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PROCLUS

Commentary on Plato's Timaeus

Proclus' Commentary on Plato's dialogue *Timaeus* is arguably the most important commentary on a text of Plato, offering unparalleled insights into eight centuries of Platonic interpretation. This edition offers the first new English translation of the work for nearly two centuries, building on significant recent advances in scholarship on Neoplatonic commentators. It provides an invaluable record of early interpretations of Plato's dialogue, while also presenting Proclus' own views on the meaning and significance of Platonic philosophy. The present volume, the first in the edition, deals with what may be seen as the prefatory material of the *Timaeus*, in which Socrates gives a summary of the political arrangements favoured in the *Republic*, and Critias tells the story of how news of the defeat of Atlantis by ancient Athens had been brought back to Greece from Egypt by the poet and politician Solon.

Harold Tarrant is Head of the School of Liberal Arts, University of Newcastle, Australia. He has published widely on Plato and ancient Platonism including *Scepticism or Platonism?* (1985) in the Cambridge Classical Studies series.

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Commentary on Plato's Timaeus

VOLUME I

Book 1: Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis

TRANSLATED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

HAROLD TARRANT
University of Newcastle, New South Wales

With a general introduction by
Dirk Baltzly and Harold Tarrant

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Harold Tarrant
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

Acknowledgements *page* vii
Note on the translation viii

General introduction to the *Commentary* **1**
DIRK BALTZLY AND HAROLD TARRANT
The importance of the *Timaeus* and its commentary tradition 1
Proclus' life and writings: some essential facts 2
Cultural context: Proclus and pagan practice in Athens 3
Proclus' writings 7
Intertextuality and interpretation in the Neoplatonic commentary tradition 10
Formal features of Proclus' commentary 13
The *skopos* of the *Timaeus*: theology and physiology 16

Introduction to Book 1 **21**
The structure of Book 1 of Proclus' commentary 21
Interpreting the *Timaeus* in antiquity 23
Proclus on general questions concerning the *Timaeus* 49
Proclus on the summary of the constitution in the *Timaeus* 53
Proclus and his predecessors on Atlantis 60

On the *Timaeus* of Plato: Book 1 **85**
Analytical table of contents 87
Translation 91

References 305
English–Greek glossary 312
Greek word index 318
General index 342

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978-0-521-17399-5 - Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus, Volume I
Harold Tarrant
Frontmatter
More information

Acknowledgements

The project of which this is part was a cooperative one from the start, emerging from a mutual conviction that Proclus' great *Commentary on the Timaeus* is a work for which a modern English translation was particularly needed, and helped along by the shared belief that input from both classicists and philosophers was needed. The team of translators originally consisted of Dirk Baltzly of Monash University, David Runia (then working in the Netherlands), and myself, and was later expanded to include Michael Share. The input of my colleagues was very much appreciated. The project has been kindly supported by a three-year grant from the Australian Research Council, notionally for 2000–2002. The University of Newcastle (Australia) afforded me study leave for the second semester of 2001, and has also supported me with conference grants to attend various conferences crucial to my interests in the history of Platonism in antiquity. Furthermore, it supported a conference held in Newcastle in July 2002 on 'Plato's Ancient Readers', where many of the papers were related to Proclus.

The support of our research assistants, Dr Tim Buckley (on a wide range of matters) and Fiona Leigh (on the indexing), has been very much appreciated. So also has been input from the wider scholarly world, and particularly from my widely spread colleagues in the International Plato Society, the membership of which I have found invaluable. I may confidently predict that none of them will have saved me as many errors as I should have wished to avoid, but these are due to no fault but my own. Constant pressures as Head of School in a University trying to grapple with an ever-deepening deficit might have been an easier target to blame, but my admirable colleagues have been commendably happy to put up with inferior administration and welcomed the idea of a Head with active interests in research and publication. Their tolerance has been critically important, but is of course superseded by that of my wife, Judith, who has long been used to the perils of a husband obsessed with his latest publishing projects. I can confidently assert that I do not intend to desert her for Proclus!

Creative life is not an island, whether in the universe or the partial space of one's study. There are a great many others, both past and present, who have contributed in their own ways to this single reversion to the text of Proclus. To all that plurality I send my thanks.

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Frontmatter
More information

Note on the translation

In this translation we have sought to render Proclus' text in a form that pays attention to contemporary ways of discussing and translating ancient philosophy, while trying to present the content as clearly as possible, and without misrepresenting what has been said or importing too much interpretation directly into the translation. We have not sought to reproduce Proclus' sentence structure where this seemed to us to create a barrier to smooth reading, for which reason line and page numbers will involve a degree of imprecision. We have found the French translation by A. J. Festugière an invaluable starting-point, and it is still a useful and largely faithful rendition of Proclus' Greek.[1] However, we consider it worthwhile to try to make the philosophical content and arguments of Proclus' text as plain as possible. Something of our intentions can be deduced from the translation and commentary that Tarrant produced cooperatively with Robin Jackson and Kim Lycos on Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Gorgias*.[2]

We believe that the philosophy of late antiquity now stands where Hellenistic philosophy did in the early 1970s. It is, at least for the anglo-analytic tradition in the history of philosophy, the new unexplored territory.[3] The most impressive contribution to studies in this area in the past fifteen years has been the massive effort, coordinated by Richard Sorabji, to translate large portions of the Greek Commentators on Aristotle.[4] R. M. van den Berg has provided us with Proclus' *Hymns*, while John

[1] Festugière, (1966–8). We are enormously indebted to Festugière's fine work, even if we have somewhat different aims and emphases. Our notes on the text are not intended to engage so regularly with the text of the Chaldean Oracles, or the Orphic fragments, or the history of religion. We have preferred to comment on those features of Proclus' text that place it in the commentary tradition.

[2] Jackson et al. (1998).

[3] To be sure, some of the seminal texts for the study of Neoplatonism have been available for some time. These include: Dillon (1973), Dodds (1963), Morrow (1970), Morrow and Dillon (1987), O'Neill (1965). There are also the translations by Thomas Taylor (1758–1835). While these constitute a considerable achievement, given the manuscripts from which Taylor was working and the rate at which he completed them, they cannot compare well with modern scholarly editions.

[4] The *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* (Duckworth and Cornell University Press). The first volume in the series, Christian Wildberg's translation of Philoponus' *Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World*, appeared in 1987. There are a projected 60 volumes including

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Finamore and John Dillon have made Iamblichus' *De Anima* available in English.[5] Sorabji's Commentators series now includes an English translation of Proclus' essay on the existence of evil.[6] There is also a new edition of Proclus' eighteen arguments for the eternity of the world.[7] We hope that our efforts will add something to this foundation for the study of late antiquity. If we have resolved ambiguities in Proclus' text without consideration of all the possibilities, or failed to note the connections between a particular passage in the *Timaeus* commentary and another elsewhere, then we can only plead that our team is working to begin the conversation, not to provide the final word.

In all five volumes in this series, the text used is that of Diehl. His page numbers and line numbers are reproduced in the margins; the page numbers are in bold. Deviations from that text are recorded in the footnotes. On the whole, where there are not philological matters at issue, we have used transliterated forms of Greek words in order to make philosophical points available to an audience with limited or no knowledge of Greek.

Neoplatonism has a rich technical vocabulary that draws somewhat scholastic distinctions between, say, intelligible (*noêtos*) and intellectual (*noeros*) entities. To understand Neoplatonic philosophy it is necessary to have some grasp of these terms and their semantic associations, and there is no other way to do this than to observe how they are used. We mark some of the uses of these technical terms in the translation itself by giving the transliterated forms in parantheses. On the whole, we do this by giving the most common form of the word – that is, the nominative singular for nouns and the infinitive for verbs – even where in the corresponding Greek text the noun is in the dative, or the verb a finite form. This allows the Greekless reader to recognize occurrences of the same term, regardless of the form used in the specific context at hand. We have deviated from this practice where it is a specific form of the word that constitutes the technical term – for example, the passive participle of *metechein* for 'the participated' (*to metechomenon*) or comparative forms such as 'most complete' (*teleôtaton*). We have also made exceptions for technical terms using prepositions (e.g. *kat' aitian*, *kath'*

works from Alexander Aphrodisias, Themistius, Porphyry, Ammonius, Philoponus and Simplicius.

[5] Van den Berg (2001), Finamore and Dillon (2002). Other important, but somewhat less recent, additions to editions and modern language translations of key Neoplatonic texts include: Segonds (1985–6) and the completion of the *Platonic Theology*, Saffrey and Westerink (1968–97).

[6] Opsomer and Steel (2005).

[7] Lang and Macro (2001). Cf. the first translation of the reply to Proclus by the Christian Neoplatonist, Philoponus, Share (2005).

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More information

hyparxin) and for adverbs that are terms of art for the Neoplatonists (e.g. *protôs*, *physikôs*). This policy is sure to leave everyone a little unhappy. Readers of Greek will find it jarring to read 'the soul's vehicles (*ochêma*)' where the plural 'vehicles' is followed by the singular form of the Greek noun. Equally, Greekless readers are liable to be puzzled by the differences between *metechein* and *metechomenon* or between *protôs* and *protos*. But policies that leave all parties a bit unhappy are often the best compromises. In any event, all students of the *Timaeus* will remember that a generated object such as a book is always a compromise between Reason and Necessity.

We use a similar system of transliteration to that adopted by the *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* series. The salient points may be summarized as follows. We use the diaeresis for internal breathing, so that 'immaterial' is rendered *aÿlos*, not *ahylos*. We also use the diaeresis to indicate where a second vowel represents a new vowel sound, e.g. *aïdios*. Letters of the alphabet are much as one would expect. We use '*y*' for υ alone as in *physis* or *hypostasis*, but '*u*' for υ when it appears in diphthongs, e.g. *ousia* and *entautha*. We use '*ch*' for χ, as in *psychê*. We use '*rh*' for initial ρ as in *rhêtôr*; '*nk*' for γκ, as in *anankê*; and '*ng*' for γγ, as in *angelos*. The long vowels η and ω are, of course, represented by *ê* and *ô*, while iota subscripts are printed on the line immediately after the vowel as in *ôiogenês* for ᾠογενής. There is a Greek word index with each volume in the series. In order to enable readers with little or no Greek to use this word index, we have included an English–Greek glossary that matches our standard English translation for important terms, with its Greek correlate given both in transliterated form and in Greek. For example, 'procession: *proödos*, πρόοδος'.

The following abbreviations to other works of Proclus are used:

in Tim. = *Procli in Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. E. Diehl, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–6)

in Remp. = *Procli in Platonis Rem publicam commentarii*, ed. W. Kroll, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899–1901)

in Parm. = *Procli commentarius in Platonis Parmenidem* (*Procli philosophi Platonici opera inedita* pt. III), ed. V. Cousin (Paris: Durand, 1864; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1961)

in Alc. = *Proclus Diadochus: Commentary on the first Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. L. G. Westerink (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1954). Also used is A. Segonds (ed.), *Proclus*: *Sur le premier Alcibiade de Platon*, vols. I et II (Paris, 1985–6).

in Crat. = *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Cratylum commentaria*, ed. G. Pasquali (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908)

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ET = *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963)
Plat. Theol. = *Proclus: Théologie Platonicienne*, ed. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, 6 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–97)
de Aet. = *Proclus: on the Eternity of the World*, ed. H. Lang and A. D. Macro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)

Proclus frequently mentions previous commentaries on the *Timaeus*, those of Porphyry and Iamblichus, for which the abbreviation *in Tim.* is again used. Relevant fragments are found in

R. Sodano, *Porphyrii in Platonis Timaeum Fragmenta*, (Naples: Istituto della Stampa, 1964) and
John Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

Proclus also frequently confirms his understanding of Plato's text by reference to two theological sources: the 'writings of Orpheus' and the Chaldean Oracles. For these texts, the following abbreviations are used:

Or. Chald. = Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1989)
Orph. fr. = *Orphicorum fragmenta*, ed. O. Kern. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1922)

Majercik uses the same numeration of the fragments as E. des Places in his Budé edition of the text.

References to the text of Proclus' *in Timaeum* (as also of *in Remp.* and *in Crat.*) are given by Teubner volume number, followed by page and line numbers, e.g. *in Tim.* II. 2.19. References to the *Platonic Theology* are given by Book, chapter, then page and line number in the Budé edition. References to the *Elements of Theology* are given by proposition number.

Proclus' commentary is punctuated only by the quotations from Plato's text upon which he comments: the lemmata. These quotations of Plato's text and subsequent repetitions of them in the discussion that immediately follows that lemma are in bold. We have also followed Festugière's practice of inserting section headings so as to reveal what we take to be the skeleton of Proclus' commentary. These headings are given in centred text, in italics. Within the body of the translation itself, we have used square brackets to indicate words that need perhaps to be supplied in order to make the sense of the Greek clear. Where we suppose that Greek words ought to be added to the text received in the manuscripts, the supplements are marked by angle brackets.

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