

PROCLUS



COMMENTARY ON
PLATO'S *TIMAEUS*

VOLUME V

Book 4: Proclus on Time
and the Stars



EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
DIRK BALTZLY

CAMBRIDGE

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 English 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. The present volume, the fifth in the edition, presents Proclus' Commentary on the *Timaeus*, dealing with Proclus' account of static and flowing time – an aspect of Neoplatonic metaphysics that has already attracted significant scholarly attention. In this volume we see Proclus situating Plato's account of the motions of the stars and planets in relation to the astronomical theories of his day. The volume includes a substantial introduction, as well as notes that will shed new light on the text.

Dirk Baltzly is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania and Adjunct Research Professor at Monash University. His recent publications include *Reading Plato in Antiquity* (co-edited with Harold Tarrant, 2006); *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus, vol. III* (Cambridge, 2006); and *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus, vol. IV* (Cambridge, 2009).

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TRANSLATED WITH AN
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Richard Charles Baltzly and Linda Knight Baltzly

ἔσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ᾗπ' ἔσθλὰ μαθήσεαι

(Theognis, *Eleg.* 1.35)

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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 in this series 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.

In all five volumes in this series, the text used is that of Diehl.² Deviations from that text are recorded in the footnotes. 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. Volumes in this series 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

¹ Festugière (1966–8). All the volumes in this series 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 Proclus (1904).

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*).

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 likely 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.

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 *aiilos*, not *abulos*. We also use the diaeresis to indicate where a second vowel represents a new vowel sound, e.g. *aiidios*. 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 ‘rb’ 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 *ώογενής*. 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. Olms: Hildesheim, 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).
Plat.Theol. = *Proclus: Théologie Platonicienne*, ed. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, 6 vols. (Paris: Société d’édition “Les belles lettres”, 1968–97).
Hyp. = *Procli Diadochi hypotyposis astronomicarum positionum*, ed. C. Manitius (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909).
de Aet. = *Proclus: on the Eternity of the World*, ed. H. Lang and A. D. Marco (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).
 John Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

It is now possible to add a collection of fragments by Proclus’ teacher.

- S. Klitenic Wear, *The Teaching of Syrianus on Plato’s Timaeus and Parmenides* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011).

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: Weidmannsche, 1922).

Majercik uses the same numeration of the fragments as E. des Places in his Budé edition of the text.

Finally, we are now able to add a remarkable new reference work on late antique philosophy to our list of standard abbreviations:

- CHPLA = Lloyd Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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.

Introduction to Book 4

THE STRUCTURE OF BOOK 4

Book 4 of Proclus' *Timaeus Commentary* continues the structure introduced at the opening of Book 3. Proclus takes Plato's dialogue to provide an account of ten gifts bestowed on the visible cosmos by its creator, the Demiurge.¹ Each of these gifts makes a progressively greater contribution to the goodness of the Demiurge's creation, rendering it ever more perfect and its life ever more divine and blessed. Book 2 (Volumes III and IV in this series) deals with the first seven gifts of the Demiurge:

1. Being perceptible due to the presence of the elements (*Tim.* 31b).
2. Having its elements bound together through proportion or *analogia* (31c).
3. Being a whole constituted of wholes (32c).
4. Being spherical in shape so that it is most similar to itself and similar to the paradigm upon which it is modelled (33b).
5. Being self-sufficient or autarchês (33c).
6. Rotating upon its axis makes it similar to the motion of Intellect (*Tim.* 34a, cf. *Laws* 10. 898a).
7. Being animated by a divine World Soul (*Tim.* 34b).

Book 4 (the present volume) provides the last three Demiurgic gifts to the cosmos:

8. Time, in virtue of which it is a moving image of eternity had by its intelligible paradigm, the Living Being Itself (*Tim.* 36e–37a).
9. The heavenly bodies in it, which Plato describes as the 'instruments of time' and Proclus as 'sanctuaries of the gods' (*Tim.* 39d; in *Tim.* II 5.28).

¹ Kutash (2011) argues that this notion of the ten gifts structures the entirety of Proclus' dialogue – not merely the commentary subsequent to the introduction of the gifts at *in Tim.* II 5.17–31. I agree that the notion of the ten gifts structures Proclus' commentary in the present volume and the previous two in this series (Book 3). I have some hesitation about the manner in which Kutash thinks that it organises the material in volumes I and II. Moreover, I think that the influence of the ten gifts as an organising principle peters out in Book 5 (the sixth and final volume in this series).

10. All the living things within the visible cosmos make it an even more perfect or complete imitation of its paradigm since the Living Being Itself contains four genera of living things: celestial, aerial, aquatic and terrestrial living things (39e–40a).

Proclus' commentary in Book 4 does not exhaust the tenth and final gift of the Demiurge. The present volume contains his account of the celestial genus of living things. The final section of the present work begins his discussion of the sub-lunary gods, a topic that continues in Book 5. The nature of the breaks between the books, however, finds some rationale in Plato's text. At 40d4–5 Timaeus says that he is finished discussing the visible and created gods. He next turns to a genealogy of the 'traditional gods' such as Ouranos, Okeanos and Tethys, referring to them initially as 'daemons'. In fact, Proclus' discussion in Book 4 is a sort of preface to the discussion of the traditional gods taken up in Book 5, for at the end of Book 4 he raises the question of why Plato called these gods 'daemons'. So Book 5 actually starts with the first substantial discussion of these traditional gods – beings whom Proclus now denominates 'sub-lunary' or 'generation-producing gods'. Allowing for ten pages that form this transition to Book 5, the sections of Book 4 dedicated to each of the Demiurgic gifts are roughly equal – about fifty pages each.

The subject matter of these sections, however, is not as sharply separated as the architectonic implied by the notion of the ten gifts might suggest. The planets involved in the ninth gift come about for the sake of 'distinguishing and preserving the numbers of time' (*Tim.* 38c6–7). Proclus in fact treats this gift as tantamount to granting the cosmos a second kind of time, which he calls 'visible time'. Thus there is a strong connection between the seventh and eighth gifts. Moreover, the Sun, Moon and planets – which are the principal means through which the numbers of visible time are manifested – are themselves members of the class of celestial living beings. Since celestial living beings are the first among the four kinds of living thing granted to the cosmos in the tenth gift, there are strong connections here too. In this introduction, I'll take up three issues that arise in Book 4.

First, Proclus' insistence that the ten gifts bestow *progressively greater* blessings upon the cosmos might seem initially puzzling. After all, Plato himself says that the visible cosmos could not be made eternal in the same manner in which its intelligible paradigm is. So the gift of time looks a bit like a prize for being runner-up. How can the world's temporality be a greater benefit to it than the fact that it is animated with a divine World Soul (the sixth gift)? Doesn't time simply measure the activities of the World Soul and the things that transpire in the cosmos that it enlivens? As we shall see, however, this objection treats time all too passively – as