων σοφώτεροι οἰόμενοι γεγονέναι, Ἀριστοτέλη πρὸ Πλάτωνος
θαυμάζουσιν, Ἀβερρόη τινὶ Ἄραβι πειθόμενοι μόνον Ἀριστοτέλη φάσκοντι τέλεόν τι
τῆς φύσεως ἐς σοφίαν ἔργον ἀποτετελέσθαι. Ἄνδρὶ εἰ μὲν τᾶλλα σπουδαίῳ, οὐκ ἄν
οὕτω ῥαδίως εἰπεῖν ἔχοιμι τὸν μέντοι περὶ ψυχῆς λόγον οὕτω φαύλῳ ὥστε καὶ
θνητὴν αὐτὴν τίθεσθαι. καίτοι ὅς γ' ἄν ταύτην τὴν ἀμαθίαν τυγχάνη ἀμαθαίνων,
τίνός ποτ' ἄν σπουδαίου πράγματος κριτῆς γένοιτο ἄξιος; καὶ ταῦτα οὐδ'
Ἀριστοτέλους ταύτην δοκοῦντος τὴν ἀμαθίαν ἀμαθαίνειν.

Our forebears, both Greeks and Romans preferred Plato far more than Aristotle. But of today's people, and especially most of those in the West, looking on themselves as much wiser than those who came before them admire Aristotle more than Plato, persuaded by the claim of Averroes, an Arab to the effect that only Aristotle has managed a complete account of natural philosophy (the wisdom of nature). However important this man is otherwise, nevertheless, it is not good to take the view that the soul is mortal, and how could any be a worthy judge of such ignorant nonsense? Especially as Aristotle does not make such a nonsensical claim.

Lagarde p. 321.14 Χρὴ γὰρ τάληθῆ λέγειν καὶ μὴ συκοφαντεῖν τὸν ἄνδρα, καίτοι πλείστους γε
Woodhouse 2 τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ σεσυκοφαντηκότα· ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ οὐδὲ τὸ συκοφάντην ἀντισυκοφαντεῖν
εὐαγὲς εἶναι δοκεῖ. Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ νῦν εἶσιν οἱ Πλάτωνι μᾶλλον τὴν ψῆφον τίθενται,
ἡμεῖς τούτοις τὲ χαριζόμενοι, κάκεινους εἰ μὴ σφόδρα φιλονεικῶς ἔχουσιν
ἐπανορθοῦντες, βραχέα περὶ ὧν διαφέρονται τῷ ἄνδρῳ ἐροῦμεν καὶ δεῖξομεν τὸν
ἄνδρα τάνδρὸς οὐ σμικρῶ λειπόμενον, οὐ μακρὰς οὐδ' ἐριστικὰς ἀλλ' ὡς οἷόν τε
διὰ βραχυτάτων ποιούμενοι τὰς ἀποδείξεις.

For it is necessary to tell the truth and not to misrepresent the man, even though he may have misrepresented many of those who came before him: so it seems right to me not to

6 The best translation by far of Plethon's *de Differentiis* is to be found in Woodhouse, C.M. *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*. OUP, 1986. pp. 192. ff. As it is in copyright, I have made a poor attempt at a translation of my own. If it is close to Woodhouse in places, this is because I had read that translation before beginning my own, and was duly influenced. This text is included here only for the convenience of those who might wish to be exposed to a little of Plethon's thinking before listening to the Open House discussion. Note that for any serious work, or for the rest of the text, the reader should certainly obtain Woodhouse's book, which is probably anyway the best and most complete study of Plethon's work to date.

7 Numbering refers to Woodhouse's paragraph numbers, page and line numbers of the Greek text in Lagarde B. "Le «de Differentiis» de Pléthon d'après l'Autographe de la Marcienne", *Byzantion*, 1973, Vol. 43. (1973), pp. 312 – 343. PG is J P Migne's *Patrologiae Graecae*, Vol. CLX. Paris 1866, pp. 889-934. The Greek text included here is that of J P Migne (see next note) but scarcely differs from the text of Lagarde which, in other parts of the document, is incomparably better.

criticize the misrepresenter in turn. But since there are still even today some who cast their vote for Plato, so as to make them happy and correct their opponents, always provided their intentions are not too violently polemical, we will briefly say a few words about the differences between the two men, showing a the shortest possible proofs rather than long and argumentative ones.

PG A' Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν τὸν πάντων βασιλέα θεὸν Πλάτων δημιουργὸν τῆς νοητῆς τε
Lagarde I, p. καὶ χωριστῆς πάντη οὐσίας, καὶ δι' αὐτῆς τοῦ παντὸς τοῦδε οὐρανοῦ τίθεται·
321, 23 Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ δημιουργὸν μὲν οὐδενὸς οὐδαμοῦ αὐτὸν φησιν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ μόνον
Woodhouse 3 τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τοῦδε κινητὸν· καὶ εἰ μὲν οἰόμενος εἶναι γε δημιουργὸν ἔπειτα
οὐδαμοῦ λέγει, φαύλως ἂν ἐξετίθετο τὴν αὐτοῦ φιλοσοφίαν⁸ τὸ μὲν μέγιστον τοῦ
Θεοῦ ἔργον ἀποσιωπῶν, τὸ δὲ πολὺ τούτου μείον μόνον σεμνύνων. Ἀλλὰ φαίη ἂν
τις, ὡς καὶ τέλος αὐτὸν καὶ τελικὸν αἴτιον τίθεται. Ἄλλ' οὐδὲ ἀξίως τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἴ γε
οὐ τοῦ εἶναι οὐδὲ τῆς οὐσίας ἐκάστων ἀλλὰ τῆς κινήσεως μόνης τέλος αὐτὸν
τίθεται. Εἰ δ' οὐδ' οἰόμενος δημιουργὸν τοῦ παντὸς εἶναι τὸν Θεὸν, διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲ
λέγει οὐδαμοῦ, οὕτω γε αὖ καὶ πολὺ ἔτι ἂν φαυλότερος εἴη, μῆτε δοξάζων τὸ
κάλλιστον τῶν φιλοσοφίας δογμάτων, καὶ οὐ μόνον φιλοσοφίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντων
τῶν τὰ βελτίω φρονούντων ἀνθρώπων.

First then, Plato proposes that God is the ruler of all things, creator of all comprehensible and divisible substances, and therefore of our whole universe. Aristotle, on the other hand, does not call God the creator of anything at all, but only the motive force of the universe and if, he does Him to be the creator, which he nowhere says, then he has set out his own philosophy erroneously in staying silent about the great work of God, and exalting only a lesser one. One might affirm that he makes God out to be the end, not the final cause. But this is not worthy of God, if he makes God the end, not of the existence or essence of each and every thing, but only of motion. If on the other hand he does not affirm God to be the creator of all things, which he nowhere claims, because he does not believe it, then he would be even more in the wrong, neither extolling the best judgments (dogmas) of philosophy, and not only of philosophy, but of all best-thinking men.

Lagarde p. Ἡμεῖς γε μὴν δείξομεν οὐδὲ δοξάζοντα. Πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι οὐκ εἰκὸς ἦν
322, 4 δοξάζοντα οὕτω κάλλιστον δόγμα ἀποσιωπῆσαι πανταχοῦ τῶν βιβλίων, τὸ⁹ περὶ
Woodhouse 4 ἐμβρύων καὶ ὄστρέων¹⁰ καὶ τοῦ δέοντος περαιτέρω πολυπραγατοῦντα· ἔπειθ' ὅτι
καὶ τοῖς αἰτίαν γενέσεως ἀριθμὸν¹¹ ἀποδιδούσιν, οὐ χρόνον λέγων¹² οὐδένα ἄλλ'

8 Lagarde op. cit. “ἐκπιθεῖτο τὴν ἑαυτοῦ φιλοσοφίαν”.

9 Lagarde “τὸν”

10 Lagarde “ὄστρείων”

11 Lagarde “ἀριθμῶν”

12 Lagarde “λέγω”

αίτιαν, ὡς δῆλοί εἰσιν ἐξ ὧν αὐτὸς λέγοντας αὐτοὺς ἐκτίθεται, τούτοις μεμφόμενος ἐπάγει, «ἄτοπον δὲ καὶ τὸ γένεσιν ποιεῖν ἀϊδίων ὄντων, μᾶλλον δ' ἔν τι τῶν ἀδυνατών». Ἐξ οὗ δῆλός ἐστιν Ἀριστοτέλης, ὡσπερ καὶ ἄλλοι ἴσως τινές, τῆ κατ' αἰτίαν γενέσει καὶ τὴν χρονικὴν δοξάζων ἔπεσθαι ἐξ ἀνάγκης.¹³ Οὐχ ὡσπερ Πλάτων τὴν ψυχὴν ἐν μὲν τῷ Φαίδρω ἀγέννητον, δῆλον ὅτι τῷ χρόνῳ, γένητην δ' ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ, δῆλον ὅτι τῆ αἰτία, τιθέμενος, δῆλός ἐστιν οὐ πάντως ἐπομένην τῆ κατ' αἰτίαν γενέσει καὶ τὴν χρονικὴν δοξάζων. Εἰ δ' ἀϊδίων τόδε τὸ πᾶν Ἀριστοτέλης νομίζει, δῆλον ὅτι οὐδ' ἂν γένεσιν τινα αὐτοῦ δοξάζοι· εἰ δ' οὐ γένεσιν, οὐδ' ἂν δημιουργὸν αὐτοῦ οὐδένα. Καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων¹⁴ ἱκανῶς.

Now we will show that he does not believe even this. First, it would be unreasonable for him to be silent on the matter throughout all his books, if he held this fairest of doctrines as his opinion all the more when he goes into things like embryos and shellfish at such length. Next, finding fault with those who postulate a cause of the generation of numbers, that is a cause as distinct from a time when they came into existence, and proposes against these people that "it is absurd, indeed impossible, to suppose the generation of eternal entities"¹⁵. From this it is obvious that Aristotle, as others perhaps, believes that temporal generation must be a necessary consequence of causal generation. Not so Plato, who would have the soul ungenerated in the Phaedrus¹⁶, that is to say in time, but generated in the Timaeus¹⁷, i.e. causally, and who does not believe generation in time to be a necessary consequence of causal generation. But, if Aristotle views our universe as eternal¹⁸, he clearly could not presuppose its generation; and if not generation, then no creator of it either. Enough of that.

PG B' Ἐτι δὲ κάκεῖνο ἄτοπον Ἀριστοτέλει²³ ἐς τὸν Θεὸν τοῦτον πεπραγμάτευται.
 Lagarde p. Διανέμων γὰρ τὰς σφαῖρας καὶ κινήσεις αὐτῶν νοῖς καὶ οὐσίαις, μίαν καὶ τῷ Θεῷ
 322, 21 τούτῳ σφαῖραν τὴ καὶ κίνησιν ἀπονέμει, ἀντιμέριστον²⁴ αὐτὸν τοῖς μετ' αὐτὸν
 Woodhouse 5. ποιῶν νοῖς. Τοῦτο δ' ὅσον ἔχει τὸ ἄτοπον ἐνθένδε ἂν τις συνίδοι. ἀνάλογον δεῖ οἷς
 διανέμεται ἔχειν τὰ διανεμόμενα, εἰ μέλλοι καλῶς ἢ γε διανέμησις ἔσεσθαι, ἢ καὶ
 αὐτὸς Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τοῖς περὶ δικαιοσύνης ἀξιοῖ λόγους. Οὐκοῦν ἐνταῦθα αἱ γε
 σφαῖραι πᾶσαι οὐσίας ἀλλήλαις τῆς αὐτῆς. σώματά τε γὰρ ἅπασαι ἄφθαρτα ἔχουσι²⁵
 κατ' αὐτὸν Ἀριστοτέλη, καὶ ἀϊδίοι αὐταῖ τε καὶ κινήσεις αὐτῶν. Οὐκοῦν ἀνάγκη καὶ
 τοὺς χωριστοὺς ἐκείνους νοῦς, οἷς αἱ σφαῖραί γε αὐταὶ διανεμῆνται, τῆς αὐτῆς τὴ

13 Lagarde "ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔπεσθαι δοξάζων,"

14 Lagarde "τούτου"

15 *Met.* xiv. 1091 12-13

16 *Phaedrus* 246a

17 *Timaeus* 36e.

18 *Met.* xii. 1072 22-23

23 PG reads "Ἀριστοτέλης", obviously wrong, so Lagarde's reading is used here.

24 Lagarde "ἀντιμερίτην" is puzzling. Μερίζω = allot, assign, + ἀντι seems a more likely reading.

25 Lagarde omisit

οὐσίας ἅπαντας εἶναι ἀλλήλοις, καὶ οὐδένα γε αὐτῶν τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐκ ἐνάριθμον, ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον μόνον ὑπερέχοντα τὸν πρεσβύτατον αὐτῶν, ὅσον ἡ ἀπονενεμημένη αὐτῷ σφαῖρα τῶν λοιπῶν σφαιρῶν. Αὕτη δ' ὅτι οὐκ ἀξία τοῦ Θεοῦ τούτου ἔστιν ὑπεροχή, οὐδενὶ ὄτῳ οὐ δηλον, οὐδὲ τῶν καὶ σμικρὸν νοῦν ἔχόντων· ἐπεὶ καὶ Ἄβινσένας ὁ Ἄραψ, συνεῖς τὸ τοῦ λόγου τούτου ἄτοπον, τὰ μὲν ἄστρα καὶ σφαῖρας τοῖς ἄλλοις χωριστοῖς νοῖς καὶ αὐτὸς κατ' αὐτόν πως Ἀριστοτέλη διανέμει, τῷ δὲ Θεῷ τούτῳ οὐκ ἄστρον οὐ σφαῖραν οὐδεμίαν ἀπονέμων, τῶν πάντων ἐξαίρων ὑπερτίθησιν. Ἄλλα περὶ μὲν τούτων τοσαῦτα εἰρήσθω.

Yet another paradox is put forward by Aristotle with regard to God Himself. For by assigning the spheres and their motions to individual minds (nous) and substances, he assigns a sphere and its motion to God Himself, so that He is assigned equal to the minds dependent on Him.²⁶ One can gather how paradoxical this is as follows. Things which are assigned need to be analogous to the things they are assigned to if the assignments are to be appropriately made, as Aristotle deems in his writings on justice.²⁷ Therefore here the spheres are all equal in substance to each other. According to Aristotle himself, they all have indestructible bodies and their motions are eternal.²⁸ Therefore of necessity the separate minds to which the individual spheres are assigned must also have the same substance as each other, and cannot be counted differently from the others. The most superior of them can excel in degree only to the same extent as the sphere assigned to him excels the other spheres. But anyone, even people with very small minds, can see that this pre-eminence is insufficient to be worthy of God. Even Avicenna the Arab recognizes that this argument is paradoxical when, more or less following Aristotle, he assigns the stars and spheres to the other separate minds, but does not assign a star or any sphere to God: he places God over everything else.²⁹ But I have said enough of these things.

26 *Met.* xii. 1027 24-26

27 *Eth. Nic.* v. 1131 21-22

28 *Met.* xii. 1072 23; 1073, 30-31

29 *Avicennae Metaphysices Compendium*, Latin trans. By N. Caramè (Rome 1926), I. 4. I. 1 (pp. 169-171).

[Plethon : Summary of the Book of Laws](#)²⁷

This link leads to a translation of Plethon's own summary of his "Book of the Laws" a significant part of his ongoing argument over the relative worth of Aristotelian and Platonic thought. The translation can be found under "[III. God in Plethon's Summary](#)".

These are the principal doctrines that ought to be acknowledged by one who will be prudent. [1] The first of these is one about the gods: that they are. One of the gods is Zeus, the supreme sovereign, both the greatest and the best that it is possible to be. He is set over this whole order and singular in highest divinity. He is himself being in its entirety and completely ungenerated; both father and highest creator of all the other gods. His eldest child, also motherless, and second god is Poseidon. Secondary matters have been entrusted by Zeus to him as master of all the things below; and, moreover, Poseidon is the origin and creator of the heavens here. He uses the other gods as coadjutors, as brothers, all motherless supercelestials--these include both the Olympians and the Tartareans. He himself then begot from Hera, a goddess productive of the matter, other gods within the heavens, both the celestial offspring of the stars and then the chthonian offspring of the spirits who are close to us by nature. Who even in Helios, the eldest of his own children, he placed his trust as the master of the heavens here, and, moreover, Helios is the source of the mortal things in it. Nevertheless, he achieves this with Kronos, he who is one of the Tartarean Titans and their leader.

The Tartareans are different from the Olympian gods. The Olympians are the creators and rulers of the immortals in the heavens, but the Tartareans rule the mortals here; so that Kronos of the Tartareans, himself the leader of the Titans, rules over the mortal form altogether. Hera, appointed second after Poseidon among the Olympians, is the creator and ruler of the highest matter, itself indestructible. She did this for the things made with Poseidon himself. Poseidon himself rules the entire form of both the immortal and the mortal. He is the master in the universe. He himself has truly ordained the whole order. Since Zeus, alone in the singularity of his highest divinity, rules apart over the universe. (27) Let this then be the first doctrine that one is to understand and believe.

[2] Next that these gods provide for us. On the one hand, they grasp hold of themselves immediately, on the other, they through themselves grasp those inferior, and all are entirely set right according to the laws of Zeus. [3] Next that they are not responsible for any of the evils, neither to any other in the universe nor to us, however, they themselves are most responsible for the good things. [4] And in addition to these

²⁷ This translation is in DeBolt, Darien C., "George Gemistos Plethon on God: Heterodoxy in Defense of Orthodoxy", *Paideia for the 20th World Congress of Philosophy*, 1998, www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Medi/MediDebo.htm. I include a copy here for convenience of the reader. The original Greek is in Migne, J.P. *Patrologiae Graecae* CLX 973 – 974. Numbers in square brackets refer to the points made on the subject of the laws by Woodhouse.

things, that by an unalterable and inexorable destiny proceeding from Zeus, each effects its purpose in accordance with the best. These are the doctrines concerning the gods.

[5] Concerning the universe, first that this universe is eternal. Both the second ranking and the third ranking gods are in it. This universe was begotten by Zeus; it was neither begun in time nor will it come to an end. [6] Next that from the many universes it was joined into a unity. [7] Next that the best out of those possible has been made, precisely because it was made by the particularly best being. Once it had been made, it was such that nothing had been left out and anything added to it would be excessive. [8] In addition to these things, that just as it was set down in this form so it shall always be preserved undisturbed. These then are the doctrines about the universe.

[9] Concerning we ourselves, first that our soul, being of like kind to the gods, is immortal and remains in this universe the whole time and is eternal. [10] Next that the soul is sent down for the purpose of partaking in a mortal body here each time by the gods, at one time in one body, at another in another, on account of the harmony of the universe. That, even though we have a share in mortal things, one thing in us is from the immortals and this is our form. In this way, the universe itself is united to itself. [11] Next that the good is in us, naturally by our ties to the gods, and this is the fit end of life. [12] In addition to all this, that our happiness is in our immortal part, put there by the gods who unite our kind, and that is the substance and most important part of man.

These then, twelve altogether, are the principal doctrines concerning the gods, this universe, and our nature. If one, motivated by prudence about considerations of what is necessary, will also really be prudent, then one ought to acknowledge and be mindful of these things.(28)

Marsilio Ficino reports in the preface to his translation of Plotinus on the lectures of Plethon, and the foundation of the Platonic Academy. (1490-1492)²⁸

At the time when the Council was in progress between the Greeks and the Latins in Florence under Pope Eugenius, the great Cosimo, whom a decree of the Senate (*Signoria*) designated *Pater patriae*, often listened to the Greek philosopher Gemistos (with the cognomen Plethon, as it were a second Plato) while he expounded the mysteries of Platonism. And he was so immediately inspired, so moved by Gemistos' fervent tongue, that as a result he conceived in his noble mind a kind of Academy, which he was to bring to birth at the first opportune moment. Later, when the great Medici brought his great

28 Marsilio Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (Basle, 1576; reprint, Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus 1962), 2:1537. Translated in Woodhouse, C.M. *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*. OUP, 1986. and Hankins, James, "Cosimo de' Medici and the 'Platonic Academy'", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1990, Vol. 53 (1990), pp. 144-162, pp. 150-151. The original Latin of this and other relevant texts by Ficino can be found conveniently collated in an appendix to Hankins' article.

idea into being, he destined me, the son of his favorite doctor Fecino, while I was still a boy, for the great task. Moreover, he labored that I should not only have all the books of Plato in Greek, but also the books of Plotinus. After this, in the year 1463, in the thirtieth year of my life, he commissioned me to translate, first, Thrice-Great Hermes, and thereafter Plato. Mercury I finished in a few months while Cosimo was still alive; Plato I had also begun at that time. Although he was also eager for Plotinus, he said nothing to me about translating it, lest he should appear to be weighing me down with too great a burden all at once. Such was the great man's clemency.