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 fourth in the edition, describes the 'creation' of the soul that animates the entire universe, and addresses a range of issues in Pythagorean harmonic theory. This part of the Commentary is particularly responsive to the interpretive tradition that precedes it. As a result, this volume is especially significant for the study of the Platonic tradition from the earliest commentators onwards.

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PROCLUS

Commentary on Plato's Timaeus

VOLUME IV

Book 3, Part II: Proclus on the World Soul

TRANSLATED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

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IVA GILDOW KNIGHT

1913–2008

bibliophile, grandmother, friend

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In spite of all this help, I am all too aware that, when it comes to ancient mathematics and harmonic theory, I am operating at or beyond the limit of my competence. This is highly specialised subject matter and I'm no expert. (Festugière's translation ((1966–8), vol. III, 211 ff.) of this portion of Proclus' text has notes from Charles Mugler.) Indeed, I don't have much of a head for quantitative questions even when they are framed in a perspicuous modern notation, much less in Proclus' ancient conventions for writing fractions or expressing different functions. I certainly have not provided a commentary on the more technical aspects of Proclus' discussion that would exhaust its interest. My limited acquaintance with ancient harmonics suggests to me that there are more interesting things to be said about Proclus' text. My modest hope is that I will have made available a relatively accurate translation that will allow others with the relevant background to carry the investigation forward.

This book is dedicated to someone whose contribution toward this volume is rather less direct than anyone named thus far. My maternal grandmother, Iva Gildow Knight, was born on the family farm in the foothills of the Appalachians and educated at Crow School – a one-room

educational institution at the crest of Crum Ridge in Noble County, Ohio. Though she excelled in her studies, the high school in Caldwell was too far away to make the trip on a daily basis and the family had no money for her to live away from home. Her formal education thus ended with grade 8, though her autodidactic journey continued throughout her life. Her enthusiasm for the written word, and especially for poetry, contributed to my childhood love of reading. My attempts to turn Proclus' tortured sentence structure into readable English are a far cry from the rhythm and well-turned phrases of her own verse. Nonetheless, I hope she would have taken this offering for what it is worth and have conceded that, in some rather attentuated sense, we are both on the same page.

Note on the translation

In this translation I 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. I have not sought to reproduce Proclus' sentence structure where this seemed to create a barrier to smooth reading, for which reason line and page numbers will involve a degree of imprecision. The French translation by A. J. Festugière is an invaluable starting-point, and it is still a useful and largely faithful rendition of Proclus' Greek.[1] However, my collaborators and I consider it worthwhile to try to make the philosophical content and arguments of Proclus' text as plain as possible. To that end, we have not hesitated to break lengthy sentences into smaller ones, shift from passive to active voice, or provide interpolations that are indicated by square brackets.

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.[2] 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.[3] R. M. van den Berg has provided us with Proclus' *Hymns*, while John Finamore

[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*, 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] 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), O'Neill (1965), Morrow (1970), Morrow and Dillon (1987). 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.

[3] 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 sixty volumes including works from Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Porphyry, Ammonius, Philoponus and Simplicius.

and John Dillon have made Iamblichus' *de Anima* available in English.[4] Sorabji's Commentators series now includes an English translation of Proclus' essay on the existence of evil, his essay on providence, and his commentary on Plato's *Cratylus*.[5] There is also a new edition of Proclus' eighteen arguments for the eternity of the world.[6] I hope that my efforts will add something to this foundation for the study of late antiquity. If I 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 I 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.[7] 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 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 this corresponds to a Greek noun in the translated text that may be in the dative or a finite verb form. This allows the utterly Greek-less reader to readily recognise 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' hyparxin*) and for adverbs that are terms of art for the Neoplatonists (e.g. *protôs*, *physikôs*).

[4] 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).

[5] Opsomer and Steel (2003), Steel (2007), Duvick (2005).

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

[7] Diehl (1904).

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 'vehicles' is in the plural and is followed by a singular form of the Greek noun. Equally, Greek-less 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.

This volume in particular calls for some special comment on specific terms that appear frequently in it. The term '*ousia*' exhibits a delicate sensitivity to context in this portion of Proclus' commentary. On the one hand, it is frequently used in the sense of 'essence', where it is often contrasted with power (*dynamis*) and activity (*energeia*). This is because Proclus adopts Iamblichus' set of headings for organising an account of the soul; a systematic psychology considers first the soul's essence, then its powers, then its activities.[8] This sense of '*ousia*' as essence frequently bleeds over into a discussion of the divisible and indivisible kinds of Being (*ousia*) into which Plato's Creator God blends a third, specifically psychic, kind of Being (*Tim*. 35a1–5). Where this transition occurs in a way that helps to explain the connection that Proclus sees between the soul's essence and the genera of Being, I alert the reader to this fact by including the transliterated term in brackets. But there is also a third sense that frequently crops up: the Aristotelian sense of *ousia* as substance. Here too there is a relation to the other uses, for the psychic essence, considered as a composite kind of Being, is what makes the World Soul 'what it is' (*ti esti*) and 'a this' (*tode ti*). In spite of the fact that Proclus refers to the mixture of divisible and indivisible Being as 'dough' (*phyrama*, *in Tim*. II. 272.22) I have resisted the temptation to play on modern associations with 'substance' as 'substrate', for Proclus also insists that the psychic essence is not *really* a substrate of the soul (II. 221.31).

There is a similar context sensitivity to the terms *mesos* and *mesotês*. On one hand, discussion of the geometric, harmonic and arithmetic *means* that the Demiurge inserts into the World Soul (*Tim*. 36a2–b5) plays a dominant role in Proclus' commentary. One translation of '*mesos*' or '*mesotês*' is thus 'mean' or the middle term in a proportion. On the other hand, the World Soul is also constituted from an *intermediate* kind of Being between the realm of Forms, associated with the indivisible kind of Being, and the realm of sensible things, associated with the divisible kind of Being. As a result, '*mesos*' is also frequently 'intermediate' and here

[8] Finamore and Dillon (2002).

too Proclus often sees an analytic connection between the fact that the World Soul has the various *means* in it and the fact that it is an *intermediate* sort of thing between Being and Becoming. In addition, he sometimes draws an analogy between the soul's role as an intermediate and the function of the middle term (*mesos*) in Aristotelian syllogistic (*in Tim*. II. 104.1–3). A third use of the '*mesos*' word group relies on the ambiguity of '*logos*'. In one sense, a *logos* can be a ratio and the terms in a proportion stand in ratios; hence there is a link to the first sense. In another technical Neoplatonic sense a *logos* is a rational-forming principle.[9] Very roughly, a rational-forming principle *mediates* something at a higher order of reality to lower levels. For instance, the *logoi* within the World Soul mediate the participated Forms to matter. As a result, I sometimes translate terms from the '*mesos*' word group as 'intermediary' where it is the soul's *role* in relating intelligible to sensible reality that is at issue, rather than its *status* as something intermediate between them.

I follow Andrew Barker's policy of leaving the technical harmonic vocabulary of *epogdoos*, *hêmiolios* and *epitritos* untranslated. The first is the 9:8 ratio that corresponds to the tone, the second the 3:2 ratio that is associated with the musical fifth, and the third the 4:3 ratio associated with the musical fourth. It is common to translate '*epogdoos*' as 'tone'. Festugière simply uses the fractions $^3/_2$ and $^4/_3$ for *hêmiolios* and *epitritos*. But as Barker points out, this vocabulary can be used to refer to the ratio of a musical interval or to the interval itself.[10] Sometimes Proclus will write '*hêmiolios logos*' so that it is clear that he means the 3:2 ratio. Other times, he will leave off '*logos*' but it seems clear enough that it is the *ratio* that is at issue. In such cases, I supply '3:2 ratio' in brackets as a supplement. At other points, Proclus will speak of 'the *epogdoos* of 2048' where it is clear that the referent is that number that *stands in the ratio* to 2048 rather than the 9:8 ratio itself. In order to preserve these ambiguities and thus not prejudice interpretive questions one way or another, I have followed Barker's practice of simply using the transliterated terms.

Our volumes in the Proclus *Timaeus* series use a similar system of transliteration to that adopted by the Ancient Commentators on Aristotle volumes. The salient points may be summarised as follows. We use the diaeresis for internal breathing, so that 'immaterial' is rendered *aülos*, not *ahulos*. 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 dipthongs, 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,

[9] Witt (1931). [10] Barker (2007), 267.

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 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: *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*, tomes 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).
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: Instituto 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 ought 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.