General Introduction

I. THE STRUCTURE AND CHARACTER OF THE ESSAYS IN THIS VOLUME

The General Introduction to volume 1 in this series provides an overview of Proclus’ Republic Commentary. We discussed the place of Plato’s Republic within the Neoplatonist curriculum and defended the conclusion that, while Proclus’ Republic Commentary is different in character from his (incomplete) line-by-line commentaries on Alcibiades I, Parmenides, and Timaeus, it is not merely a grab bag of disparate materials that is unified only by having the Republic as their subject matter. The seventeen essays that make up the Republic Commentary do cover the dialogue from beginning to end. The essays also differ from one another in character and tone. Some are expressly said to have been composed for one purpose (e.g. Essay 1 arises from a class on the Republic), while others were for special occasions. As we noted in volume I, Essay 6 reflects a lecture celebrating Plato’s birthday. The longest essay in the Republic Commentary, Essay 16, covers the myth of Er in the manner of the line-by-line commentaries and is dedicated to Proclus’ friend Marinus. While it has become customary to see the existing Republic Commentary as composed of essays that once made up a basic lecture course on the dialogue supplemented with special, advanced teaching on select parts of it, we struggle to see any vast differences in the level of the teaching or exegesis involved in the various essays. Any single essay is capable of swinging between fairly banal summary of Plato’s dialogue suitable for beginners and difficult Neoplatonic exegesis that presupposes acquaintance with the full panoply of their elaborately structured metaphysics. So while the Republic Commentary does not have the uniformity of Proclus’ Timaeus or Parmenides commentaries, we think it has more unity to it than a portmanteau of materials – one perhaps even assembled after Proclus’ death. If readers do not find the argument of the General Introduction to volume I in this series persuasive, each of the essays translated in our series is prefaced by an Introduction

1 Baltzly, Finamore, and Miles (2018).
1 For references to the previous literature defending the ‘portmanteau’ understanding of the nature of Proclus’ Republic Commentary, see volume I and Sheppard (2013).
that treats the essay in isolation. In short, you are free to treat them as elements in a portmanteau, but we think it is more illuminating to see them as chapters in a single, more-or-less uniform work whose purpose is to interpret those parts of the Republic that Neoplatonists would find most salient or most in need of explanation.

While volume I in this series translated and introduced Proclus’ essays on Books I to III of Plato's Republic, the present volume contains essays dealing with Books V–X. The longest of these, Essay 13, concerns the mysterious ‘nuptial number’ (546c5–547b) whose miscalculation explains the decline of the ideal polis into the first of the degenerate political orders discussed in Books VIII and IX. Apart from a cottage industry attempting to decipher the complex mathematical instructions of 546b–c that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this short stretch of text has not invited too much contemporary interest. The mismatch in length between Proclus’ 80 pages on Republic 545d–47c and contemporary judgements of its importance has perhaps contributed to the relative neglect of Proclus’ Republic Commentary as a whole. Yet the combined volume of the other essays contained here outweighs that of the essay on the nuptial number and these do deal with aspects of Plato’s text that continue to command the attention of contemporary interpreters.

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Prominent examples of this literature include Adam (1891) and Diès (1936).
1. The structure and character of the essays in this volume

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It must be conceded immediately that Essay 13 stands out, not only for its length but for the character of the commentary on it. It is prefaced with an introduction that re-visits some of the same issues that occupied Essay 1. Proclus treats ‘the speech of the Muses’ as if it were a mini-dialogue contained within the Republic and accordingly addresses its character and style as he did with the Republic as a whole. In addition, his exegesis of the marriage number involves citing interpretations or comments on the subject from a host of predecessors. This contrasts sharply with the Essays 10–12 on the sight-lovers, the sun, and the cave.

If Essay 13 stands apart as seemingly very different from the other essays in this volume – or in the Republic Commentary as a whole – this is perhaps because Republic 545d5–47b1 stands out to the Neoplatonically inclined reader. Modern readers may suppose that the fact that Plato has Socrates call upon the Muses to tell ‘how discord broke out’ among the guardians is simply a literary device. But Plato’s ancient readers were inclined to take seriously the idea that in the dialogues Socrates may utter ‘divinely inspired speech.’ By contrast, Grube’s lengthy (and

4 Modern readers of Plato’s Republic may well be scratching their heads at this point: ‘The speech of the Muses?’ This episode in book VIII 545e–47a does not now attract much interpretive attention. In it, Socrates turns to the Muses to tell the assembled party ‘how dissension first broke out’ among the guardians in such a way as to lead to the first stage of political decline: from the ideal constitution to timocracy. It is they who narrate the details of the notoriously obscure ‘nuptial number’.

5 Cf. Hermias in Phdr. 59.1 Lucarini and Moreschini (2012), where Proclus’ friend and classmate, Hermias, takes very seriously that Socrates is verging on being possessed by the Nymphs at Phdr. 238c.
otherwise helpful) note on the marriage number nicely sums up the lack of seriousness with which modern readers tend to treat the idea that the Muses’ description of the first steps in the degeneration of the ideal polis is importantly different from the surrounding text:

The mock heroic invocation to the Muses and their talking in tragic language should warn us not to take the mathematical myth which follows too seriously or too literally.

(Grube, p. 197, n. 1)

But it is precisely the intrusion of these otherworldly voices into Plato’s dialogue that prompts Proclus to take it very seriously. So the length of Proclus’ treatment of this part of Plato’s text may look eccentric from our point of view. But that may say as much about us and our presuppositions as it does about any deeply heterogeneous nature of the materials assembled in his Republic Commentary.

What about the fact that Essay 13 discusses the views of predecessors in ways that the other essays in this volume do not? It is a familiar observation that Proclus similarly ‘names names’ in his Timaeus Commentary in ways that he does not in the Parmenides Commentary. The Republic Commentary sits somewhere in between: some essays engage with other Platonists, while others do not. Is Essay 13 marked as having a profoundly different provenance from Essays 10–12 and 14–15 by virtue of the fact that Proclus names a lot of names in the former, but none in the latter group of essays? Consider that the Muses communicate through Socrates in a Pythagoreanising manner. That, after all, is the point of the nuptial number. In the Timaeus Commentary, Proclus describes this mode of communication as follows:

[It contains loftiness of mind, intuition (to noeron), inspiration, a tendency to link everything to intelligibles, to depict the Whole in terms of numbers, to give an indication of things in a symbolic and mystical fashion, to lead upwards, to remove one’s focus on particulars, to state with affirmation.


Faced with the mathematically dense and symbolic text of the Timaeus, Proclus frequently resorts to the insights of his fellow Platonists – particularly those who are part of the chorus of Bacchants following after the divine Plato (cf. Plat. Theol. I §1. 6.16–7.8). So when Plato communicates in the Pythagorean mode, this seems to call for Proclus to synthesise a whole team of exegetes in order to properly discern his meaning. It may be that he even imagines a kind of symmetry between the plural voices of the Muses and the plurality of exegetical perspectives that he brings to the task of interpreting them. There is a gap in our text precisely at the point at which Proclus takes up the question
why Plato does not call upon one authoritative voice – the Leader of the Muses (i.e. Apollo) – to prophesy about the sources of the downfall of the ideal polis (in Remp. II 4.11–22). The answer is incomplete in our text, but it begins by contrasting Apollo as the single author of a single cosmic harmony with the plurality of Muses and their pluralised harmonies. Perhaps Proclus supposed that a chorus of exegetes were needed to extract the multi-layered meanings of the plural voices of the Muses.

Apart from the nuptial number, Proclus’ most sustained discussions occur in relation to the virtues and the tripartite soul in Republic IV and in relation to the question of female guardians in Republic V. In the central, metaphysical books of Republic VI and VII, the longest discussion is over the nature of the Form of the Good. These are, of course, still aspects of Plato’s dialogue that are the subject of interpretive disagreements among contemporary philosophers. So Essay 13 perhaps creates the impression that Proclus’ interests in his Commentary are more eccentric (from the modern point of view) than they really are.

If Essay 13 creates the impression that the Republic Commentary is an eccentric and scholastic approach to Plato’s text, Essays 8 and 9 have contributed to the claim that it is a grab-bag of different materials relating to the Republic. Both obviously cover the same ground in general, but the second of the two essays on female guardians relates the views of Theodore of Asine on the question of whether the virtues of men and women are, in fact, one and the same. This led Festugière to comment that:

Essay 9 cannot therefore be regarded as a simple appendix to the previous one (for in this case we would only have Theodore’s contribution and the objection drawn from the comparison with Laws at 256.2 and 256.15–257.6): it must be considered as a new essay on the same subject, perhaps composed long after the previous one. And this proves, therefore, that the Commentary on the Republic is not a continuous series of lessons forming the same course arranged according to chronological order, but rather a collection of essays, the only common feature of which is that they all have the Republic as their subject.6

We have already addressed the question of the unity of Proclus’ Republic Commentary in the General Introduction to volume I. There we argued that, in spite of differences among the essays, there is more unity to

6 Cette IXe Dissertation ne peut donc être regardée comme un simple appendice à la précédente (on n’aurait en ce cas que la contribution de Théodore et l’objection tirée de la comparaison avec les Lois 256.2 s. + 256.15–257.6): il faut la tenir pour une nouvelle dissertation sur le même sujet, peut-être composée longtemps après la précédente. Et ceci prouve, dès lors, que le Commentaire sur la République n’est pas une suite continue de leçons formant un même cours selon qu’elles ont été données dans l’ordre chronologique, mais plutôt un recueil d’essais, dont le seul trait commun est qu’ils ont tous pour objet la République. Festugière (1970), vol. 2, 54 n.1.
them than one would expect of a portmanteau unified only by the fact that the essays deal with the same Platonic dialogue. Proclus does cover the whole work – albeit not in the same way that the line-by-line commentaries on *Parmenides*, *Timaeus*, and *Alcibiades* do. Moreover, there is reason to think that his choices about which questions to pose about Plato’s text respond to ancient sensibilities about the job of the Platonic interpreter. So while the Myth of Er or the marriage number are not central to Plato’s text from our point of view, Proclus’ commentary itself, together with the reports that it contains of the readings of these Platonic passages by earlier Platonists, shows the extent to which ancient interpreters thought these parts of the text were central to understanding Plato’s philosophy. Finally, we observed that even a ‘proper commentary’, like Proclus’ *Timaeus Commentary*, contains some traces of earlier drafts. Thus *Tim.* 35b4–6 is quoted twice and interpreted twice – the first in a more basic way, and the second with more attention to its symbolic significance. So while Festugière’s comment that Essay 9 is not merely an appendix to Essay 8, but a new essay on the same subject, is undeniable, this does not render the *Republic Commentary* any less a unified work than the *Timaeus Commentary*.

2. INTERTEXTUALITY IN ESSAYS 7–13 OF THE *REPUBLIC COMMENTARY*

If Proclus’ Essays 9 and 13 are conspicuous for the way they name the views of other thinkers, then Essays 10, 11, and 12 are conspicuous for the way in which they seek to connect the correct interpretation of Plato’s *Republic* to other dialogues. Proclus explicitly connects the correct understanding of the shadows and reflections discussed in the Cave Analogy to the theory of images in the *Sophist*. Essay 10 also turns to the *Sophist* to shed light on opinion and discursive reasoning, as well as the distinction between a faculty’s power or dynamis and its object. Because of the role that truth plays in the Sun Analogy, *Philebus* 64b, ff. is deemed to be relevant to the correct understanding of what Socrates says here in the *Republic*. As the Introduction to Essay 11 shows, truth is a potent causal principle. It is not merely a property of representations that correctly mirror reality: the ‘light of truth’ constitutes reality from a position high up in the Neoplatonists’ structured metaphysics. Of course, throughout his interpretation of the *Republic*, Proclus takes the *Timaeus* to be relevant to the correct understanding of Plato’s thought. Indeed, the most pervasive theme in Proclus’ reading of the *Republic*...
3. Key themes from the Republic outside Proclus’ Republic Commentary

is the extension of the two-term analogy between the constitution or politeia of the city-state and individual soul to a three-term analogy between the cosmic, civic, and psychic constitutions. Modern readers of the Republic who suppose that the text should be interpreted from just the text may find this disappointing. But often the connections drawn between the Republic and other dialogues are at least creative and invite us to confront some of our deepest philosophical assumptions.

3. KEY THEMES FROM THE REPUBLIC OUTSIDE PROCLUS’ REPUBLIC COMMENTARY

We conclude this General Introduction with a brief consideration of the ways in which the key ideas of the central books of the Republic are interpreted outside the context of Proclus’ Republic Commentary.

3.1. The Republic’s Dialectic in the Parmenides Commentary

Both contemporary interpreters of Plato and the Neoplatonists faced the question of reconciling the dialogues’ various discussions of dialectic. The Republic makes dialectic the distinctive philosophical method through which the guardians know the Forms and especially the Form of the Good (Rep. VII 534b–c). The dialectician is able to ‘give an account of the essence of each thing’. His cognitive state is distinguished from that of the mathematician in its nature – intellection or noësis versus discursive thought or dianoia – and perhaps also in its objects (Rep. VI 511a–c). The movement of thought involved in dialectic is also distinguished from that involved in mathematical thinking. We are told by Socrates that while dialectic treats hypotheses as hypotheses, using them as steps to ascend to an unhypothetical first principle, mathematicians proceed from hypotheses to a conclusion (510b4–9, 511b3–c2). Moreover, dialectic ultimately ‘does away with’ its hypotheses (533c8). Finally, while mathematical thinking involves the use of images, dialectic does not (510d5–511a1, 511b8–c2). So dialectic plays a key role in Plato’s Republic. The authority of the guardians to lead the ideal polis is grounded in the psychic consequences – both in terms of knowledge and character or motivation – that results from their acquaintance with, and love of, the Forms. Dialectic, in turn, is the method through which

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* For a sketch of the contemporary landscape around the topic of dialectic over all the dialogues, see Benson (2006) or, more briefly, Baltzly (2012). Other reference works treat dialectic in the Republic in separate entries from dialectic in, e.g., the Philebus. Cf. Fine (2008).
they gain this acquaintance. But in spite of this key role, Socrates’ remarks on the nature of dialectic are far from clear. The reader is left to wonder in what, exactly, it consists. The explanation of the nature of dialectic we are given does not seem proportionate to the argumentative weight resting on it in the dialogue.

Things become even more puzzling when we look at dialogues other than the Republic. There are, of course, remarks about the method of dialectic in the Phaedrus, Sophist, and Philebus that do not resemble closely the method of dialectic described in the Republic. Here it is the method of collection and division that is identified with dialectic.9 Readers of Plato who take a chronological approach to the dialogues may find this switch unproblematic. Perhaps Plato just changed his mind. But Proclus is not such a reader. So how does he deal with the relation between the different procedures identified as dialektikê?

The relation between the Republic’s notion of dialectic and the method of collection and division emerges in Proclus’ Parmenides Commentary but in a rather surprising context. At 648.1 Proclus takes up the arguments of those who assert that Parmenides’ method cannot be the same as Plato’s dialectic.10 Three grounds are offered for this non-identity between Parmenidean and Platonic dialectic. First, Parmenides urges the young Socrates to engage in it, but Socrates recommends against young people being allowed to engage in dialectic too early (Rep. 537–39d). Second, Parmenidean dialectic is described as an exercise (askēsis) and Proclus takes this to mean that it involves arguing both sides of a question. Thus, he claims, it more closely resembles Aristotelian dialectic than Plato’s. Proclus then summarises Platonic dialectic in a way that resembles the Republic:

Plato’s dialectic is described in the dialogue as leading to the highest and purest stage of knowledge and insight, since its activity is based on intelligible Forms, through which it advances to the very first member of the intelligible world, paying no attention to human opinion but using irrefutable knowledge at every step. (6491, trans. Dillon and Morrow)11

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9 Perhaps most explicitly at Phdr. 266b3–ε1 Τούτων δὲ ἐγώ οὖν αὐτὸ τῇ ἔραστή, ὦ Φαῖδρε, τῶν διαιρέσεων καὶ συναγωγῶν, ἵνα οἶδα τῇ δὲ λέγειν τε καὶ φανεῖν ..., καὶ μέντοι καὶ τούς δυναμένους αὐτὸ δρᾶν εἰ μὲν ἀρθῶς ή μὴ προσαγωγεῖν, θεὸς οἶδα, καλῶ δὲ οὖν μέχρι τοῦ διαλεκτικοῦ.

10 Cf. Steel (1997).

11 τὴν δὲ Πλάτωνος τὸ ἀκρότατον παρ’ αὐτῷ λέγεισθαι καὶ καθαρότατον νοοῦ καὶ φρονήσεως, ἐν τοῖς νοοτοῖς εἶδε τὴν πραγματείαν ἑαυτῆς ἱδρύσασι καὶ διὰ τούτων χαροῦσαν ἐτ’ αὐτῷ τὸ ἕγοιμένον τοῦ νοοτοῦ παντός, οὐ πρὸς δέξαν βλέπουσαν ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ’ ἐπιστήμῃ περὶ πάνων ἀνελέγκτως χρωμένην.
3. Key themes from the Republic outside Proclus’ Republic Commentary

Finally, while Parmenidean dialectic is characterised as like a kind of ‘babbling’, Platonic dialectic is the ‘capstone of knowledge’ (Rep. 534e) which is suitable only for genuine philosophers (Soph. 253e). This final point suggests that Proclus’ Middle Platonic opponents do not sharply distinguish the method of collection and division described in the Sophist (and elsewhere) from the dialectic of the Republic. Or at the very least, Proclus has seen fit to put their arguments in ways that elide the difference since both Republic and Sophist are mentioned in the same breath, as if it were obvious that these things were one and the same, or at least closely related.

Let us set aside as not philosophically interesting the tedious special pleading that Proclus does on behalf of the young Socrates (who is, of course, so obviously talented that he should enjoy an exemption for youthful participation in Platonic dialectic). The overall thrust of Proclus’ reconciliation of the putative differences between Parmenidean and Platonic dialectic is to assimilate collection and division to the method of hypothesis employed in the latter half of the Parmenides. Proclus offers a tripartite division of Platonic dialectic: the kind that argues both sides of the question; the kind that exhibits only the truth; and the kind that serves only to refute false beliefs (in Parm. 654.11–13). The second kind seems to include both Republican dialectic and the method of collection and division from the Phaedrus and the Statesman. As Proclus says:

In another form of its activity, dialectic places the mind at the outset of the region of thought where it is most at home, looking at truth itself, ‘sitting on a sacred pedestal’ (Phaedr. 254b7), which Socrates says unfolds before the mind the whole intelligible world, making its way from Form to Form, until it reaches the very first Form of all, sometimes using analysis, sometimes definition, now demonstrating, now dividing, both moving downwards from above and upwards from below until, having examined in every way the whole nature of the intelligible, it climbs aloft to that which is beyond all being. When it has safely anchored the soul there, it has reached its goal and there will no longer be anything greater to be desired. You could say these are the functions of dialectic spoken of in the Phaedrus and in the Sophist, the former dividing dialectical procedures into two, the latter into four parts.

(in Parm. 653.18–33, trans. Dillon and Morrow)\(^1\)

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\(^{1}\) Ετέρα δὲ ἀναστάσεως ἤδη τῶν νοῶν συνειστάτη ψευδρία τῶν ὄντων καὶ αὐτῆς ὀρώσας καθ’ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἄγνωσθή βάθρῳ βεβώσας, ἢ φησιν ὁ Βουκράτης ὅταν τὸ νοητὸν ἀνελίττειν, δι’ εἰδῶν δὲ πορευομένην ἢς ἢς αὐτὸ καταντήσῃ τὸ πρῶτον, τὰ μὲν ἀναλύουσαν, τὰ δὲ ἀνελίττειν, τὰ δὲ ἀποικιήσαν, τὰ δὲ διερευνωμένα, ἢς ἢς κατάμεθαν εἰς τὸ ἀνατετοῦσαν καὶ τὸν κατὰμεθαν ἓξε τοῦ ἀνατετοῦσαν, ἢς τὸ πάρα πάντα διερευνυμένα τῆς τῶν νοητῶν φύσεως εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ἀναδρόμη τῶν ὄντων, ὡς τὴν ψυχῆς ὀρώσασα τελεύς σύκ ἢ τοῦτο εὑρέτετο κρεῖττον ἔρημόν ἐστι
Steel’s new Oxford Classical Text reveals the extent to which this passage approaches a cento of Platonic passages. The quotation from Phaedrus 247b8 is of course obvious. Steel rightly notes the connection between Proclus’ ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν ἀνελίττειν, δι’ εἰδόν δέ πορευομένην and the double use of the same participle at the point where the divine souls survey the realm of Forms in Phaedrus 247a8–b3 ἀκραν ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπουράνιον. ἡ δὲ τὰ μὲν θεϊν άχματα ἵππος ὄντα χρήσεται ἵππος ὄντα χρήσεται, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα μόνοι. But Proclus’ δι’ εἰδόν δε πορευομένην also echoes the way in which the Republic describes dialectic as ‘moving by means of Forms, through Forms, to its conclusions which are Forms’ (511c1–2). Trans. Grube ἀλλ’ εἰδέσειν αὐτοίς δι’ αὐτῶν εἰς αὐτά, καὶ τελευτᾷ εἰς εἰδη. Now in Proclus’ passage, this movement extends upward rather than downward. So that instead of τελευτᾷ εἰς εἰδη, dialectic arrives at what is first (τὸ πρῶτον). And dialectic’s omni-directional capacity is stressed in ἄνωθεν τε καὶ κάτωθεν. So, it goes through Forms to Forms, but also arises through Forms (perhaps by seeing many kinds as unified by their genus) and descends through Forms (dividing a genus into its parts).

Arising to the first principle and descending again it ‘analyses, defines, demonstrates, and divides’ along the way. Analysing, dividing, and defining are plausibly activities associated with the method of collection and division from the later dialogues. But in the next sentence we find διερευνώμενη τὴν τῶν νοητῶν φύσιν εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ἁπάντων ἀναδράμει τῶν ὄντων which clearly recalls the Form of the Good in Republic 509b (ἐπέκεισα τῆς ὑσίας). The soul is finally ‘safely anchored’ here and Proclus’ language in relation to this anchoring may function to suggest a confluence between Platonic dialectic and the practice of theurgy. So Proclus’ second form of Platonic dialectic – the kind that μόνον τὸ ἄλλης ἔκφασιν ὑσίας (in Parm. 654.17) – seems to combine what is described in the Republic with collection and division and, perhaps, even theurgical practice. So the truth-revealing kind of dialectic is capacious indeed. Where modern interpreters have διαλεκτῆς ὀνομάζειν τὰ ἔργα ἐπέκεινα, ἥκουσα ἤκουσα διαφοράς, τὰ δὲ τετραχῇ τῆς ἄναντες διαλεκτῆς ἔργα τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ἁπάντων ἀναδράμει τῶν ὄντων which clearly recalls the Form of the Good in Republic 509b (ἐπέκεισα τῆς ὑσίας). The soul is finally ‘safely anchored’ here and Proclus’ language in relation to this anchoring may function to suggest a confluence between Platonic dialectic and the practice of theurgy. So Proclus’ second form of Platonic dialectic – the kind that μόνον τὸ ἄλλης ἔκφασιν ὑσίας (in Parm. 654.17) – seems to combine what is described in the Republic with collection and division and, perhaps, even theurgical practice. So the truth-revealing kind of dialectic is capacious indeed. Where modern interpreters have διαλεκτῆς ὀνομάζειν τὰ ἔργα ἐπέκεινα, ἥκουσα ἤκουσα διαφοράς, τὰ δὲ τετραχῇ τῆς ἄναντες διαλεκτῆς ἔργα τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ἁπάντων ἀναδράμει τῶν ὄντων which clearly recalls the Form of the Good in Republic 509b (ἐπέκεισα τῆς ὑσίας). The soul is finally ‘safely anchored’ here and Proclus’ language in relation to this anchoring may function to suggest a confluence between Platonic dialectic and the practice of theurgy.