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NEMESIUS
On the Nature of Man

Translated with an introduction and notes by
R. W. SHARPLES and P. J. VAN DER EIJK

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so that they always move in the same courses, and he laid bounds upon the
sea. (25) and he placed a necessary limit on the universal and generic. If
they want to call him fate, since things come about wholly and completely
in accordance with necessity in such a way that everything that comes to be
ceases to be in its turn, it is of no account. [111] For we do not quarrel with
them about words. God himself is not only set outside all necessity, but is
also its lord and maker. He is authority and his nature is authoritative, and
he does nothing either by natural necessity nor by the dictate of law: every-
ting is possible to him including what is necessary. (5) In order that this
should be shown to be, he once stopped the course of the sun and the moon
which travel of necessity and are always the same, to show that nothing
comes about for him of necessity, but everything contingently according
to his authority. He made such a day once, as the scriptures also signified,
so that he should only exhibit and not break the decree that he made in the
beginning of (10) the necessary course of the stars.943 Also he preserves
some men alive, such as Elijah and Enoch, who are mortal and subject to
passing-away, in order that we should recognize through all these acts his
authority and unfettered will.944

The Stoics say945 that the planets are established again into the same
(15) sign according to magnitude and longitude in which each was in the
beginning when the universe first was formed, and at set revolutions of time
they bring about the conflagration and destruction of what exists and again
establish the universe anew in the same state, and, as the stars travel once
again in the same way, each of the things that came to be in the previous
cycle is brought to be (20) unchanged. For Socrates and Plato will exist
again, and each person with the same friends and fellow-citizens, and they
will have the same experiences, meet with the same events and undertake
the same activities, and every city and village and field will be reconsti-
tuted as before. The reconstitution of the universe occurs not once but many
times, or, rather, to infinity, and (25) the same things will be re-established
without end.946 But, they hold, the gods who are not subject to this destruc-
tion, having observed one cycle, know from [112] it everything that will
come about in the following cycles. For there will be nothing foreign beyond

943 Joshua 10:12–14, ‘Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon’.
944 II Kings 2:11, ‘And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven’; Genesis 5:24, ‘And
Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him’, quoted at Epistle to the Hebrews
11:5.
945 111.14–112.3 = SVF 2.625; LS 52C.
946 For this Stoic doctrine (also attributed to Pythagoreans) cf. LS § 52.
what happened before, but everything will be the same without change even in the least detail. Some say that the Christians imagine the resurrection because of this reestablishment, far (5) wide of the truth. For the sayings of Christ foretell that the resurrection will occur once and not cyclically.\footnote{Luke 20:36. For the contrast between Christian belief and the pagan doctrine of eternal recurrence cf. Origen, Against Celsus 5.20–23; Siclari (1974) 265; Polites (1979) 89.}

[Sections 39–40] Which things are up to us; the extent of our autonomy.

**SECTION 39**

ON WHAT IS UP TO US, OR ON AUTONOMY

The account of autonomy, i.e. of what is up to us,\footnote{‘up to us’ renders ἐφ’ ἑμῖν, as previously; ‘autonomy’ renders autexousion. See Bobzien (1998a) 355 and n.73, and above, Introduction 4.c.} includes first an investigation whether anything is up to us; for there are many who oppose this. (10) The second investigation is about what things are up to us, and over what we have control. The third is to discover the reason why the God who made us made us autonomous.

So let us resume and speak first about the first problem, and prove that there is something up to us from what even the opponents accept. They say that of everything that happens the cause is either God, or necessity, or fate, or nature, (15) or luck, or spontaneity;\footnote{Streck (2005, 91–92) compares the lists at Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 3.3 1112a31–33 and Anonymous, On Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics 149.33 and 155.19. Only Nemesius includes God among the causes. The anonymous commentary and Nemesius distinguish ‘spontaneity’ (automaton) from luck; Aristotle does not do so here, but the later writers have clearly incorporated the distinction from Aristotle, Physics 2.5–6 in a typical piece of systematisation. Neither Aristotle nor the anonymous commentary includes fate, but for the apparent addition of fate to lists of causes attributed to Aristotle (and to Theophrastus) and deriving ultimately from Nicomachean Ethics 3.3 1112a31–33 one may compare Aëtius 1.29.2 and 1.29.4. (We are grateful to Bill Fortenbaugh and David Runia for discussion of these passages; see Fortenbaugh’s forthcoming commentary on Theophrastus fr. 503 FHS&G). Verbeke and Moncho (1975, 143) and Streck (2005, 91–92) note a similar list (necessity, fate, choice, chance, spontaneity) attributed to Anaxagoras and the Stoics at Aëtius 1.29.7, in the context of the Stoic theory of chance as ‘a cause obscure to human reason’. The list in Aëtius includes choice and excludes nature, since for the Stoics everything is in a sense due to nature, identified with fate. Neither pseudo-Plutarch nor Calcidius introduces their account of chance with an argument by elimination of this type. What is up to us and what is due to chance are contrasted by Basil the Great, On the Six Days [of Creation] 2.5 (PG 29 40A).} but of God the work is existence and