Introduction to Book 2

STRUCTURE OF BOOK 2 OF PROCLUS' COMMENTARY

Book 2 of Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* comments on 27c1–31b4 of the original text, amounting to 106 lines of Greek in Burnet's OCT edition. After two introductory sections, the former recapitulating the role of the prologue in 17a1–27b8, the latter giving a brief exposition on the nature and role of prayer, Proclus divides the text into fifty-one brief lemmata and treats them sequentially in the remainder of the book. The longest lemma is four and a half lines, the shortest are a number of lemmata of about a single line of text.[1] Each lemma is cited in full.[2] Proclus' text, which antedates that of the earliest manuscripts by at least half a millennium, is remarkably similar to Burnet's text, but there are a few significant differences, such as the omission of ἀεί at 28a1. All variations between Proclus' text and Burnet's are noted in the translation in footnotes to the translated lemma.

The commentary on the fifty-one lemmata takes up 240 pages of Diehl's Teubner text, so averages just under five pages per lemma. The length of the individual sections, however, is quite varied, depending on the subject dealt with. The longest sections are in each case provoked by an important theme, as can be seen in the following table, which lists the seven longest:

Lemma	Location	Length	Main subject
27d6–28a1	227.4–240.12[3]	13	being and becoming I
28a1–4	240.13–258.8	18	being and becoming II
28c3–5	299.10–319.21	20	who is the Demiurge?
28c5–29a2	319.22–328.11	8	what is the Paradigm?
30a1–2	370.11–381.21	11	creation and the nature of evil
30a2–6	381.22–396.26	15	the temporality of the cosmos
31a3–4	438.19–447.32	10	unicity of Paradigm and cosmos

[1] Longest 28a5–b2 cited at 264.4; shortest 27d5 at 223.3, 29b2–3 at 337.8, 30b3–4 at 402.13, 31a3–4 at 438.18, 31b3–4 at 457.12.

[2] This is not the case in Book 1, where some lemmata are abbreviated, but corresponds to Proclus' practice in the rest of the work.

[3] All references to *in Tim.* without book numbers refer to volume I of Diehl's edition (i.e. Books 1 and 2).

Some sections, in contrast, are as short as a single page.[4] It cannot, in fact, be said that the commentary itself has any kind of structure beyond the sequence of cited lemmata and the comments made on them, which are in turn determined by both the method used by Proclus and the subjects raised by the text and its commentator. We shall return to Proclus' method in the next section.

A different, though not wholly unrelated, question is how Proclus the commentator views the structure of the Platonic text. This is in fact what determines the length of the book. The question is not hugely important for him, and what he says on the matter is not always fully consistent, but he makes enough remarks to enable us to reconstruct his views.[5] In the general introduction at the beginning of Book 1 he divides the work into three: at the beginning the order of the All is indicated through images, in the middle sections the creation as an entirety is recounted, and towards the end the particular parts and the final stages of the creative process are interwoven with the universal parts (see 4.8–11). The first part, as he goes on to explain, covers the section 17a–27b, which presents the continuation of the constitution of the *Republic* and the story of Atlantis, the subject of Book 1.[6] He then continues (4.26–29): 'Following upon this he teaches the demiurgic cause of the universe, and the paradigmatic, and the final. With these pre-existing, the universe is fashioned both as a whole and in its parts.' This statement can be easily related to the macro-structure of Book 2: the first part (205.1–355.15) introduces the three causes, the second part (355.16–458.11) the creation of the universe as a whole. This division is confirmed at the beginning of Book 3, where he distinguishes (II. 2.9–15) between 'the first foundation of the universe with reference to the wholeness that it receives from its creation', namely what is discussed in the second part of Book 2, and 'the second foundation which divides the cosmos by wholes and brings about the creation of whole parts', namely body and soul as discussed in the two parts of Book 3.[7]

But there is more to be said about the main division of the book into two parts. Early on, when interpreting the words 'in my opinion at least' (27d5), Proclus points out that Timaeus, as a Pythagorean, does not follow the dialectical method of Socrates but puts forward his own doctrine (223.5–14). This takes place by means of an account (*logos*) in

[4] E.g. on 27d1–4 at 222.7, 28b4–5 at 275.1, 31b3–4 at 457.12 (final section of the book).
[5] See the monograph of Lernould (2001), esp. 39–112, to which we are indebted for basic insights.
[6] See the Introduction to the translation of Book 1 by Harold Tarrant.
[7] See the Introduction to the translation of Book 3, part 1 by Dirk Baltzly.

which its subjects are sequentially introduced (227.1). As a Pythagorean, Timaeus is a natural philosopher (*phusiologos*), but not in the manner of other natural philosophers (236.3–9). His chief subject is the natural realm of physical reality, but he recognizes that the first principles of that realm need to be studied in so far as they are relevant for natural philosophy.[8] So the first part of Book 2 is concerned with preliminary matters relating to natural science, including some metaphysical or, as Proclus would prefer, theological themes. As he writes at 355.18, when making the transition to the second part, these are preparations for the science of nature in its entirety. The second part then commences the commentary on that part of Timaeus' account which is natural science proper, namely when it is concerned with its own object of inquiry, the universe. We shall return to this division when we discuss Proclus' treatment of Plato's *proemium* (27c–29d).[9]

By the time that Proclus was writing his commentary in about 440 CE[10] book production had moved from the scroll to the codex. His books are thus much longer than those produced by earlier writers such as Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. The first part of Book 2 on 27c–29d (150 pages) is only marginally shorter than Book 4 on 37c–40e (161 pages) and not that much shorter than Book 1 on 17a–27b (205 pages). It may be surmised that Proclus decided that, although Plato clearly meant the section of the text 27c–29d to stand on its own, the links that it has with the following section on the creation of the cosmos as a whole (29d–31b) were so strong – especially in its discussion of the role of the Demiurge and the Paradigm – that it was advantageous to join the commentary on them in a single book. Even so, its length of 254 pages is shorter than Book 3, which discusses the creation of both the cosmos's body and its soul, and runs to no fewer than 317 pages in Diehl's text.

[8] In fact, as Proclus notes at 237.6, Timaeus will engage in metaphysics proper (called the 'highest science') in 47e–52d, where he proves the existence of (intelligible) Being. The commentary on this section is lost. Note that he is described as using all the methods of dialectics at 276.10, but this only applies to the preliminary topics required for his main theme, i.e. the fundamental principles and the demonstrations based on them.

[9] See below, pp. 16–17.

[10] According to his biographer Marinus, *Vita Procli* 13, Proclus completed his *Timaeus* commentary in his twenty-eighth year, i.e. by 440 CE. In modern terms it can be compared to a 'doctoral dissertation', showing what he could do, and very soon after he was chosen as his teacher Syrianus' successor. It is a prodigious work to have been completed in less than three years. It has been speculated that we may not have the original version, but one that has later been reworked; see Saffrey and Segonds (2001) 112, n. 12.

METHOD OF PROCLUS' COMMENTARY

As we noted in the previous section, Proclus follows a fixed procedure in writing his commentary. He divides the Platonic text into brief lemmata and then proceeds to write explanatory comments of varying lengths on them. No use is made of headings of any kind. All the headings incorporated in the translation are the work of the translators, not of Proclus himself.[11] The sections of commentary themselves follow no fixed procedure. In a valuable article Festugière argued on the basis of the *Commentary on the Alcibiades* and the present work that the main structural tool used by Proclus was the distinction between general presentation (*theôria*) and detailed lexical reading (*lexis*) of the text, which goes back to oral teaching methods.[12] One of the main texts that he appeals to is found in Book 2, where Proclus begins his treatment of the famous text introducing the Demiurge at 28c3–5. After citing with approval the observation of his predecessors that Plato introduces a divine cause immediately after demonstrating that the cosmos has come into being from a cause, Proclus writes (299.19–21): 'As for us, we should first examine the wording (*lexis*) of the text on its own and then proceed to the examination of the theme in its entirety (*hê holê theôria*) . . .' The next four pages are then devoted to an analysis of virtually every word in the lemma (299.13–303.23). This is followed by sixteen pages on the subject of who the Demiurge is and in which order of reality he is to be located (303.24–319.21). Clearly the French scholar's suggestion has merit and gives insight into some of the basic patterns of the commentary. In fact, however, Proclus' method is much more varied and complex than this simple opposition indicates.[13] Without wishing to be exhaustive, we suggest that the methods used by Proclus in his commentary can be illuminated by the following nine features.

1. *Analysis of argument*. As we noted above, Timaeus is a philosopher of nature or natural scientist (*phusiologos*) who presents a reasoned, structured account (*logos*) of the origin and order of the physical world. Proclus therefore regards it as one of his chief tasks to explain the train of thought of Plato's argument. The commentator assumes its underlying method, logic and structure and proceeds to explain it as he goes along. These assumptions come to the fore mainly at nodal points in his commentary, when he introduces the comments he is going to make.

[11] The use of headings does occur in some ancient texts, but to our knowledge they are not used in ancient commentaries.

[12] Festugière (1963). For the earlier history of this distinction, which goes back to the beginning of our era, see Dörrie–Baltes, PA §77.

[13] Lamberz (1987) 17 argues that it does not belong to the formal characteristics of the commentary (*hupomnêma*) as such.

Plato's account has an order (*taxis*), logical procedure (*logikê ephodos*), proper sequence (*akolouthia*) and continuity of thought (*sunecheia*); see 227.1, 328.16, 365.6, 371.9, 416.12. Plato proceeds in this way because there needs to be a strict correspondence between realities, thoughts and linguistically formulated accounts (339.5), as the text itself makes clear in 29b3–c3. For this reason the interpreter has to explain and defend the 'logographic' sequence of the text (436.6). Timaeus uses the proper methods of dialectic in presenting his account (276.10), asking the what-question when starting a particular inquiry in accordance with (Aristotelian) scientific method (227.13, 321.1, 357.3) and the example of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (275.15). The statements that Plato gives in his argument have to be explained and their truth demonstrated (452.3). At various points Proclus explains or makes intelligent comments on the underlying syllogistic structure of Plato's argument; see 258.23, 328.20, 424.6, 438.20, 439.2. There is much that present-day interpreters of Plato's text can learn from his remarks.[14]

2. *Detailed reading of the text*. Much of the commentary is spent on detailed examination of terms and phrases used by Plato. As noted above, this is generally called the *lexis* (wording, text, formulation) of the text. How can we resolve a dispute between two interpretations, Proclus writes at 227.9, 'if we did not examine each of the *lexeis* involved one for one'? see also 243.26, 299.20, 387.6, 390.27, 420.20. The aim is to show the accuracy of the words (*onomata*) used by Plato to express his thought and argument (327.10). This can lead to some very interesting terminological analyses of crucial terms in Plato's philosophy, for example when he explains the epistemological terminology of 28a1–3 in 243.26–252.9. In such passages copious references are made to Platonic texts outside the *Timaeus* (see further under no. 8 below). Interpretation of the *lexis* also leads to differences among the interpreters, for example in the case of the words 'singly' and 'in their families' at 30c6 (425.11). Of course Proclus finds it as difficult to make a clear demarcation between terminological and systematic questions as any modern commentator would do. He is certainly flexible in his understanding of terms and consistently interprets them against the background of the context, even if he sometimes reads more into them than we would be inclined to do (e.g. his interpretation of 'in my opinion' in 27d5 at 223.14).

3. *Explanation of main philosophical themes*. Proclus recognizes, as any reader of the *Timaeus* must, that it contains a number of central themes. On a number of occasions he describes these as *problêmata*, literally 'things thrown up (by the text)', points of discussion or problems. The

[14] See for example the discussion on Timaeus' logic in the *proemium* by Ebert (1991), Runia (2000).

question of whether the cosmos is generated or not is 'the very first of the problems concerning the universe' (236.3), which in turn leads to other problems such as its causation, unicity, knowability, and so on (236.12, 416.9, 436.6, etc.). Other main themes are the nature of Being and becoming, the nature and role of the Demiurge and the Paradigm, the origin and role of matter, and so on. These themes are furnished by the philosophical problematics and systematics of the text itself but can in turn give rise to significant issues of interpretation, on which commentators can differ (see no. 5 below) and which highlight the differences between Platonic thought and that of other schools (see no. 6 below).

4. *Difficulties raised by the text*. More specifically Proclus often draws attention to *aporiai* (difficulties, puzzles). They can be raised directly by the text, but usually they arise from the work of previous interpreters and readers. For example the word *ti* (what) at 27d6 'furnishes both us (i.e. Proclus) and his predecessors with this *aporia*' (227.18): why does Plato immediately proceed to the question 'what it is' and not follow the standard (Aristotelian) scientific procedure of asking 'whether it is'? Such difficulties are often introduced by vague formulas using third-person plurals, such as 'some raise the difficulty' (266.21, see also 217.28), and 'one might ask' (422.5). But sometimes they are raised by previous interpreters, who are explicitly named, for example Atticus at 431.14 followed by Porphyry, Iamblichus and Amelius. Proclus naturally takes on the challenge of resolving the difficulty, as at 325.12–28 where, after raising the question why Plato should speak of a generated paradigm at 29a2, he says a little patronizingly that 'we shall solve this difficulty if we recall to mind what has often been said before . . .' (325.22). But this immediately gives rise to another difficulty (325.25), which is resolved at 327.9, and so on. Often he is at first quite tentative in answering these puzzles, beginning his explanations with words such as 'perhaps' (218.13), and 'one might say' (225.4). But this modesty does not usually last long. The task of the commentator is to point out the difficulties and then to solve them.

5. *Differences of interpretation*. Proclus records frequent differences of opinion (*antilegousi* 227.6, cf. 439.22) among prior exegetes and commentators in the Platonist tradition. Sometimes the reference is very general, as at 227.6. This is often the case when his criticism of their approach is harsh, such as when those who identify the Demiurge with the highest god are described as 'altogether ridiculous' (359.23). He is also quite critical of predecessors such as Plutarch and Atticus or Amelius (see 381.26–383.22, 398.16), whose views diverge from what had become standard Neoplatonist interpretation. Usually his tone, however, is more neutral. Analysis of previous positions helps him to clarify his own. On a number of occasions we are presented with the views of a list of interpreters.

The longest list is given on the question of the identity and role of the Demiurge, introduced by the statement, 'the ancient interpreters have come to different opinions (*doxai*)' (303.27). Other quite long lists are found on the question of the generation of the cosmos (276.31), the Paradigm and its relation to the cosmos (321.24), the temporality of the cosmos (381.26), the contents of the Paradigm (425.11), and on the relation between the Paradigm and the Demiurge (431.14). On Proclus' use of source material from his exegetical predecessors see further in the next section. Consistently after giving these lists Proclus will state his own opinion or that of his teacher Syrianus with which he identified. He is convinced that these views come closest to Plato's own thinking (310.6). Many of these passages can be called doxographical in the loose sense of the word. It is standard practice to state the views of others, criticize them and finish with one's own considered opinion. Two passages show more resemblance to the doxographical method of the *Placita*, one on whether there is or is not an efficient cause of the cosmos (i.e. the Demiurge) at 265.21–266.4, the other at the end of Book 2, where views on unicity, plurality or infinite number of worlds are opposed to each other (453.14–456.31, following Plato's cue at 31b2–3; see also 31a2–3).[15]

6. *Objections raised against the text*. But not all readers of the *Timaeus* were as sympathetic to its doctrine as Proclus and his Platonist predecessors. Throughout the commentary he also refers to those who actually oppose Plato's viewpoint rather than just question its interpretation. A clear case is found at 266.21, where Proclus lists the objections of other philosophical schools to the conception of a Demiurge who uses a paradigm to create a cosmos. As is usually the case, their views are stated rather superficially. Proclus is not really interested in their views and engages in easy polemics. The case is different for Aristotle and his school. He gets some things wrong (e.g. the true nature of the cosmos's eternity 286.21, the nature of the first principle 267.4),[16] but he also gets a lot of things right and can be used as a valuable source for doctrine (e.g. the argument that a limited body cannot have unlimited power 253.11, the doctrine of the various kinds of causes 261.2, etc.). See further the next section on Proclus' references to other philosophical schools.

7. *Praise and defence of Plato*. As a Platonist, Proclus is fully committed to the value of Plato's philosophy. The commentary is filled with

[15] Cf. Aëtius at Ps.Plut. 2.1, Stob. *Ecl.* 1.21–2, which in fact does not include the possibility of a plurality of worlds illustrated in Proclus by the example of Petron of Himera. On the method of the *Placita* and the concept of doxography in general see Runia (1999).

[16] See also 252.11–254.18 for a good example of how Proclus deals with Aristotle's objections to Platonic doctrine, using his own views to refute his position.

remarks praising him and expressing admiration for his doctrine and the way he formulates it. See, for example, 270.9, 292.9, 403.31, 404.21. The principles of Plato's philosophy are true and Proclus is eager to demonstrate their truth in his commentary (265.9–266.21). He is not a detached observer who sees it as his task to explain what a great philosopher thought and wrote. Plato has expounded the truth and in doing so stands in a long tradition which starts with the first theologians.

8. *Plato's writings form a unity*. A hidden assumption, which Proclus does not make explicit in the text, is that the corpus of Plato's writings form a coherent unity. A number of classic texts in other dialogues shed light on the account of the cosmos's creation in the *Timaeus*, so are referred to at regular intervals; see especially references to *Philebus* 23–31 (259.27, 262.30, 315.15, 384.24, 403.18, 423.22) and *Politicus* 268–273 (253.19, 260.14, 312.18, 315.23). Proclus is aware that the context is a determinant factor in the terminology used. It allows him to explain, for example, why soul is called ungenerated in the *Phaedrus*, but generated in the *Timaeus* (287.20). Reference to other dialogues can also be used as proof for a particular interpretation of Plato's philosophy. A fine example is found at 393.14–31, where Proclus takes over a passage from Porphyry in which texts from other dialogues are invoked to demonstrate against the Middle Platonist Atticus that there is but one ultimate principle. It is striking how often he names other dialogues explicitly when referring to their texts rather than simply making an erudite allusion as we might find in an author such as Plotinus; see the index for a full list of such references. This practice stems from the didactic background and purpose of the commentary.

9. *Plato and the tradition of wisdom*. Finally we should note that Proclus does not only use philosophical sources to explain Plato's text. As a pupil of Syrianus ('our teacher', as he usually calls him) Proclus stands in a tradition, beginning with Iamblichus, which recognizes a single tradition of wisdom that can be expressed in both philosophical and theological modes. It should be recognized, he says at 390.27–391.4, that when Plato introduces the pre-cosmic chaos he was imitating the 'theologians' when they opposed the Titans to the Olympians, but they were speaking 'theologically' whereas he operates 'philosophically'. Basically there is complete agreement between Plato and both the 'theologians' in the Orphic tradition and the much later Chaldean Oracles. Indeed they can be used to shed light on each other, as he argues at 407.21. On these traditions and references to Homer and the poets see further the following section. It is noteworthy that these discussions often occur towards the end of the commentary on a particular lemma. This is because Proclus tends to regard the agreement between the inspired poets and Plato as he interprets him as a confirmation of his exegesis. Undoubtedly this is

the aspect of Proclus' work that deviates most from what we would now expect of a commentary on a strictly philosophical text.

Summing up, we can say that the only fixed procedure that Proclus follows in his commentary is the alternation of text and exposition. His methods, for which he is greatly indebted to his exegetical predecessors, are highly varied and primarily adapted to the needs of his exegesis. He is a tidy author and the reader is generally left in no doubt about the direction that he wishes his comments to take. There is a fair amount of repetition, but this is hard to avoid when using the method of the line-by-line commentary. To some degree Proclus is aware of the problem and does include a considerable number of cross-references in his text. Without doubt the commentary is long-winded,[17] but it is worth remembering that, if it had been shorter, we would have been deprived of much of the extremely valuable information on the commentary tradition of the *Timaeus* which it contains.

THE SOURCES FOR PROCLUS' COMMENTARY

The importance of Proclus' commentary for our knowledge of the tradition of interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* can hardly be overestimated. Indeed it has been suggested that it may well be the most important text for our knowledge of Middle Platonism.[18] But it contains much more material than just on that period. We are presented with this cornucopia because, for reasons that we do not fully understand,[19] Proclus is much more generous with references to and discussions of his exegetical predecessors than in his later commentaries. The following is an overview of the source material which Proclus uses in Book 2. The list is only exhaustive as far as the names are concerned. For a complete list of references, see the Index of names.

The Platonist tradition[20]

1. *Old Academy*.[21] The only member of the Old Academy whom Proclus mentions by name is Crantor (277.8), whom he had earlier (76.1) called

[17] It is, for example, much longer than the equivalent modern commentaries of A. E. Taylor and F. M. Cornford.
[18] Tarrant (2004) 175.
[19] For various speculations see Tarrant (2004) 176. I suspect that chronology may have something to do with it. The commentary is a youthful work and, just like modern dissertations, is better documented than usual.
[20] For a fine overview of Platonist commentators and commentaries on the *Timaeus* see Dörrie–Baltes, PA §81.
[21] On Proclus and the Old Academy see Tarán (1987).

'Plato's first exegete'.[22] Plato's successors in the Academy, Speusippus and Xenocrates, are not named although we know that the view that the cosmos is created 'for purposes of instruction', cited at 290.9, is theirs. Proclus will have derived it from Aristotle's critique in *De caelo* 1.10, 279b32–280a11.[23]

2. *Middle Platonists*.[24] The earliest 'Platonist'[25] to be mentioned is Plutarch. Most often he is coupled with the second-century Platonist Atticus as the key representatives of an interpretation of the *Timaeus* with which Proclus very strongly disagrees, namely that the creation is a process that takes place in time (276.31, 326.1, 381.26, 384.4). Plutarch is cited on his own on the doctrine of providence (415.19) and the question of the unicity of the cosmos (454.13). Others to be mentioned are Harpocration (304.22), Albinus on his own (219.2) and with his teacher Gaius (340.24), Severus (227.15, 255.6, 289.7), Atticus on his own (272.1, 366.9, 391.7 etc.) and Numenius (only once at 303.27).

3. *Third-century Neoplatonists*. Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, is called 'the most divine' at 427.14 and is cited about ten times in passages which shed interesting light on early interpretation of the *Enneads* (esp. 3.9). His friend and fellow-philosopher, the 'noble' Amelius (309.21), is mentioned a little less often. Proclus argues against the way he makes the Demiurge triple: it is possible to let the three demiurges stand, but who is the single Demiurge prior to them (306.21)? Plotinus' rival, the 'philologist' Longinus, is named only once at 322.24, the only other mention in the commentary apart from the copious references in Book 1. But it is Plotinus' pupil and editor, Porphyry of Tyre, who as exegete has the greatest impact on Book 2. By means of his commentary Porphyry placed the interpretation of the *Timaeus* on a new footing and it is only a slight exaggeration to say that Proclus is indebted to it on almost every page. In Sodano's collection of fragments Proclus supplies the bulk of the fragments on this part of the text.[26] At 391.4 he makes it quite clear that he is paraphrasing an extensive section of Porphyry's commentary amounting to nearly six pages in length (391.4–396.26), where he attacks the Middle Platonist Atticus for interpreting Plato in

[22] Although Proclus is not explicit, both Tarán (1987) 270 and Dörrie–Baltes, PA §81.1 interpret this statement to mean that Crantor was the first to write a commentary on the *Timaeus* (though not necessarily a line-by-line treatment).

[23] It is possible that the description 'those who explain in a more dialectical fashion' (290.3) is at least partly an oblique reference to these philosophers.

[24] I make no distinction between Platonists and Neopythagoreans here. On Proclus and the Middle Platonists see Whittaker (1987).

[25] The term Platonist (Πλατωνικός) did not come into use until the first century CE.

[26] Frs. 28–33, 40–6, 51–6 (the rest are from Philoponus' *De aeternitate mundi*). Sodano's collection should be superseded by a more thorough study.