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978-0-521-84595-3 - Proclus: Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, Volume III

Dirk Baltzly

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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 third in the edition, offers a substantial introduction and notes designed to help readers unfamiliar with this author. It presents Proclus' version of Plato's account of the elements and the mathematical proportions which bind together the body of the world.

Dirk Baltzly is Senior Lecturer in the School of Philosophy and Bioethics, Monash University. He has published on topics in ancient Greek philosophy from the Presocratics to late antiquity, as well as in contemporary virtue ethics.

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PROCLUS

Commentary on Plato's Timaeus

VOLUME III

Book 3, Part 1:
Proclus on the World's Body

TRANSLATED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

DIRK BALTZLY

Monash University



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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521845953

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First published 2006

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-84595-3 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-84595-5 hardback

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The project to translate Proclus' commentary on the *Timaeus* has received financial support from the Australian Research Council in the form of a Discovery grant spanning the period 1999–2004. The translation team supported by this grant includes Harold Tarrant, David Runia, Michael Share and myself. I have also received individual support from Monash University, first in a project development grant, and then for two periods of study leave in 2000 and 2003. During the former leave, I enjoyed a visiting research fellowship at the Institute of Classical Studies at the University of London. I would like to thank the Institute and its members for their kind hospitality and the use of their excellent facilities.

This volume has benefited from the attentions of two very good research assistants: Tim Buckley and Fiona Leigh. The eagle eyes of Muriel Hall, CUP's diligent copy-editor, have caught many embarrassing mistakes on my part. I am also indebted to my collaborators on this project, Harold Tarrant and David Runia, who have each read portions of the draft translation and helped me with several thorny passages. John Bigelow has lent me his expertise in ancient mathematics and astronomy, as well as his acute sense of what, *a priori*, it makes sense for Proclus to be saying about these matters. Jim Hankinson and Ian Mueller (who have been working on Simplicius' *de Caelo* commentary) and Robert Todd and Alan Bowen (who have just completed a translation and commentary on Cleomedes) have allowed me to pick their brains on various topics in natural science. Finally, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Richard Sorabji from whom I learned much about the Neoplatonic commentators when I was at King's London, and who has kindly given me draft versions of his forthcoming 3-volume set of sourcebooks on the commentators.

In spite of the painstaking work of my research assistants and the expertise of those who have helped me there are doubtless places where I've gotten Proclus wrong, or failed to say all that needed to be said in the notes. These aspects of the translation and commentary I can claim as solely mine – and doubtless the persons just named will be perfectly willing to cede me full credit for them too!

My warmest thanks, however, are reserved for my wife, Elaine Miller, who has endured the gestation of this book with good grace. I suspect that I would not have liked Proclus much as a human being. I don't fancy

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the thought of a pint at the celestial pub if our respites from reincarnation should happen to coincide. His ontology is out of this world, his syntax often inscrutable, and his ear for Plato's humour and playfulness is tin. Yet for all that, he's critically important to the philosophy of late antiquity. Elaine has patiently endured close companionship with a reluctant – and thus frequently irascible – initiate to the mysteries of Neoplatonism. She loves me even when I am utterly unlovable, and for that I love her.

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[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 (*noëtos*) 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 parentheses. 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 *metechlein* 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'hyparxin*) and for

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 (2003).

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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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 *ajilos*, not *ahylos*. We also use the diaeresis to indicate where a second vowel represents a new vowel sound, e.g. *aidios*. 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 *ôioгенês* for *φoγeνêς*. There is a Greek word index to 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: *proôdos*, *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)
- ET = *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963)

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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)
de Mal. = *De Malorum Subsistentia*, ed. H. Boese (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960), trans. J. Opsomer and C. Steel, *Proclus: On the Existence of Evils* (London: Duckworth, 2003)

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.