

PROCLUS

Commentary on Plato's Timaeus

Proclus' Commentary on the dialogue *Timaeus* by Plato (d. 347 BC), written in the fifth century AD, is arguably the most important commentary on a text of Plato, offering unparalleled insights into eight centuries of Platonic interpretation. It has had an enormous influence on subsequent Plato scholarship. This edition nevertheless offers the first new translation of the work for nearly two centuries, building on significant recent advances in scholarship on Neoplatonic commentators. It will provide an invaluable record of early interpretations of Plato's dialogue, while also presenting Proclus' own views on the meaning and significance of Platonic philosophy. This volume, the sixth in the series, presents Proclus' unrepentant account of a multitude of divinities involved with the creation of mortal life, the supreme creator's delegation to them of the creation of human life, and the manner in which they took the immortal life principle from him and wove it together with our mortal parts to produce human beings.

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PROCLUS

Commentary on Plato's Timaeus

VOLUME VI

Book 5: Proclus on the Gods of
Generation and the Creation of
Humans

TRANSLATED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-03264-4 — Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus
Proclus, Edited by Harold Tarrant
Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107032644
DOI: 10.1017/9781139506793

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First published 2017

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

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

ISBN 978-1-107-03264-4 Hardback

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For Rhys Alexander Betz-Tarrant

ἄν μὲν οὖν δὴ καὶ συνεπιλαμβάνηται τις ὀρθὴ τροφή παιδείσεως . . .

Timaeus 44b8

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Acknowledgements

The project to translate Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* was able to be launched thanks to financial support from the Australian Research Council in the form of a Discovery grant covering the years 1999–2004. The project was coordinated by Dirk Baltzly, then at Monash University, and the team included also David Runia and Michael Share. Further grants from the Australian Research Council to teams including Baltzly and myself, one led by myself (2009–12: DP0986334, 'Academies under Stress') and the other led by Professor Benitez (2012–15: DP120102425, 'Plato's Myth Voice'), though with different work in view, have nevertheless been sufficiently related to these continuing endeavours to contribute significantly to the understanding essential for the completion of this volume. A number of smaller grants from the University of Newcastle, Australia have also been of great benefit to me. Regarding Proclus, and this project overall, I have continued to be in regular contact with Dirk Baltzly in particular, and there have been particular aspects of this book that have benefited from our discussions, most notably the treatment of Theodore of Asine. Other collaborators, such as François Renaud, Danielle A. Layne, and Marguerite Johnson have also taught me much, and for this volume I have been particularly indebted to John Finamore for making available to me materials and translations on the soul's vehicle(s) used at the ISNS conference in Cardiff in 2013. I have also been greatly encouraged by the scholars who have inquired, usually at conferences, about the gradual progress towards the completion of this project. Their encouragement has been particularly important at those times when I seemed to lack the mental space for a project of this magnitude.

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 always 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 I was partly responsible for along with Robin Jackson and Kim Lycos on Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Gorgias*.²

Our team was of the belief that the philosophy of late antiquity had come to stand where Hellenistic philosophy did in the early 1970s. It was, at least for the Anglo-analytic tradition in the history of philosophy, largely unexplored territory.³ Already it has opened up, revealing unexpected treasures. Important scholars worldwide have joined the cause. Still after almost thirty years the most impressive contribution to studies in this area has been the massive effort, coordinated by Richard Sorabji, to translate large portions of the Greek

¹ Festugière (1966–8). The team remains greatly indebted to Festugière's fine work, though we have somewhat different aims and emphases. Our notes on the text are not intended to engage so systematically with the text of the Chaldean Oracles or the Orphic fragments, or other matters concerning the history of religion. We have preferred to comment on those features of Proclus' text that place it in the Platonic tradition.

² Jackson et al. (1998).

³ Certainly some key texts for the study of Neoplatonism had been available for some time, such as Dillon (1973), Dodds (1963), Morrow (1970), Morrow and Dillon (1987), and O'Neill (1965); they went right back to the serviceable translations by Thomas Taylor (1758–1835), which though not based on modern scholarly editions, nevertheless benefited from Taylor's enthusiasm for his subject matter. Taylor's work, like many other useful volumes including R. Petty's (2012) translation of Numenius, is now available among the volumes published or republished by the Prometheus Trust (Westbury, UK).

Note on the Translation

Commentators on Aristotle and related texts.⁴ Sorabji's Commentators series now includes English translations of Proclus' works *On the Existence of Evils*, *On Providence*, *On Plato's Cratylus*, and *Ten Problems concerning Providence*;⁵ it also now includes two volumes of Olympiodorus' *On Plato First Alcibiades*.⁶ Beyond that series there have been a number of excellent contributions too numerous to list: including editions of the Greek, translations, collections of essays, and scholarly studies.

We hope that our efforts will add something to this foundation for the study of late antique philosophical texts, but also that, in seeking to present and explain what messages Proclus and his age had found within an influential text of Plato, we have managed to open up a series of different lines for those more interested in Plato to explore. Certainly few of them will ever commit to Proclus' reading of Plato, but rather more will find them intriguing, and a little extra thought may reveal wider possibilities in texts that we once thought we knew. Inevitably our work is partial and temporal, not a Thucydidean *ktêma eis aei*, and it is a product of the times in which we write. It does not provide a complete window onto Proclus' philosophy, but our plea has been that we have worked to begin a conversation and to make that conversation more inclusive: not to provide the final word on the philosophy of Proclus. This plea seems particularly apt in the case of Book 5 of the *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, which on the whole has attracted far less attention from scholars than some earlier books.

There is also a danger in linking everything up with parallels across the corpus and seeing the whole as an integrated system, for we also need to present this commentary, composed in Proclus' late twenties, as the work of a fresh young scholar deeply influenced by the work of his master Syrianus, and at times struggling towards the kind of system that we can see in the *Platonic Theology* rather than as one who had long arrived; and struggling towards his own integrated understanding of everything within a Platonic text, rather than as one for whom alternative readings were never possible. That Proclus is already a very

⁴ The *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* (once Duckworth and Cornell University Press, now Bloomsbury Academic using the Bristol Classical Press imprint). 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 now over 100 volumes including works from the Aristotelian scholars Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Porphyry, Ammonius, Philoponus, and Simplicius, and a growing number of works by those known primarily as Platonist commentators, including Proclus and Olympiodorus, and others that have more bearing on the reception of Plato than of Aristotle.

⁵ Opsomer and Steel (2003); Steel (2007); Duvick (2007); Opsomer and Steel (2012).

⁶ Griffin (2015, 2016).

Note on the Translation

systematic thinker is clear enough from this text, and there is no need to introduce a stream of further systematic material from elsewhere.

In all six volumes in this series, the text used is that of Diehl. His page numbers and approximate 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 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’ aitiam*, *kath’ hyparxin*) and for adverbs that are terms of art for the Neoplatonists (e.g. *protôs*, *physikôs*). For reasons explained in other volumes this policy may leave everyone a little unhappy.

We use a similar system of transliteration to that adopted by the *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* series. The salient points are summarized as follows. We use the diaeresis for internal breathing, so that ‘immaterial’ is rendered *ajilos*, not *abylos*. 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 upsilon alone as in *physis* or *hypostasis*, but ‘u’ for upsilon when it appears in diphthongs, e.g. *ousia* and *entautha*. We use ‘ch’ for chi, as in *psychê*. We use ‘rh’ for initial rho as in *rhêtôr*; ‘nk’ for gamma, kappa, as in *anankê*; and ‘ng’ for double gamma, as in *angelos*. The long vowels eta and omega are, of course, represented by *ê* and *ô*, while iota subscripts are printed on the line immediately after the vowel as in *ôioгенês* for *φωγενής*. 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

Note on the Translation

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: *proōdos*, 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*, 2 vols. (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)
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)

Almost as important for Book 5 as any other Proclan text is the extant commentary of Hermias, clearly based on Syrianus’ lectures:

- in Phdr.* = Hermias, *in Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, ed. C. M. Lucarini and C. Moreschini (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012)

Proclus frequently mentions previous commentaries on the *Timaeus*, those of Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Syrianus, 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)
 John Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).
 Sarah Klitenic Wear, *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato’s Timaeus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011).

Note on the Translation

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. = E. des Places (ed.), *Oracles Chaldaïques, troisième triage* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996), or in English with the same numeration: Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989)

Orph. fr. = *Poetae Epici Graeci, Pars II Fasc. 2, Orphicorum et Orphicis similibus fragmenta*, ed. A. Bernabé (Munich and Leipzig: Saur, 2005), or *Orphicorum fragmenta*, ed. O. Kern (Berlin: Weidmann, 1922).

References to the text of Proclus' *in Timaeum* (as also of *in Remp.*) are given by Teubner volume number, followed by page and line numbers separated by a stop, e.g. *in Tim.* II 2.19. The volume number may be omitted in the case of references to the immediate context in vol. III. 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.