

MATTER AND THE ONE IN PROCLUS

by

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For Amy Bird

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to describe the relation between matter and the One in the philosophy of Proclus, and to discover how, by their relation, all things exist. The difficulty of this task is that matter and the One are not 'things.' They are beyond being, and both do not exist. Even still, the 'nothings' of matter and the One are also potentially all things, and this power is from their non-existence. The One is nothing in excess (καθ' ὑπεροχήν) and matter nothing in lack (καθ' ἔλλειψιν), and the relation between these two nothings produces the affirmation that is all being. However, matter and the One as principles can only be related through a mediator which must pass through every moment of negation and affirmation and bind them together. This mediator is soul. It is soul alone who brings together negation and affirmation in the self-constitution of its own life. Soul, which is the principle of all generation, reaches out to both extremes and draws the imperfect power of matter into communion with the perfect power of the One. For this reason, as this thesis argues, the relation between matter and the One in Proclus *is* Soul, who makes nothing into a principle and abolishes it again, binding all things together and converting ineffability into moments in the process which is soul's own self-constitution.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

Works of Proclus

El. Theo.

in Tim.

in Parm.

in Euclid.

Pl. Theo.

De Mal.

Elements of Theology

Commentary on Plato's Timaeus

Commentary on Plato's Parmenides

Commentary on Euclid's Elements

Platonic Theology

On the Existence of Evils

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

All beings are embraced in a circle by the gods and exist in them. Thus, in a wonderful way, all things both proceed and have not proceeded forth (*in Tim.* I 209).¹

The Gods know all things together, wholes and parts, beings and non-beings, things eternal and things temporal [. . .] even of matter itself (*Pl. Theo.* I.21).²

This thesis is about matter in the philosophy of Proclus. Speaking broadly, for Neoplatonists matter is the nature residing beneath the corporeal world which we discover when we strip away every attribute and quality and look into the depths of body. It is only discernable when every form and divine gift is precluded from sight, and even then, what we ‘discern’ is but an emptiness. It is the furthest of all things from the One, has no good of its own, and cannot even be said to exist. Even still, as we will see, Proclus insists that matter is necessary. So necessary, in fact, that without it the cosmos could not exist, the Good would not be manifest in the world, and the continuous mediation joining all to all

¹ Proclus, *in Tim.* I 209.28-29: “πάντα δὲ τὰ ὄντα κύκλω περιείληπται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἔστι. θαυμαστὸν οὖν τινα τρόπον καὶ προήλθε πάντα καὶ οὐ προήλθεν.” Text edited by E. Diehl, *in Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 3 volumes (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903-1906). Translations of *in Tim.* I are by or modified from David T. Runia and Michael Share, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus: Book 2: Proclus on the Causes of the Cosmos and its Creation*, Volume 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 2008).

² Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* I.21, 98.7-12: “οἱ θεοὶ τὰ πάντα γινώσκουσιν ὁμοῦ, τὰ τε ὅλα καὶ τὰ μέρη, τὰ τε ὄντα καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα [. . .] καὶ τὴν ὕλην αὐτήν.” Text edited by H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, *Proclus Théologie Platonicienne*, 6 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968-1997).

would be broken. Matter is nothing in itself, but by its nothingness all things come to be. In a strange way then, matter is like the One.

The purpose of this thesis is to describe the relation between matter and the One in the philosophy of Proclus, and to discover how, by their relation, all things exist. The difficulty of this task is that both matter and the One are not 'things.' Neither can be said to exist; they are beyond (or beneath) being. Even still, the 'nothings' of matter and the One are also potentially all things, and this power is from their non-existence. The One is nothing in excess (καθ' ὑπεροχήν) and matter nothing in lack (καθ' ἔλλειψιν),³ and the relation between these two nothings produces the affirmation that is all being. However, matter and the One as principles can only be related through a mediator which must pass through every moment of negation and affirmation and bind them together. This mediator is soul. It is soul alone who brings together negation and affirmation in the self-constitution of its own life. Soul, which is the principle of all generation, reaches out to both extremes and draws the imperfect power of matter into communion with the perfect power of the One. For this reason, as this thesis argues, the relation between matter and the One in Proclus *is* Soul, who makes nothing into a principle and abolishes it again, binding all things together and

³ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* I.12, 57.24.

converting ineffability into moments in the process which is soul's own self-constitution.

For Proclus, the question of matter draws together Plato and Aristotle, and our inquiry will begin from his synthesis of these two thinkers. This is admittedly a difficult place to start, for Plato and Aristotle have accounts of material nature that are, at the very least, in tension with one another. On the one hand, Plato's receptacle from the *Timaeus* (which Neoplatonists call 'matter' even though Plato nowhere uses that name) is a universal nature and a co-cause of all becoming. On the other hand, as Aristotle works out his concept of *hule* he explicitly critiques the Platonists 'universal' account.⁴ Matter, for Aristotle, can only be articulated according to particular substances, and only ever relative to form; it must be the matter of something. Even still, Proclus' own way of talking about matter, and especially matter's relation to the One, requires a synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian concepts, and by examining this synthesis we will begin to discover the concepts and questions that will occupy the rest of this thesis.

We will have many texts from many sources to consider over the course of our inquiry, but in order to see from the beginning how plainly Proclus sets Plato and Aristotle together, let us begin with a passage from his arguments on the

⁴ Aristotle, *Physics* I.9. Chapter two explores this criticism briefly below.

eternity of the world. This text (below) argues that matter's eternity implies the world's eternity. However, in order to do so, Proclus must set 'Platonic' and 'Aristotelian' notions of matter together, and from their synthesis reveals a glimpse of our object—matter's relation to the One in the creation of all things.

Matter is the matter 'of something,' [that is,] of its form. Particular matter (τις ὕλη) is only matter when there is also a form. [. . .] Rocks are not the matter of the form house until they are shaped and fit together, and only when they have received these [qualities]. Just when they truly become matter the form is already present.

Thus, if universal matter on its own (ἀπλῶς ὕλη πάντως) is the matter of all generation and is potentially all things, requiring nothing in order to be matter as the particular kind does (for that which is universal as such and first, requires nothing to be what it is), then it has all form in itself at once. For needing nothing to be matter, it needs nothing to have form.

Thus, in the moment [matter] exists, it has the forms of whose matter it is. Since it is ungenerated and incorruptible it requires no other matter; it is matter simply. And as the forms exist in it eternally, so does the cosmos (κόσμος). [. . .] Thus, the moment the matter of the cosmos exists, so does the cosmos itself.⁵

⁵ Proclus, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, XI: “τινὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ὕλη τοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς εἶδους· καὶ γὰρ ἢ τις ὕλη τότε ὕλη ἐστίν, ὅταν ἦ καὶ τὸ εἶδος· [. . .] οὐ γὰρ οἱ λίθοι τοῦ εἶδους τῆς οἰκίας ὕλη, πρὶν ξεσθῶσιν εἰ τύχοι καὶ ἀρμωσθῶσιν, ἀλλ’ ὅταν ταῦτα προσλάβωσιν· ὅταν ἄρα ὡς ἀληθῶς ὕλη γένωνται, τότε πάρεστιν ἀχρόνως ἤδη τὸ εἶδος. εἰ οὖν καὶ ἡ ἀπλῶς ὕλη πάντως ἐστὶν ὕλη πάσης γενέσεως καὶ ἔστιν δυνάμει πάντα καὶ οὐδὲν αὐτῇ δεῖ πρὸς τὸ ὕλη εἶναι καθάπερ τῇ τινί (τὸ γὰρ ἀπλῶς πανταχοῦ τοιοῦτο καὶ πρῶτως οὐδενὸς εἰς τὸ εἶναι ὃ ἐστὶν δεόμενον), ἅμα ἐστὶν καὶ τὰ εἶδη πάντα ἐν αὐτῇ· μηδενὸς γὰρ δεομένη πρὸς τὸ εἶναι ὕλη οὐδενὸς δεῖται πρὸς τὸ εἶδη ἔχειν· ὥστ’, ἀφ’ οὗ ἐστὶν, ἔχει τὰ εἶδη, ὧν ὕλη ἐστίν. ἀγένητος δὲ ἐστὶν καὶ ἀφθαρτος, ἵνα μὴ ὕλης ἄλλης δέηται ὕλη οὕσα ἀπλῶς. ἔστιν ἄρα καὶ τὰ εἶδη ἐν αὐτῇ ἐξ αἰδίου καὶ ὁ κόσμος· [. . .] ὥστ’, ἀφ’ οὗ ὕλη κόσμου, καὶ κόσμος ἐστὶν.” Text from *On the Eternity of the World: De Aeternitate Mundi*, edited by Helen S. Lang and A. D. Macro (California: University of California Press, 2001).

In the first paragraph, Proclus describes an understanding of matter familiar from Aristotle.⁶ Matter (ύλη) signifies a potential in things, but never apart from the form for which it is the material. Proclus calls this kind of matter, ‘particular matter’ (τις ύλη). Conversely, ‘universal matter’ (άπλως ύλη πάντως, ‘matter wholly in itself’), while it still uses Aristotle’s term, ύλη, is familiar from the receptacle (ύποδοχήν) of Plato’s *Timaeus*, which is the ‘receiver all things’ (τὰ πάντα δεχομένης).⁷ What is most striking, is that Proclus implies these two ‘matters’ have the very same relation to their forms. The presence of matter always implies the presence of its form. For the particular, this is not surprising. Stones are something useful for housebuilding, but they only become the house’s matter once the house actually exists. The material potency belongs to the form’s actuality. Matter and form are present together, but form is always matter’s principle. ‘Thus’ (οὖν), as Proclus strikingly infers, it must be the case that universal matter, which is matter eternally, eternally implies the existence of every form and all cosmos. As Proclus brings Plato and Aristotle together, matter is converted from being an order of receptivity among the forms that actually

⁶ See, for example, Aristotle, *Physics*, I.9.

⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*, 50b. Text edited Ioannes Bunet, *Opera*, Volume 4 (Oxford: Oxonii, 1900). Translations modified from Donald J. Zeyl, *Timaeus*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 1224-1291, edited with introduction and notes by John M. Cooper, with associate editor, D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

exist—the receptive aspect of their order or cosmos—to being a principle which implies the existence of the world.

The key difference is that universal matter is “ungenerated and incorruptible [and] it requires no other matter.” There is no thing that makes the matter of the world ‘true’ material. And because the presence of matter implies the presence of form, universal matter’s eternity necessarily implies the existence of all form in matter and the order of the entire cosmos.

At this conclusion, we are propelled in the direction this thesis will take. For particular matter, form is primary. Particular matter describes an order of particular kinds of receptivity *among forms*. It is the form of stones that are good for house building which becomes the material of an actual house. But for universal matter, the priority seems to be reversed. The receptivity of universal material is not from its form, but from its lack of form. Rather than depending on form for its existence, as does particular material, it is the embodied forms that depend on universal material for their existence. This universal matter, even while it is last and furthest from the One, is somehow primary (or a co-cause with what is primary) to all cosmos, which, as the order of embodied forms, requires universal matter in order to realize its existence. It is as if the things in our world are determined from two sides: by the forms which give all things

their substance, but before this is possible, by a universal matter which is logically prior to the forms because it receives them.

The reason for this conclusion, as we will discover, is that even as matter is the last of all things, it is immediate to the One. The One gives all things as matter receives them, and what passes between is our world. It is also we ourselves who are given and received, and we embrace in our embodied life both sides, all that proceeds from the One and the ineffable reception which is its reflection. We will continue to examine this ineffable relation in the chapters that follow, but there is also another less apparent, but equally necessary aspect to this passage's conclusion.

What is the significance of the fact that it is we ourselves who, as we are given and received by ineffability, give that ineffability its name, calling its manifestation in excess the One and in lack matter. We have been pointing to the conclusion that matter's uncaused priority together with its necessity with respect to the world reveal a causal kinship with the One. However, it must also be recognized that the One is not a cause, but beyond cause. The One is ineffable, and if matter is 'co-cause' with the One, then its causation is also ultimately beyond (or, perhaps, beneath) all thought and being. As we noted briefly above, matter and the One are 'nothings' whose negations produce the affirmations of being (much more on this in chapter four). How is it that these non-essential

super-principles are present as 'causes' in any meaningful way to ordinary beings?

As this thesis progresses, we will find the emphasis beginning to shift from matter and the One to those beings whose existence actually are the relation between ineffable lack and ineffable excess. These principles—matter and the One—are only constituted as principles by soul, and they are constituted as they are 'discovered,' so to speak, in the world which is the mediation of their powers unfolding in generation. Soul constitutes as 'things' that which cannot be a thing at all. Matter and the One 'are not' apart from their relation to one another in the process which is soul. In the cosmic middle where soul as the principle of generation mediates between being and non being, it encounters the ineffability which is its ground. 'Matter' and 'the One' are but soul's names for the unnamable nothings that it discovers when it confronts its own existence in the world. In this way, we will discover that the answer to this thesis' central question—"What is the relation between matter and the One?"—is soul, the principle of the temporal world which expresses the complete mediation between the ineffable nothings above and beneath all things.

This conclusion will clarify as we approach it, but for now it is enough to point out that the two sides to the thesis' question, either 'matter and the One,' or the 'relation' between them are already represented by the two matters from the

text above. On the one hand, universal matter, uncaused and ungenerated, is necessity linked to the One itself. On the other hand, particular matter, which describes an order of receptivity among substances that actually exist, is a way of talking about the ways 'matter' and divine unity become actually present in the world of becoming which is their relation. In the next chapter we will continue to examine these two sides of matter as they appear in Proclus' work *On the Existence of Evils*, where he argues for matter's affinity with One and the Good. From there, we will look to the *Elements of Theology* to see that the two kinds of matter are necessary aspects of two logical structures in the cosmic architecture. The cosmic point of view will move us towards the theological focus of the fourth chapter, whose purpose is to demonstrate that the receptivities of particular materials emerge from the receptivity of universal matter as the Gods themselves make being in relation to one another. And finally, looking from the Gods to the world of becoming itself, we will consider the mediation of soul, the principle who both gives ineffability a name and abolishes it again, bringing to a complete end in itself the cosmic process which is the relation between matter and the One.

CHAPTER TWO: MATTER AND THE ONE

So far, we have been introduced to Proclus' basic understanding of matter in its two aspects (universal and particular), and have been drawn towards the central question they imply. What is the relation between matter and the One? In order to begin our inquiry and to break this one question into its necessary parts, we will turn to Proclus' *On the Existence of Evils*. This shorter work contains a theodicy which defends matter from the charge that it is a principle of evil. This charge comes largely from Plotinus, whose position Proclus explicitly rejects. A consequence in the work is that if matter is not evil, it must be good and bear a relation to the Good itself. As we will see, the two 'kinds' of matter we have encountered so far can also be understood as two sides of matter's relation to the first principle which corresponds to its two names, 'One' and 'Good.' In this work Proclus demonstrates both that the matter's perpetual lack is necessary to the manifestations of the Good and that indeterminacy and multiplicity of the material in each body must still proceed from the One.

Before we begin, we might ask how it is possible to talk about the first principle in different ways and under different names as we imply above. It almost seems to imply two distinct principles, or at least to speak in division about what must dwell in simplicity. The answer is that the 'One' and 'Good' as names of the first do not point to two distinct substances, but to two modes of

revelation by which the first becomes manifest to us.⁸ Let us begin with a passage from the *Platonic Theology* where Proclus describes their distinction:

Of these names, “The One” is the image of the progression of the whole, and “The Good” of their conversion. [. . .] The Good converts all secondary natures, but the One gives them subsistence. [. . .] We transfer names [to the First] by looking to that which comes after, to the progression from, or the circular conversions back to it. Because a multitude subsists from it, we ascribe to it the name, The One, and because all things are converted to it, we call it The Good.⁹

The first is revealed as the One through the subsistence of beings, and as the Good through their conversion. In *On the Existence of Evils* Proclus approaches matter from these two perspectives, looking to a particular dialogue of Plato in both cases. Turning to the *Timaeus*, Proclus demonstrates matter’s relation to the Good with respect to the universal conversion of “all secondary natures.” Then, looking to the *Philebus*, Proclus turns to the matter and the particular in relation to the One which “gives them subsistence.”¹⁰ It is between these two dialogues

⁸ The significance of names for ineffability will be the special subject of the final chapter.

⁹ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* II.6 40.9-41.9: “Πάλιν δὴ οὖν τῶν ὀνομάτων τούτων, τὸ μὲν τῆς προόδου τῶν ὅλων, τὸ δὲ τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς ἐστὶν εἰκῶν [. . .] Ἐπιστρεπτικὸν ἄρα τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶ τῶν δευτέρων ἀπάντων, ὑποστατικὸν δὲ τὸ ἓν [. . .] Τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὀνόματα κἀνταῦθα πρὸς τὸ μετ’ αὐτὸ βλέποντες καὶ τὰς ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ προόδους ἢ πρὸς αὐτὸ κατὰ κύκλον ἐπιστροφὰς ἐπ’ ἐκεῖνο μεταφέρομεν ἐπάγοντες, διότι δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ πάντα καὶ μέχρι τῶν ἀμυδροτάτων ἐπιστρέφεται, τὰγαθὸν αὐτὸ προσονομάζοντες.”

¹⁰ There remains much to be said about the scheme I suggest here, setting universal matter under the Good as illumined by Plato’s *Timaeus* on the one hand, and particular matter under the One as illumined by the *Philebus* on the other. However, one thing that must be noted, is that it implies that Proclus understands what we have so far called Aristotle’s particular matter to be a fundamentally Platonic idea derivable from the *Philebus*. We will look at this relation more below.

that the central doctrine of matter in Proclus, as well as its problems and complexities, will emerge

1

As we turn to Proclus' arguments in *On the Existence of Evils* against the claim that matter is evil, it will be useful to examine the claim itself. We mentioned above that, for Proclus, Plotinus is the primary representative of the negative view. Proclus does not refer to Plotinus by name, but he implicates Plotinus' own treatise on evil which is paraphrased in the very first sentence of the work asking "What is the nature of evil, and from whence does it come?"¹¹ For Plotinus, as Proclus presents his position, matter is the principle of evil because it's nature is to be devoid of all goodness. And Proclus affirms that, in some ways, this conclusion easily follows. If the Good is "the measure of all things, their boundary, limit and perfection," then evil must be the lack of all these qualities, "unmeasuredness, absolute unlimitedness, imperfection and

¹¹ Proclus, *de Mal.* 1.1: "Τὴν τοῦ κακοῦ φύσιν, ἣτις τέ ἐστι καὶ ὅθεν ἔχει τὴν γένεσιν." Chapter and line numbers are from the edition of Daniel Issac, *Trois Études sur la Providence* Vol III: *de l'Existence du Mal* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982). Greek text edited by H. Boese, *Procli Diadochi tria Opuscula*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960). Translations modified from Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, *On the Existence of Evils* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003). Where the Greek text is fragmentary, corrupt, or dubious, the Latin translation of Moerbeke is also supplied. For notes on the complicated history of this text see Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel (2003: 1-10). Compare Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.8 (51): "ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟΥ ΤΙΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΘΕΝ ΤΑ ΚΑΚΑ." *Enneads*, 7 volumes, translated by A. H. Armstrong, (Cambridge / Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965-1988).

indeterminate,"¹² and all these qualities are primarily in matter.¹³ Furthermore, matter could not have these qualities as 'properties,' for it is matter's nature to be entirely indeterminate and without any property or kind whatsoever. This means that if matter is evil, it could not have it as an accident or possession; no, it must be evil in principle.¹⁴ As Plotinus' position concludes, the Good is the first good and ultimately good, while matter has the least goodness and is therefore ultimately evil, both in itself and to other beings.

The problem, as Plotinus puts it in his own works, is that matter "falls short completely" (*παντελῶς ἐλλείπει*), retaining nothing of its origin. Matter is a pure lack, a non-being, and for this reason is opposed to all beings and a principle of evil. It lies, Proclus explains, at the end (*ἔσχατα*) of soul, where it "begs and bothers, and wants to come inside,"¹⁵ and "spreading itself out, it is illuminated but unable to grasp from where it is lit."¹⁶ For this reason, matter "darkens the light" (*φῶς ἐσκότωσε*), turns soul from its source, and "makes evil what it has got hold of by a sort of theft."¹⁷ Matter is a pure unlimitedness which

¹² Proclus, *de Mal.* 30.13-16: "τὸ γὰρ ἀγαθὸν μέτρον ἐστὶ πάντων καὶ ὄρος καὶ πέρας καὶ τελειότης· ὥστε τὸ κακὸν ἀμετρία καὶ αὐτοάπειρον καὶ ἀτελές καὶ ἀόριστον."

¹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴ See Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8 (51) 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.8 (51) 14.35-36: "προσαιτεῖ καὶ οἶον καὶ ἐνοχλεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ εἶσω παρελθεῖν θέλει"

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I.8 (51) 14.38-39: "Ἐλλάμπεται οὖν ὑποβάλλουσα ἑαυτὴν καὶ ἀφ' οὗ μὲν ἐλλάμπεται οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν"

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.8 (51) 14.48: "ὁ δ' ἔλαβεν οἶον κλέψασα ποιῆσαι κακὸν εἶναι . . ."

is incomplete by nature and therefore must ever be opposed to the perfection that is the work of the Good in all things.¹⁸

As we turn to Proclus' response, let us consider first the significance of matter's non-existence, for this is central to Plotinus' charge that matter is a principle of evil. It is useful to note, first, that this is a problem Aristotle himself perceived in his own account of matter. In the *Physics*, when Aristotle introduces the concept of ὕλη, he explains that the Platonists' universal matter equates *potency* and *privation*. In the *Timaeus*, the substrate is postulated as the cause of deficiency and lack in things. But for the substrate to be the cause of lack, as Plotinus argues above, it must be a kind of 'Lack Itself,' since it can have no properties. The problem is, as Aristotle explains in the *Physics*, that this implies

¹⁸ On the relation between matter and the intellectual unlimited in Plotinus: The intellectual unlimited is "born from the infinity, power, or everlastingness of the One." (γεννηθὲν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀπειρίας ἢ δυνάμεως ἢ τοῦ αἰεῖ, II.4 [12] 15.19-20). But, as Plotinus explains, "the Unlimited is also double; and how do they differ?—as archetype and image" ("Ἡ διττὸν καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον. Καὶ τί διαφέρει; Ὡς ἀρχέτυπον καὶ εἶδωλον, Ibid., 15.22-23). Matter's unlimitedness is the image of the intellectual unlimited, and "has escaped from being and truth" (γὰρ εἶδωλον πεφευγὸς τὸ εἶναι <καὶ> τὸ ἀληθές, μᾶλλον ἄπειρον, Ibid., 15.23-24). He uses similar language in another treatise: "Matter is as if cast out, completely separate, and unable to change itself; just as it was non-being from the beginning, so it will always be" (ἢ δὲ ἐστὶν οἷον ἐκριφεῖσα καὶ πάντη χωρισθεῖσα καὶ μεταβάλλειν ἑαυτὴν οὐ δυναμένη, ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἦν – μὴ δὲ ἦν – οὕτως αἰεῖ ἔχουσα, II.5 [25] 5.11-13). Jean-Marc Narbonne points to the significance of Matter's 'escape' in his study *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2011), 31-32. For Narbonne, this passage from Plotinus suggests, contra the position of Denis O'Brien (See esp. 2011a, 2011b, 2012), that Plotinian matter is from intellect and not, in the end, 'made' by Soul—a now long and unresolved controversy. Whatever the significance of this problem in Plotinus, we will find that for Proclus there are also two 'origins' of matter, the supreme principles from which its receptivity proceeds, and particular soul, who discovers and distinguishes (and in a way 'makes') matter as it encounters both being and non-being in the world (see the fourth and final chapters).

becoming arises from non-being without qualification—it cannot be ‘born’ in nothing. For this reason, Aristotle argues,

We say that matter and privation are distinct. Matter may be non-being, but only as an attribute, while privation is non-being according to itself. Matter is nearly substance, while privation in no sense is.¹⁹

The privation of existence belongs to *the process of becoming* and matter is before that process since it receives it. Matter is “the primary substrate of *each thing*, from which it comes to be and which persists in the result without qualification.”²⁰ While privation is the relative lack of completeness in each thing as it gradually comes to be and passes away.

On the one hand, Proclus’ formulation of particular evils in *On the Existence*, is very similar to Aristotle’s description of privation as relative to particular beings. But on the other hand, as we saw in the introduction, Proclus still holds a universal view of matter together with the particular, ‘Aristotelian’ kind. If matter is privation in itself, and if privation is privation of goodness, then how does Proclus avoid Plotinus’ conclusion?

As we said above, in *On the Existence of Evils*, Proclus works out his solution through two Platonic dialogues. By way of the *Timaeus*, Proclus

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Physics* I.9, 192a.3-6: “ἡμεῖς μὲν γὰρ ὕλην καὶ στέρησιν ἕτερόν φαμεν εἶναι, καὶ τούτων τὸ μὲν οὐκ ὄν εἶναι κατὰ συμβεβηκός, τὴν ὕλην, τὴν δὲ στέρησιν καθ’ αὐτήν, καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐγγύς καὶ οὐσίαν πως, τὴν ὕλην, τὴν δὲ οὐδαμῶς.” Text edited by W. D. Ross, *Physics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I.9, 192a.31-32: “λέγω γὰρ ὕλην τὸ πρῶτον ὑποκείμενον ἐκάστω, ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται τι ἐνυπάρχοντος μὴ κατὰ συμβεβηκός.”

considers again matter's necessary complete and utter deficiency, but rather than concluding that this is evil, he demonstrates how it is necessary for the manifestation of the Good. Then, by way of the *Sophist*, Proclus demonstrates that matter's presence in bodies as their multiplicity is not opposed to the One, but rather proceeds from it. Finally, we will begin to see how these two sides go together (the special task of chapter three).

2

In the *Timaeus* the Demiurge looks to paradigmatic being and creates a world of becoming in its image. The world is a "moving image of eternity"²¹ and a "shrine for the everlasting Gods." It exists as it strives to imitate its paradigm, and receives its order as it longs to return to its origin.²² But why is this 'striving' necessary? If the image is caused by a perfect pattern, why aren't the two already alike? Striving for perfection implies a kind of lack or failure, but how can we understand the existence of change and failure in the first place? What is the cause or source of diversion? As the dialogue encounters these problems, it makes a new beginning and introduces the receptacle (ὑποδοχήν).²³ The

²¹ Plato, *Timaeus* 37d: "ἰοῦσαν αἰώνιον εἰκόνα[.]"

²² Ibid., 37c: "τῶν ἀιδίων θεῶν γεγονὸς ἄγαλμα"

²³ Plato calls this receptacle by other names as well, necessity (*Timaeus* 48a), the discordant and disorderly motion (30a), the straying cause (48a), wet-nurse (49a), receptacle of becoming (49a), the mother (50d), the receiver of all things (50b), space (52b), the shaking (52e), the traces (53b), and others (for a discussion of these in relation to one another see chapter four, Van Riel

receptacle, which Proclus takes to be equivalent with ‘universal matter,’ is a co-cause of generation. The demiurge looks to the paradigm as he crafts the world by taking up the disordered receptacle fashioning it in the image of the intelligible.²⁴ The receptacle is a universal potential for order; it is a ‘material’ for all creation. But Proclus must answer the question, how is it possible to argue that the principle of diversion from the good paradigm is itself good?

Proclus understands matter’s ‘goodness’ according to the primary image in the *Timaeus* used to depict the receptacle’s relation to the world. The image is childbirth, where the nothingness of the receptacle is likened to the emptiness of a womb. In a passage that is central for Proclus’ discussion, Plato writes,

This world is of mixed birth: it is the offspring of a union of necessity and intellect. Intellect prevailed over necessity by persuading her to bring what is born, as much as possible, to what is best; and the result of necessity’s submission to wise persuasion was the initial formation of the All.²⁵

The receptacle receives the world in its submission to intellect. In another passage, Plato writes that “it is the receptacle of everything coming to be—a wet-

[2009], and Opsomer [2017]). But Plato does not call it ὕλη, the primary term drawn from Aristotle and used by the Neoplatonists in their interpretation of the *Timaeus*.

²⁴ Ibid., 30a.

²⁵ Plato, *Timaeus* 48a.1-5: “μεμειγμένη γὰρ οὖν ἢ τοῦδε τοῦ κόσμου γένεσις ἐξ ἀνάγκης τε καὶ νοῦ συστάσεως ἐγεννήθη· νοῦ δὲ ἀνάγκης ἄρχοντος τῷ πείθειν αὐτὴν τῶν γιγνομένων τὰ πλεῖστα ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον ἄγειν, ταύτη κατὰ ταῦτά τε δι’ ἀνάγκης ἡττωμένης ὑπὸ πειθοῦς ἔμφορος οὕτω κατ’ ἀρχὰς συνίστατο τότε τὸ πᾶν.”

nurse, as it were.”²⁶ It is the mother of beings, and all becoming is her offspring.²⁷

By these images, Proclus translates the non-being that was such a problem in the discussion’s beginning, into the lack of Plato’s *Symposium*, which is the condition of desire. He writes,

If matter offers itself to be used in the fabrication of the whole world, and has been produced primarily as ‘the receptacle of generation’, and as it were a ‘wet-nurse’ and ‘mother,’ how can it still be said to be evil, and even the primary evil? [. . .] If matter *desires* and *conceives* generation, and, as Plato says, *nourishes* it, no evil will come from it, since matter is the mother of the beings that proceed from her, or rather, the beings that are born in her.²⁸

Far from being evil, matter’s emptiness is the condition of its desire for the Good.

But this is not the same desire that Plotinus describes when he writes that matter

“begs and bothers [soul], and wants to come inside.”²⁹ Matter’s desire in Plotinus

is a neediness which “darkens” and “robs” soul’s light. But Proclus shows that

this desire is in fact the means by which the Good is born in generation.

²⁶ Ibid., 49a.6: “πάσης εἶναι γενέσεως ὑποδοχὴν αὐτὴν οἷον τιθήνην.”

²⁷ Ibid., 50d.1-4: “τὸ μὲν γιγνόμενον, τὸ δ’ ἐν ᾧ γίγνεται, τὸ δ’ ὅθεν ἀφομοιούμενον φύεται τὸ γιγνόμενον. καὶ δὴ καὶ προσεικάσαι πρέπει τὸ μὲν δεχόμενον μητρὶ, τὸ δ’ ὅθεν πατρὶ, τὴν δὲ μεταξὺ τούτων φύσιν ἐκγόνω”

²⁸ Proclus, *de Mal.* 32.1-23: “εἰ τοίνυν καὶ πρὸς τὴν δημιουργίαν τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου τὴν ἑαυτῆς παρέχεται χρεῖαν καὶ παρῆκται πρώτως <ὑποδοχὴ τῆς γενέσεως> ἐσομένη καὶ <οἷον τιθήνη> [Pl. Tim. 49a 6] καὶ <μήτηρ> [ib. 50d 3, 51a 4], πῶς ἂν ἔτι λέγοιτο κακὸν καὶ τὸ πρώτως κακόν; [. . .] εἰ δὲ ... καὶ κυῖσκει τὴν γένεσιν, καὶ – <ὡς φησιν αὐτός> – τρέφει, κακὸν δὲ οὐδὲν παρ’ αὐτῆς μητρὸς οὐσης τοῖς ἐξ αὐτῆς, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννωμένοις.” For the lacuna: “Si autem expetit et concipit generationem, et – ut ait ille – nutrit, malum autem nullum ab ipsa, matre ente, his que ex ipsa, magis autem in ipsa genitis.” Latin text edited by Daniel Issac, *Trois Études sur la Providence Vol III : de l’Existence du Mal* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982).

²⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8 (51) 14.35-36: “προσαιτεῖ καὶ οἷον καὶ ἐνοχλεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ εἶσω παρελθεῖν θέλει”

Proclus demonstrates that while matter cannot be good according to itself, it is good according to the whole. It is necessary because “is everything it is for the sake of the Good and has a relation to the Good.”³⁰ The question has been whether matter is good or evil, but, according to the *Timaeus*, it seems a better answer might be ‘neither.’ Proclus writes,

The cause of all good not only creates goods that are good in themselves, but also that which isn’t simply good by itself, but instead desires the good, and by this desire gives birth to others into being.³¹

How is matter good? Not as something sought for-the-sake-of-which, not as an end. In these terms matter cannot be good or evil. However, even in these terms it is still necessary. Matter “is produced by divinity as necessary, to be necessary for the forms that are incapable of being established in themselves.”³² The Good unfolds to its complete manifestations in generation while Matter conceives those beings that are unable to be born in themselves.

The surprising implication of this conclusion is that, since the goodness of matter is not like any other being, but rather that which the goodness of beings depends on, matter has become co-relative to the Good itself. The Good is

³⁰ Proclus, *de Mal.* 36.16-18: “τὸ δὲ ἀναγκαῖον <τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἕνεκα> πᾶν ἐστὶν ὃ ἐστὶ καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτὸ τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει.”

³¹ Proclus, *de Mal.* 36.32-37: “οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ παρ’ ἐαυτῶν τοιαῦτα παράγειν ἔδει τὴν τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀπάντων αἰτίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἐκείνην, ἢ μὴ ἔστι μὲν ἀπλῶς καὶ παρ’ αὐτῆς ἀγαθόν, ὁρέγεται δὲ ἀγαθοῦ, οὗ καὶ ὁρεγομένη δίδωσιν ἄλλοις γένεσιν εἰς τὸ εἶναι καὶ ὁπωσοῦν ἐπ’ αὐτῆς.”

³² *Ibid.*, 36.21-22: “καὶ γεγονέναι θεόθεν ὡς ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τοῖς ἐφ’ ἐαυτῶν ἰδρῶσθαι μὴ δυναμένοις εἶδεσιν ἀναγκαῖον.”

beyond being and beyond the goodness of beings, since their goodness is its revelation. Matter too, is necessary to being, and desires its goodness, the means by which the goodness of the world becomes manifest. By this conclusion, matter's necessity can only be directly related to the Good itself which begets beings through the series of divine causes even as matter conceives them. Just as we only transfer a name to the Good "by looking to that which comes after;"³³ we only transfer goodness to matter by looking to that which is born. Matter desires the Good for the good of other beings and is co-ordinate with the unfolding of the Good. In conclusion, matter's lack of goodness in itself is linked to the goodness of the Good itself—but what of the unity of the One? For this question we must turn, with Proclus, to the *Philebus*.

3

Even if matter is necessary in a universal way with respect to goodness, we might rejoin, from a Plotinian perspective, that there is still a problem for particulars. Matter still seems to be responsible for everything evil in bodies, their lack of unity, indeterminacy, and unresolved unlimitedness. How is it

³³ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* II 41.2-3: "Τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὀνόματα κἀνταῦθα πρὸς τὸ μετ' αὐτὸ βλέποντες"

possible that this infinity in bodies could be reconciled to the simplicity of the One? For this problem, Proclus looks to Plato's *Philebus*. Plato's *Philebus* contains for Neoplatonists the logic of the One's transcendent causality.³⁴ Socrates explains in that dialogue that "whatever is said 'to be' is both one and many, having limit (πέρας) and unlimitedness (ἄπειρίαν) in itself by nature."³⁵ Every being has a limited and unlimited aspect, and the mixture of these two constitutes every existence. Furthermore, these three principles—limit, unlimited, and mixture—also imply a transcendent fourth, the God who is the cause of the mixture and before all limit and infinity.

For Proclus, the entire problem of relating the One and multiplicity is addressed in this single passage of the *Philebus*. He explains the cosmic implications of these principles in his commentary on Euclid's *Elements*.

These, the two highest principles [limit and unlimited] after the indescribable and utterly incomprehensible causation of the One, give rise to everything else [. . .] From these principles proceed all other things collectively and transcendentally, but as they come forth, they appear in appropriate divisions and take their place in an ordered procession, some coming into being first, others in the middle, and others at the end.³⁶

³⁴ Van Riel explains this reception well in his essay, "The Transcendent Cause: Iamblichus and the *Philebus* of Plato," *Syllecta Classica*, Volume 8 (1997): 31-46.

³⁵ Plato, *Philebus* 16.c.9-10: "ὡς ἐξ ἑνὸς μὲν καὶ πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν αἰεὶ λεγομένων εἶναι, πέρασ δὲ καὶ ἀπειρίαν ἐν αὐτοῖς σύμφυτον ἔχόντων." Text edited by Ioannes Bunet, *Platonis Opera*, Volume 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

³⁶ Proclus, *in Euclid*. 5.18-25: "ἐκ γὰρ τούτων τῶν δύο πρώτων μετὰ τὴν τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀπεριήγητον καὶ τοῖς ἅπασιν ἄληπτον αἰτίαν ὑπέστη τά τε ἄλλα πάντα [. . .], ἐκείνων μὲν ἀθρόως πάντα παραγουσῶν καὶ ἐξηρημένως, τῶν δὲ προϊόντων ἐν μέτροις τοῖς προσήκουσι

The One can be the cause of multiplicity because, transcending the difference between unity and division, it is the cause of both. Every level of existence shares in these two limited and unlimited sides, the corporeal too, where they are present as form and matter. For this reason, matter, together with the whole series of the unlimited must be from the One:

[Plato] produces matter itself and the whole nature of the Unlimited from the One, and in general, places the divine cause before the distinction between Limit and the Unlimited. Thus, he will admit that Matter is something divine and good because of its participation in and origin from God, and that is never evil.³⁷

From the formulation of the *Philebus*, Proclus locates the form and matter of bodies within the limited and unlimited structures of being as a whole. For this reason, while matter's multiplicity is indeed in tension with the principle of unity, this is a tension that is at the heart of the constitution of being itself.³⁸

Proclus explains:

[In the *Philebus* Socrates argues that] unlimitedness is generated from God, and if one must straightaway identify the unlimited with matter, matter is from God, since we must say that the first unlimited and all unlimitedness belonging to being and deriving from a unique case are generated from

καὶ τάξει τῆς προεπούσης τὴν πρόοδον καταδεχομένων, καὶ τῶν μὲν πρώτων, τῶν δὲ μέσων, τῶν δὲ τελευταίων ὑφισταμένων." Text edited by G. Friedlein, in *primum Euclidis elementorum librum commentarii* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1873). Translation by Glenn R. Morrow, Proclus, *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* (Princeton: University Press, 1970).

³⁷ Proclus, *de Mal.* 34.12-18: "ἐν δὲ τῷ Φιλήβῳ καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ὕλην καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν τοῦ ἀπείρου φύσιν ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς παράγων καὶ ὅλως πρὸ τῆς τοῦ πέρατος καὶ ἀπείρου διαστάσεως τὴν θεϊαν αἰτίαν <τιθείς>, ἔνθεον αὐτὴν καὶ ἀγαθὸν διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μετάληψιν καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ γένεσιν εἶναι συγχωρεῖ καὶ οὐδαμῶς κακόν."

³⁸ This tension will be given much more attention in the fourth and final chapters.

God [. . .] What else is the unlimited in body but matter? And what else is limit but form? What else but the whole that which consists of both?³⁹

All unity and multiplicity in being are brought about by the series of limit and unlimited as they are mixed together by a cause beyond both.

The relation between form and matter stems from principles beyond all generation, and for this reason Proclus can conclude:

God is the cause of the existence of limit and the unlimited and of their mixture. This [unlimited] therefore, and the nature of body, as body, must be referred to one cause, God that is, for it is he who produced the mixture. Hence, neither body nor matter is evil, for they are the progeny of God, the one as a mixture, the other as unlimitedness.⁴⁰

Looking again to the passage from Proclus' Euclid commentary above, limit and unlimited are "the two highest principles after the indescribable and utterly incomprehensible causation of the One." The material of bodies is a manifestation of this supreme unlimited mingled with Limit to produce embodied particulars. Moreover, matter in itself must be a pure-unlimitedness caused, in some way, by the unlimited alone—something which we will only be able to examine in a later chapter. In any case, the particular material of

³⁹ Proclus, *de Mal.* 35.6-20: "ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἀπειρίαν γεννῶν. εἰ δὲ καὶ αὐτόθεν τὸ ἀπειρον τὴν ὕλην ῥητέον, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὕλη, εἴ γε τὸ πρῶτως ἀπειρον τὴν οὐσιώδη πᾶσαν ἀπειρίαν μιᾶς αἰτίας ἡρημένην θεόθεν <ἐκγεννᾶσθαι ῥητέον, [. . .] τί γὰρ ἄλλο ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ ἀπειρον ἢ ἡ ὕλη; τί δὲ τὸ πέρασ ἢ τὸ εἶδος; τί δὲ τὸ ἐκ τούτων ἢ τὸ σύνολον;"

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.9-14: "εἰ δὲ καὶ αὐτόθεν τὸ ἀπειρον τὴν ὕλην ῥητέον, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὕλη, εἴ γε τὸ πρῶτως ἀπειρον τὴν οὐσιώδη πᾶσαν ἀπειρίαν μιᾶς αἰτίας ἡρημένην θεόθεν <ἐκγεννᾶσθαι ῥητέον, καὶ μάλιστα> τὴν μετὰ τοῦ πέρατος ποιεῖν τὸ μίγμα μὴ δυναμένην, ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ ὄντος αἰτίου τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτῶν καὶ τῆς μίξεως."

generated body and the universal material of all generation are no longer simply the lowliest or last things to exist. They are even 'something divine and good,'⁴¹ the progeny of the One itself.

4

In *On the Existence of Evils*, Proclus demonstrates the affinity of matter and the One from two sides. First, matter's unlimitedness—even as it is present in bodies—is produced by the One, and together with limit, is the manifestation of the ineffable unity beyond the difference between unity and multiplicity. Second, matter's pure emptiness is complicit with the production of Good. In the procession of all things from the One-Good what matter is that through which the higher principles express their perfection, and that in which secondary beings are born. Bodies require material for their unlimitedness, embodied forms require matter for their completion, all of generation requires matter as the cause of difference and change, the Demiurge must 'take up' matter in order to create, and as we will see in chapter fourth, matter's necessity extends even to the Gods, of whose creative power matter is a reflection. Matter is a necessarily incomplete principle, but through its imperfection, the perfection of others is realized.

⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

Even if the above is an accurate description of Proclus' doctrine of matter, this cursory explanation produces many problems. First, it seems that 'matter,' which we have been referring to as a single principle, really has more than one aspect. On the one hand the bodies that belong to living things are the 'matter' of their souls, but, we can also speak of the 'material' belonging to any body in particular, to the matter universal to all generation, and to the unlimitedness which receives each of these.⁴² And even if some 'last matter' is the pure lack relative to the fullness of One-Good, it is not at all clear how that last is related to all the other 'materials' it implicates. We will examine these diverse manifestations of material receptivity more carefully in the fourth chapter, but before we can understand their structure, we must also discover the order of that structure, the task for the next chapter. The next step in our inquiry is to see the doctrine of Matter discovered in *On the Existence of Evils* worked out according to systematic necessity in the *Elements of Theology*.

⁴² In *de Mal.*, Proclus implies that there are also other 'matters' in addition to these more or less intuitive ones by drawing other terms from the *Timaeus* (the 'shaking' and the 'traces of forms') into the scheme as distinct aspects of Matter at distinct levels—something we will have to investigate later on in the fourth chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: MATTER AND *ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY*

In the present chapter we turn to the *Elements of Theology* which provides the systematic architecture of the doctrine we have discovered so far. Matter for Proclus, as we understand it now, has two sides. First, matter is an infinity in bodies, but an infinity that is a direct manifestation of the unlimitedness of the One. Second, matter is necessary to the complete expression of the the principles which make their manifestation in generation; matter gives birth to the beings that cannot be born in themselves. In the first case, matter is understood with respect to the causality of the One, and in the second, to the unfolding power of the Good.

In the *Elements of Theology*, these same two sides emerge, but with respect to the systematic architecture of the cosmos as a whole. The *Elements* is a systematic theology which proceeds according to an unfolding union of two distinct logical structures which are also relative to the two names of the first, 'One' and 'Good'. Recall the distinction drawn in the *Platonic Theology*: "The Good converts all secondary natures, but the One gives them subsistence."⁴³ The *Elements* describes the synthesis of these two principles as they appear in the world, through the circular logic of conversion on the one hand, and the vertical

⁴³ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* II.6 40.25-27: "Ἐπιστρεπτικὸν ἄρα τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶ τῶν δευτέρων ἀπάντων, ὑποστατικὸν δὲ τὸ ἓν."

logic of participation on the other. The complete system of the *Elements* demonstrates that these two ultimately imply and are resolved in one another.⁴⁴ From this cosmic perspective, we will discover that matter is, on the one hand, set in extreme 'vertical' relation to the One as the last to the first. But on the other hand, matter is also the materials of particular forms through whose 'circular' procession and return matter emerges as the potency of actual beings. Again, the *Elements* describes a vertical cosmic structure in which the One gives all things while matter receives them; but, it is only by the complete circular procession of beings that this relation between first and last can be recognized. In the end, these sides come together and by means of the circular conversion of being the last is also discovered to be closest to the first, the whole is proven to be unified, and the cosmos understood to be truly good.

Stephen Gersh describes the relation between these vertical and circular logics in his study of metaphysical motion in Proclus' system.⁴⁵ As he explains, the structures of spiritual motion are set in a vertical order of complete and incomplete terms that is traversed by the circular motion of causation, from procession to reversion: "A single principle is being passed down the hierarchy

⁴⁴ As we will see, one way this 'end' of the elements is accomplished is through the work's conclusion in soul's descent into body.

⁴⁵ Stephen Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ: a Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

of reality, and [. . .] it begins its course among the highest orders and ends at the lowest."⁴⁶ All existence lies on a grade between the superlative completion of the One and utterly incomplete matter. But that vertical order is traversed by the circular motion of procession, which is a "transformation of power from the complete to the incomplete form," and reversion, which is a transformation from "the incomplete to the complete."⁴⁷ All existence involves this relation of circular transformation and vertical order.

J. M. P. Lowry discusses the *Elements* in a similar way, but emphasizes more radically the immediacy between first and last that a true circularity implies. He explains:

[T]hroughout the linearity [or verticality] of hierarchy is circularity [. . .]. [It is] a linearity which bends back on itself. But, a further question may here arise as to why one should call a double linear movement circular. Why is it not simply pulsating linearity? This would be so if the finality of the πρόοδος was simply to be the farthest point from the linear beginning. But in the [*Elements of Theology*] it is the line bent into a circle. For it [the last] is nearest to the One. Its ἐπιστροφή is immediate. It is the line joining itself to itself.⁴⁸

The whole is a complete circle, a vertical hierarchy which returns to itself. For this reason, according to Lowry's articulation, matter and the One are, in some way, immediate to one another. This is an exciting doctrine with respect to our

⁴⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁸ J. M. P. Lowry, *The Logical Principles of Proclus' ΣΤΟΙΧΕΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980), 38.

central question. How do matter and the One relate?—immediately, as the top and bottom of all things joined ‘itself to itself.’ When we consider Lowry’s comment together with Gersh’s above, they imply together that the immediacy of matter and the One involves, in particular, the conversion of power. We must seek to understand the procession of the perfect power of the One as it passes through the imperfection of matter, and seek to see how this causal immediacy involves every being that proceeds and returns between them. But in order to see these ideas worked out completely, we will go to the text of the *Elements* itself.

2

The foundation of the vertical and circular structures that compose the *Elements* is established in the first thirteen propositions of the work. These first thirteen comprise a logical introduction to everything that follows. In Propositions 1-6 Proclus articulates the vertical relation between unity and multiplicity, and, in Propositions 7-12, he describes the circular motion of the Good, in which multiplicity proceeds and converts to unity again. The two imply and complete one another, and thus, following these two sets of six propositions, the thirteenth describes their synthesis. From this initial series of propositions, we will discover the prototypical logic of the One-Good, and on its basis the necessary place of matter in the whole.

2.1

In Propositions 1-6, Proclus begins with multiplicity but is drawn immediately to the unity that must ground it and the vertical order in which many and one are related. It is impossible, he says in the first proposition, for any multiplicity to exist without sharing somehow in unity (§ 1).⁴⁹ This is because multiplicity without unity would be infinite in every way, would not be a multiplicity, and could not even be said to exist. If multiplicity exists at all, it only exists insofar as it is somehow one, without actually being one lest it cease to be many (§ 2).⁵⁰ This state between one and not-one is called “becoming one” (τὸ γινόμενον ἓν, § 3).⁵¹ It is the mode of any multiplicity that actually is. It must be other than one to be multiple, but it must share in unity in order to exist (§ 4).⁵² Consequently, all which becomes one is subordinate to unity in itself (§ 5),⁵³

⁴⁹ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 1: “Everything multiple participates somehow in unity (Πᾶν πλῆθος μετέχει πη τοῦ ἑνός)”. Text edited by E. R. Dodds, *Proclus: the Elements of Theology: a Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: University Press, 1963); Translationstranslations are either adapted from Dodds or my own. In citations, line numbers restart with each proposition.

⁵⁰ Ibid., § 2: “Everything participating the one is both one and not one (Πᾶν τὸ μετέχον τοῦ ἑνός καὶ ἓν ἐστι καὶ οὐχ ἓν).”

⁵¹ Ibid., § 3: “Everything becoming one becomes one by participating the one (Πᾶν τὸ γινόμενον ἓν μεθέξει τοῦ ἑνός γίνεταί ἓν).”

⁵² Ibid., § 4: “Everything that has become unified is other than the one itself (Πᾶν τὸ ἡνωμένον ἕτερόν ἐστι τοῦ αὐτοενός).”

⁵³ Ibid., § 5: “Everything multiple is subordinate to the one (Πᾶν πλῆθος δευτερόν ἐστι τοῦ ἑνός).”

and Proposition 6 can conclude with a vertical order of three different modes of being one:⁵⁴

1. unity itself, which is unity and nothing else but unity,
2. many-ones, which are a group of undivided unities,
3. the unified, which is a manifold being-made-one.

This is the prototypical form of the vertical order that will be understood later in the *Elements* as participation. Unity-itself is unparticipated, the many-ones participated, and the unified participating. It is this kind of participation which structures the monads and manifolds that comprise the entire cosmos. As unity-itself relates to all unities, so “everything that is unparticipated produces from itself the participated [. . .]” (§ 23).⁵⁵ And as multiplicity depends on unity, “everything that participates is inferior to the participated,” and likewise, “the participated to the unparticipated” (§ 24).⁵⁶ The order and logic of participation is vertical because the higher give the lower their existence, and the lower only exist insofar as they share in what is above them. However, participation is also circular, which brings us to the second crucial point.

According to proposition 6, there are two ways to talk about the presence of unity to multiplicity such that it is ‘becoming one.’ On the one hand,

⁵⁴ Ibid., § 6: “Everything multiple is made up of either those which have become one, or of those which are one, the henads (Πᾶν πλῆθος ἢ ἐξ ἡνωμένων ἐστὶν ἢ ἐξ ἐνάδων).”

⁵⁵ Ibid., § 23: “Πᾶν τὸ ἀμέθεκτον ὑφίστησιν ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τὰ μετεχόμενα [. . .].”

⁵⁶ Ibid., § 24: “Πᾶν τὸ μετέχον τοῦ μετεχομένου καταδεέστερον, καὶ τὸ μετεχόμενον τοῦ ἀμεθέκτου.”

multiplicity depends on unity for its existence, emphasizing vertical order. But on the other hand, unity must belong in some real way to the multiplicity according to its own existence. In the proof of proposition 6, Proclus reasons that since there can be no pure plurality, the many which is being made one must be, at bottom, composed of unities that are indivisible and completely one. As Dodds explains, every plurality “must consist either (a) of indivisible units, or (b) of unified groups ultimately analysable into such units.”⁵⁷ In the end, that pure unity is not just the source of all plurality, but that all plurality is also composed of pure unities and this arrangement of unity belongs necessarily to what it is. The concluding insight of proposition 6 will require more time and consideration to unpack. For now, one thing is clear. The existence of plurality cannot simply be described by its ‘vertical’ dependence on unity, for this dependence implies an integrity in its own proper existence and a circular conversion which is its structure.

2.2

With the fundamental order of participation in place, propositions 7-12 go on to express the circular dynamic which passes from one to many and back again. This circular logic is the logic of the Good, that from which all proceed and

⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 192.

to which all convert, the first and final cause. Everything is what it is by virtue of the good it pursues. For this reason, a thing's good must be greater than it, and the good of a being must also be its cause (§ 7).⁵⁸ Moreover, every particular good has its basis in the pure Good (§ 8),⁵⁹ and like unity, there are three modes of goodness:

1. the Good itself, which is good and nothing else but good,
2. the self-sufficient, which has its good from itself,
3. the dependant, which requires some other good for its completion (§§ 9-10).⁶⁰

In this order, the lower is caused by the higher and strives for the higher for its own completion. Thus, the second series concludes with the joint expressions, on the one hand, that "everything that exists proceeds from a single first cause" (§ 11),⁶¹ and on the other, that "every being's principle and first cause is the Good" (§ 12).⁶² The Good is beginning and end; it is both the ruling determination in a being's own self-sufficing pursuit of unity and the source of its unity and existence altogether.

⁵⁸ Ibid., § 7: "Everything productive is greater than what it produces (Πᾶν τὸ παρακτικὸν ἄλλου κρείττον ἐστὶ τῆς τοῦ παραγομένου φύσεως)."

⁵⁹ Ibid., § 8: "Everything that participates *some good* is subject to the *first good* which is nothing but the good (Πάντων τῶν ὁπωσοῦν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μετεχόντων ἡγείται τὸ πρῶτως ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὃ μηδὲν ἐστὶν ἄλλο ἢ ἀγαθόν)."

⁶⁰ Ibid., § 9: "Everything self-sufficient in existence or activity is greater than that which only has its existence by depending on some other being (Πᾶν τὸ αὐτάρκες ἢ κατ' οὐσίαν ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν κρείττον ἐστὶ τοῦ μὴ αὐτάρκου ἀλλ' εἰς ἄλλην οὐσίαν ἀνηρημένου τὴν)." § 10: "Everything self-sufficient is inferior to the simply Good (Πᾶν τὸ αὐτάρκες τοῦ ἀπλῶς ἀγαθοῦ καταδεέστερόν ἐστι)."

⁶¹ Ibid., § 11: "Πάντα τὰ ὄντα πρόεισιν ἀπὸ μιᾶς αἰτίας, τῆς πρῶτης."

⁶² Ibid., § 12: "Πάντων τῶν ὄντων ἀρχὴ καὶ αἰτία πρωτίστη τὸ ἀγαθόν ἐστίν."

This circular order is the causal structure by which all beings subsist, remaining in their cause, proceeding in their existence, and returning to their cause as they exercise their own proper activity. As this logic develops, Proclus explains, “Everything that proceeds from any principle and reverts upon it has a circular activity [. . .] Thus, all things proceed in a circle, from their causes to their causes again. [. . .] For out of the beginning all things are, and towards it all return” (§ 33).⁶³ Plurality only proceeds insofar as it still remains, and only converts as the completion of its procession’s good. The beginning and end of every being are the same, and as this circular movement implies, the vertical and circular must ultimately be two aspects of one complete whole.

2.3

Proposition 13 draws the vertical and circular together, concluding this logical introduction to the *Elements* with the confession that ultimately, the One and the Good are the same. An existing manifold implies a transcendent unity on which it depends and in which it participates. Then, the causal movement proceeds from the Good to its progeny, and towards the final Good again. Ultimately these two must come together. The circular causal movement of the

⁶³ Ibid., § 33: “Πάν τὸ προϊὸν ἀπὸ τινος καὶ ἐπιστρέφον κυκλικὴν ἔχει τὴν ἐνέργειαν. [. . .] ὅθεν δὴ πάντα κύκλω πρόεισιν ἀπὸ τῶν αἰτίων ἐπὶ τὰ αἴτια. [. . .] ἀπὸ γὰρ ἐκείνης πάντα καὶ πρὸς ἐκείνην.”

Good is the completion of the hierarchy from the One; and, the hierarchy from the One is the context in which the Good proceeds. Thus, as this introduction to the *Elements* concludes: “Every good unifies that which participates it, everything unified is good, and the Good identical to the One” (§ 13).⁶⁴

The circular and hierarchical are the distinct but co-relative sides to the single reality remaining in, proceeding from, and converting back to the One-Good, and it is only their synthesis that constitutes the real existence of beings. On the side of the vertical, “everything that is complete proceeds to generate those things which it is capable of producing, imitating in its turn the one, original principle of the universe” (§ 25).⁶⁵ The consequence is that everything a principle produces, and everything those effects produce in turn belong to the completion of that first cause: “that [first] principle, because of its own goodness, is the unitary substance of all that is” (§ 25.3-4).⁶⁶ This unfolding completion passes on from one principle to another in the circular motion of procession and return: “In like manner the principles consequent upon it are impelled because of their proper completeness to generative further principles inferior to their own

⁶⁴ Ibid., § 13: “Πάν ἀγαθὸν ἐνωτικὸν ἐστὶ τῶν μετεχόντων αὐτοῦ, καὶ πᾶσα ἔνωσις ἀγαθόν, καὶ τὰγαθὸν τῷ ἐνὶ ταυτόν.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., § 25: “Πάν τὸ τέλειον εἰς ἀπογεννήσεις πρόεισιν ὧν δύναται παράγειν, αὐτὸ μιμούμενον τὴν μίαν τῶν ὅλων ἀρχήν.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., § 25.3-4: “ὡς γὰρ ἐκείνη διὰ τὴν ἀγαθότητα τὴν ἑαυτῆς πάντων ἐστὶν ἐνιαίως ὑποστατικὴ τῶν ὄντων”

being" (§ 25.5-7).⁶⁷ Everything proceeds as the expression of the perfection of the first, and converts in the completion of their own perfection producing their own manifold.

The place of matter in these movements will become clear as we follow the unfolding of this synthesized logic to the very end of the return. At this end we will discover that the union of the vertical and circular in the *Elements* produces a cosmos in which causal movement does not simply flow downwards to the end of its power. Instead, as proposition 6 implies, the unparticipated must be present both beyond and within (or, perhaps, beneath) the manifolds that proceed from them. That the unparticipated monads exist beyond their manifolds as cause is clear enough. But how is it possible to say that they are also present, in some way, within or beneath? As matter emerges explicitly in later propositions we will see that as all things proceed from the One, there is an inverse motion of reversion from matter which is reflective of all unparticipated causality.

3

In a number of key propositions midway through the *Elements of Theology*, matter emerges as the receptive side of the comprehensive power of the One

⁶⁷ Ibid., § 25.5-7: "οὕτω καὶ τὰ μετ' ἐκείνην διὰ τὴν τελειότητα τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἄλλα γεννᾶν ἐπείγεται καταδεέστερα τῆς ἑαυτῶν οὐσίας."

revealed in the dependence of secondary beings on their causes for their completion. Secondary being is the incomplete and divided existence that belongs to the temporal world of sense experience, the world of process and generation. If we consider the world of generation according to the principles we have already discovered, it becomes clear that incomplete beings cannot simply proceed in to existence from the power of their perfect causes as the perfect proceed from one another. Instead, the incomplete are completed in another; the incomplete can only proceed insofar as they are also received.

As we will see, the existence of divided beings is only possible as they share in the unity which comprehends them. Proclus must show that the self-complete includes the incomplete in their own perfection. The temporal can only proceed from the productive power of the eternal if it is received by a receptive principle that has already arrived before hand, from a productive principle even more potent. Matter, to put it simply, is this inverse power of the eternal causes, and ultimately of the One itself.

3.1

We arrive at these conclusions starting from the principle that whatever produces an effect, on account of being prior ($\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu$ προτέρων), also determines

everything that effect causes in turn (τὰ δεύτερα, § 56).⁶⁸ The later only produce effects by virtue of what they receive from their former. This implies that the prior causes also produce the effects caused by their offspring, and produce them to an even greater degree. But, crucially, since the prior is active *before* (πρὸ) the later, it will also go on producing more effects *after* (μετά) the lower reach the limit of their power (§ 57).⁶⁹

In such an order where the prior comprehends the effects of the later, the later are compounded of more and more causes and therefore are more and more complex than their parents (§ 58).⁷⁰ The result is that embodied soul is the most complex of all beings, and for this reason, it is also the end of the *Elements of Theology* (§ 211). Partial, embodied soul is begotten by the entire series of divine causes, sharing in all as one begotten by all. After soul, as the later causes reach the limit of their power and the prior continue to be effective, their effects become more simple again. Rocks are the products of fewer causes than a human being, and matter again, of even fewer than rocks. The last terms are once again

⁶⁸ Ibid., § 56: “Everything produced by secondary causes is also produced, to an even greater degree, by those prior causes from which even the secondary themselves derive (Πᾶν τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν δευτέρων παραγόμενον καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν προτέρων καὶ αἰτιωτέρων παράγεται μειζόνως, ἀφ’ ὧν καὶ τὰ δεύτερα παρήγετο).”

⁶⁹ Ibid., § 57: “Every cause is both active before its effects and gives rise to more terms after them (Πᾶν αἴτιον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ αἰτιατοῦ ἐνεργεῖ καὶ μετ’ αὐτὸ πλειόνων ἐστὶν ὑποστατικόν).”

⁷⁰ Ibid., § 58: “Everything produced by a greater number of causes is more composite (συνθετώτερόν) than that produced by fewer (Πᾶν τὸ ὑπὸ πλειόνων αἰτίων παραγόμενον συνθετώτερόν ἐστι τοῦ ὑπὸ ἐλαττόνων παραγομένου).”

simple, the product of fewer and fewer causes. And for this reason, the last are arranged in an order that reflects the first. The simplest terms are both superior (κρεῖττον) and inferior (χειρόν) to the complex life of what resides in the middle (§ 59),⁷¹ where soul and the world of becoming live in a complexity that draws together the diverse effects of the simple.

Finally, we can see that matter is relative directly and without mediation to the One alone:

The last (τὸ ἔσχατον) is, like the first (τὸ πρῶτον), perfectly simple, since it proceeds from the First alone (ἀπὸ μόνου πρόεισι τοῦ πρώτου); but the first is simple as being above (τὸ κρεῖττον) all composition, the other as being beneath (τὸ χειρόν) it. And the same reasoning applies to all other terms (§ 59.9-12).⁷²

When the properties from all secondary causes are stripped away, at cosmic bottom lies a nature like the One alone, caused by the One alone, and with no other comparison. In accord with the argument of propositions 1-6, the conclusion is that all forms of multiplicity are comprehended by forms of unity. The simple is both before and after the divided, and the divided depends entirely on the simple for its existence.

3.2

⁷¹ Ibid., § 59: "Everything substantially simple is either superior or inferior to composite things (Πάν τὸ ἀπλοῦν κατ' οὐσίαν ἢ κρεῖττον ἔστι τῶν συνθέτων ἢ χειρόν)."

⁷² Ibid., § 59.9-12: "διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον τῶν ὄντων ἀπλοῦστα τὸν, ὥσπερ τὸ πρῶτον, ὅτι ἀπὸ μόνου πρόεισι τοῦ πρώτου· ἀλλ' ἢ ἀπλότης ἢ μὲν κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον ἔστι πάσης συνθέσεως, ἢ δὲ κατὰ τὸ χειρόν. καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων ὁ αὐτός ἔστι λόγος."

If simplicity truly comprehends division, the divided and incomplete must share in the completion of the simple and perfect. The perfect must have a power that includes the imperfect. The simple and undivided have greater power (δύναμις) which gives rise to the 'wholes' of divided beings, to which the later causes contribute according to part (§ 60).⁷³ Thus, power itself is greater if undivided (§ 61),⁷⁴ producing those undivided attributes in the beings they cause. While those causes closest to the One are fewer in number than those more remote, they are still in their simplicity more powerful than the groups of greater number (§ 62).⁷⁵

On the one hand, these propositions produce the conclusion we would expect: the One is the simplest term and therefore has the greatest power, productive of all other powers. But, on the other hand, since simplicity is both prior and posterior to divided being, must the hierarchy then have two sources of power? One would be from the superlative simplicity of the One, and the other from matter which, being from the One alone, is also absolutely simple.

⁷³ Ibid., § 60: "Every cause of more effects is greater than that which has the power for fewer and produces in part what another makes whole (Πᾶν τὸ πλειόνων αἴτιον κρείττον ἐστὶ τοῦ πρὸς ἐλάττονα τὴν δύναμιν λαχόντος καὶ μέρη παρὰ γόντος ὧν θάτερον ὅλων ὑποστατικόν ἐστίν)."

⁷⁴ Ibid., § 61: "Every power is greater if it be undivided, and less if it be divided. (Πᾶσα δύναμις ἀμέριστος μὲν οὖσα μείζων ἐστὶ, μεριζομένη δὲ ἐλάττων)."

⁷⁵ Ibid., § 62: "Every group nearer to the one has fewer members than those remote, but is greater in power (Πᾶν πλῆθος ἐγγυτέρω τοῦ ἐνὸς ὄν ποσῶ μὲν ἐστὶ τῶν πορρωτέρω ἔλαττων, τῇ δυνάμει δὲ μείζων)."

How could matter, which is sterile and a cause of nothing (§ 25), be said to have a power, and a 'greater' power at that?

The answer, which we have noted already, is that 'power' in the *Elements* has two aspects, the complete and the incomplete where the incomplete belongs to the complete expression of perfect power. In order to get here, we must follow Proclus and make a new distinction. Proclus explains that every unparticipated cause actually gives rise to *two* series of effects, first one of enduring participations (ἀεὶ καὶ συμφυῶς μετέχουσι) and then one of contingent participations (ποτὲ μετέχουσι, § 63).⁷⁶ The unparticipated exists in perfect eternity, the enduring are complete in themselves, and the contingent are incomplete. This is a crucial point in the logic of the *Elements*. It is not surprising that the contingent are incomplete, but Proclus does not leave the contingent in its partial existence, dwindling at the end of procession. No, in accord with what we have discovered above, he explains that the incomplete are "illuminations that have their substance in something else" (ἐλλάμψεων ἐν ἑτέροις τὴν ὑπόστασιν κεκτημένων, § 64).⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., § 63: "Everything unparticipated gives rise to two orders of participated terms, one only sometimes participating, and the other participating perpetually of their own (Πᾶν τὸ ἀμέθεκτον διττὰς ὑφίστησι τῶν μετεχομένων τὰς τάξεις, τὴν μὲν ἐν τοῖς ποτὲ μετέχουσι, τὴν δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἀεὶ καὶ συμφυῶς μετέχουσι)."

⁷⁷ Ibid., § 64: "Every archetypal unity gives rise to two series, the one made up of substances which are self-complete, the other of illuminations which only have their substance in something else" (Πᾶσα ἀρχικὴ μονὰς διττὸν ὑφίστησιν ἀριθμόν, τὸν μὲν αὐτοτελῶν ὑποστάσεων, τὸν δὲ

We can think of the illuminations on their own, as incomplete ‘images’ (εἰκονικῶς) of their causes, but Proclus is clear that we must also consider the effect’s own existence (ὑπαρξιν), in its own place, and as distinct existence (§ 65).⁷⁸ But to have existence is to be complete. How, therefore, can the contingent, which are incomplete, be said to exist? The difference is that the incomplete is made perfect *in another*:

Either we see the effect in the cause (since every cause comprehends its effect before it proceeds [. . .]), or the cause in the effect (since the effect participates its cause revealing the primary existence it follows), or else we contemplate each thing in its own station [. . .] subsisting each in its own place (§ 65.3-11).⁷⁹

The incomplete, as ‘illuminations,’ are born in another that receives them even as it is illuminated by them. The power to receive is the power from matter’s simplicity. “Every principal cause that is more universal (τὸ ὀλικώτερον, or “more whole”) both irradiates before the parts into their participants and are

ἐλλάμψεων ἐν ἑτέροις τὴν ὑπόστασιν κεκτημένων). Proclus’ use of ἐλλάμψεων here both reminds us of Plotinus’ comment that Matter “is illuminated but unable to grasp from where it is lit,” (I.8 (51) 14.39: ἀφ’ οὗ μὲν ἐλλάμπεται οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν) and separates him from the Plotinian view. Where Matter, for Plotinus, is a principle robbing beings of their wholeness, in Proclus it is only by means of Matter that the contingent is brought to completion.

⁷⁸ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 65: “Everything that exists in any way has being either as a principal cause, as an existence, or as a participation, like an image (Πᾶν τὸ ὅπως οὖν ὑφ’ ἑστέος ἢ κατ’ αἰτίαν ἔστιν ἀρχοειδῶς ἢ καθ’ ὑπαρξιν ἢ κατὰ μέθεξιν εἰκονικῶς).”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, § 65.3-11: “ἢ γὰρ ἐν τῷ παράγοντι τὸ παραγόμενον ὁρᾶται, ὡς ἐν αἰτία προὑπάρχον, διότι πᾶν τὸ αἴτιον ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸ αἰτιατὸν προείληφε, πρῶτως ὃν ὅπερ ἐκεῖνο δευτέρως· ἢ ἐν τῷ παραγομένῳ τὸ παράγον (καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο, μετέχον τοῦ παράγοντος, ἐν ἑαυτῷ δείκνυσι δευτέρως ὃ τὸ παράγον ὑπάρχει πρῶτως)· ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ τάξιν ἕκαστον θεωρεῖται, . . .[. . .] ὑπαρξιν ἐν τῇ ἑαυτοῦ τάξει ἕκαστον.”

later to withdraw from their participation" (§ 70).⁸⁰ In the divided offspring of eternal causes, there is an order of receptive substrates determined by the order of the causes they proceed from:

Every principal cause that is more universal and has a higher rank is shared by its offspring according to the irradiations from them as they become a substrate for the more partial gifts; and the irradiations from the prior receive those proceeding from that later which are founded upon them (§ 71.1-6).⁸¹

Those last things which proceed from first causes, in their persisting, but incomplete power, serve as a substrate for the contingent products of secondary and consequent causes. From this emerges an order in participation:

Successive rays strike downwards upon the same recipient, the more universal [or more whole] causes affecting it first, and the more specific supplementing these by offering their own gifts upon the participants (§ 71.6-10).⁸²

Corporeal existence resides between simplicities at the top and bottom of the cosmos. The first simplicities are complete and self-perfecting, while the last are incomplete and receptive images of the first: "Everything which has the position of a substrate in participants proceeds from more complete and more universal

⁸⁰ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 70: "Πᾶν τὸ ὀλικώτερον ἐν τοῖς ἀρχηγικοῖς καὶ πρὸ τῶν μερικῶν εἰς τὰ μετέχοντα ἐλλάμπει καὶ δεύτερον ἐκείνων ἀπολείπει τὸ μετασχόν."'

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, § 71.1-6: "Πάντα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἀρχηγικοῖς αἰτίοις ὀλικώτερον καὶ ὑπερτέρον τάξιν ἔχοντα ἐν τοῖς ἀποτελέσμασι κατὰ τὰς ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἐλλάμψεις ὑποκείμενά πως γίνεται ταῖς τῶν μερικωτέρων μεταδόσεσι· καὶ αἱ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνωτέρων ἐλλάμψεις ὑποδέχονται τὰς ἐκ τῶν δευτέρων προόδους, ἐκεῖναι δὲ ἐπὶ τούτων ἐδράζονται."

⁸² *Ibid.*, § 71.6-10: "καὶ οὕτω προηγούμενοι μεθέξεις ἄλλαι ἄλλων, καὶ ἐμφάσεις ἄλλαι ἐπ' ἄλλαις ἄνωθεν εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ φοιτῶσιν ὑποκείμενον, τῶν ὀλικωτέρων προενεργούντων, τῶν δὲ μερικωτέρων ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκείνων ἐνεργείαις τὰς ἑαυτῶν μεταδόσεις χορηγούντων τοῖς μετέχουσιν."

causes (§ 72)."⁸³ The contingent existence of generation is received in layers by the effects that arrived beforehand, effects nested in effects, growing in complexity.

4

There are two sides to this conclusion. First, the perfection of contingent existence only unfolds through matter. And second, contingent existence, as it is perfected, is that through which matter is 'drawn back' to the One. These two sides are the result of matter ultimately belonging to the relation of power with itself in its perfect and imperfect forms. As Proclus will go on to explain, "every power is perfect or imperfect (§ 78),"⁸⁴ and "everything that comes to be arises from the two (§ 79)."⁸⁵ On the one hand, the One is the superlative excess, the perfect power which determines and comprehends everything in itself. On the other hand, the matter from the One alone is superlative lack, ever incomplete potential which desires, requires, and receives all things in itself while remaining nothing. But as proposition 71 makes clear, while we have been discussing a matter in the singular, there is actually substrate, or material, relative to every perfect cause. What we have been calling matter in the corporeal existence of

⁸³ Ibid., § 72: "Πάντα τὰ ἐν τοῖς μετέχουσιν ὑποκειμένων ἔχοντα λόγον ἐκ τελειοτέρων πρόεισι καὶ ὀλιγωτέρων αἰτίων."

⁸⁴ Ibid., § 78: "Πᾶσα δύναμις ἢ τελεία ἐστὶν ἢ ἀτελής."

⁸⁵ Ibid., § 79: "Πᾶν τὸ γινόμενον ἐκ τῆς διττῆς γίνεται δυνάμεως."

temporal reality, is really the aggregation of the illuminations of many discrete eternal potencies that become the parts relative to embodied wholes. We can speak of a singular matter, especially with respect to the last simplicity proceeding from the first alone. But we must also speak of many materials, each proceeding successively from unparticipated principles, and each being received in the illuminations of principles more universal.

On the one hand the matter which proceeds from the unparticipated and ultimately from the One alone is the ground of all generation. As matter receives the effects of the more proximate causes, the world of contingent beings comes to belong to the perfection of the unparticipated which is expressed through the material substrates which are the reflection and final moments of their power. But on the other hand, these material potencies are also themselves incomplete illuminations only comprehensible according to the perfection of the beings born in generation, and ultimately in the embodied life of the human being. This is why the *Elements* concludes with the complete descent of partial soul into body: “Every particular soul which descends into process descends entirely and there is no part remaining above as it descends.”⁸⁶ It is the incomplete materials relative to their perfect causes that make possible their unified expression

⁸⁶ Ibid., § 211: “Πᾶσα μερικὴ ψυχὴ κατιοῦσα εἰς γένεσιν ὅλη κάτεισι, καὶ οὐ τὸ μὲν αὐτῆς ἄνω μένει, τὸ δὲ κάτεισιν.”

through time. But at the same time, it is the embodied life of souls that draws these two sides of the unparticipated together in their complete existence made up of divided irradiations. Thus, divided beings never leave their eternal causes, residing ever between their perfect power and imperfect reflections, and in the next two chapters we must consider this conclusion in more detail. First, in the fourth chapter we will seek to better understand the divine processions of which matter is a reflection. Second, in the last chapter, we will seek to see how it is that the life of soul in generation mediates the entire series of material and divine principles.

CHAPTER FOUR: MATTER AND THE GODS

The things in this world which appear to be more imperfect are the products of more sovereign powers in the intellectual world which, because of their indescribable plenitude of being, are able to penetrate to the lowest grades of existence, and the things here imitate in the indefiniteness of their own nature the ineffable existence of those higher powers. The substrate therefore bears their reflections, I mean the one substrate as well as the many and diverse kinds of receptivity by which the things here are disposed towards desire of the Forms, and of the rich plenitude of the texture of the demiurgic reason-principles. Endowed with these aptitudes, the substrate receives the visible cosmos and participates in the whole process of creation (Proclus, *in Parm.* IV 845.3-12).⁸⁷

From the *Elements of Theology*, we learned that corporeal beings are brought about by orders of simple causes whose effects are received in a corresponding order of material substrates. The result is a cosmos in which the most supreme and most lowly principles bear an inverse likeness to one another. In Proclus' commentaries we find the same doctrine at work. Consider the passage above, where Proclus discusses the union of forms and matter. The things that "appear more imperfect" are products of "more sovereign powers" and the indefiniteness of the corporeal imitates "their ineffable existence." The substrates "bear their

⁸⁷ Proclus, *in Parm.* IV 845.3-12: "τὰ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα δοκοῦντα εἶναι ἀτελέστερα τῶν ἀρχικωτέρων ἐστὶ δυνάμεων ἐν ἐκείνοις ἀποτελέσματα, διὰ τὴν ἐκείνων ἀπερίγραφον περιουσίαν ἄχρι καὶ τῶν τελευταίων προϊέναι δυναμένων, καὶ τῷ ἀορίστῳ τῆς ἑαυτῶν φύσεως μιμεῖται τὴν ἐκείνων ἄρρητον ὑπαρξίν· ἐκείνων δ' οὖν ἔχει τὰς ἐμφάσεις τὸ ὑποκείμενον, {τό} τε ἐν λέγω καὶ τὰς πολλὰς καὶ διαφόρους ἐπιτηδειότητας, ἀφ' ὧν εἰς ἔφεσιν καθιστάμενα τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀποπληρώσεως τῶν δημιουργικῶν λόγων καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης συμπλοκῆς τὸν ἐμφανῆ κόσμον ὑπεδέξατο καὶ τῆς ὅλης μετέσχε ποιήσεως." Text edited by Carlos Steel, *Procli in Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria*, 3 volumes (Oxford: University Press, 2007-2008). Translations by or modified from Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton: University Press, 1987).

reflections,” and their supreme power is inverted in “diverse kinds of receptivity,” which are “disposed to desire the forms.” This is the process by which the visible world is made complete. The forms and materials of the corporeal are given and received by supreme causes and their unmediated reflections.

How does the receptivity of the substrates develop so that the “last proceeding from the first alone” becomes the material of the particular bodies that we discover in the world? How are the universal and particular matters we discussed in the introduction unified? If matter is an accumulation of different kinds of receptivity proceeding without mediation from divine principles, how does that matter become ready to receive the forms of actual corporeal bodies? While these questions concern the corporeal, it is not true that our inquiry must become less theological in order to answer them. In fact, the case is the opposite. Since the ‘more inferior’ are products of the ‘more sovereign,’ if we wish to understand the logic of matter’s receptivity we must seek to better understand the super-essential logic of the Gods. This means that the way forward in our investigation is through *demiurgy*, which is the process by which divine powers are revealed according to an order in the constitution of the world. To proceed, we must turn from the *Elements* to Proclus’ commentaries.

The method of the commentaries is significantly different from the *Elements* which describes what can be called a ‘universal’ theology, not specific to any particular revelation.⁸⁸ In contrast, the commentaries exposit the writings of the divine Plato and are explicitly concerned with the deities of Hellenic religion. We spent much of our time in the *Elements* contemplating the ‘first’ and ‘last’ as metaphysical principles, but in the commentaries we encounter hosts of Gods, who are all ‘One,’ and all ‘firsts,’ each of whom “know all things together, [. . .] even matter itself” (*Plat. Theol.* I 21).⁸⁹ We saw in the second chapter that matter belongs to the complete manifestation of the Good. The purpose of the present chapter is to work out this doctrine to a greater degree, looking to see how all material receptivity belongs ultimately to divine power in relation with itself.

1

Having considered the systematic architecture to which Proclus’ doctrine of matter belongs, one would expect to find complete outlines of the ‘material hierarchy,’ which that doctrine implies in Proclus’ other works. In particular,

⁸⁸ See Edward P. Butler, “The Third Intelligible Triad and the Intellective Gods,” in *Méthexis* XXV, 131-150 (2012): 149: “It would seem that the purpose of a text such as the *Elements of Theology* is to adumbrate such a general theology; it contains no references to factual theologies or even to Plato’s texts. But its generality makes it not the most independent, but the most *dependent* of texts. In a way, it is paradoxical for Proclus to speak of a *general* theology, when it is the primacy of individuality for Platonism that makes Plato’s theology necessarily *Hellenic* theology.”

⁸⁹ Proclus, *Pl. Theol.* I 21, 98. 7-12: “θεοὶ τὰ πάντα γινώσκουσιν ὁμοῦ, [. . .] καὶ τὴν ὕλην αὐτήν.”

there should be a comprehensive treatment of matter in Proclus' commentary on the second half of Plato's *Timaeus* where the dialogue explicitly turns to consider the substrate as a co-cause of generation. We might also expect to find a treatment of matter in Proclus' commentary on the fifth hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, which Neoplatonists had long read to be about the structure of matter.⁹⁰ But apart from the passages we already discussed in *On the Existence of Evils* Proclus' commentary on the *Timaeus* is almost completely lost to us, and his commentary of the fifth hypothesis is lost entirely.

The question then is how to proceed. It is not that one lacks a variety and quantity of references to matter in Proclus' works. The commentaries develop an entire vocabulary inspired by the *Timaeus* to describe matter's various manifestations—'the traces,' 'the receptacle,' 'the elements,' 'the second substrate,' and so on. This variety is an encouraging sign, since we are looking for numerous substrates in an order of receptivity. But how do they fit together?

To illustrate the problem, consider this passage in which Proclus sorts through the relations between different aspects of the receptacle in the *Timaeus*:

['The visible'] does not refer to either 'matter' or 'the second substrate,' but it is that which has already participated the forms and contains traces

⁹⁰ See Gerd Van Riel, "Damascius on Matter," in *Platonism and Aristotelianism*, edited by Th. Bénatouïl, F. Trabattoni, and E. Maffi, 189-213 (Hildesheim: Olms, 2011), 190.

and reflections of them, ‘moving in a discordant and disorderly manner’ (*in Tim.* 387).⁹¹

We get a glimpse here of how Proclus works out an order among the various material terms. In this case, ‘the visible’ (ὄρατον) is posterior to ‘matter’ (ὕλην) and ‘second substrate’ (δεύτερον ὑποκείμενον). Moreover, this ‘visible’ mass is related somehow to the ‘traces of forms’ (ἵχνη τῶν εἰδῶν), and the ‘discordant and disorderly movement’ (πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως κινούμενον) they produce. Are these distinct substrates caused by distinct divine principles? How does receptivity develop from one to the next? And these are not even the only terms involved. As Proclus proceeds in his commentary, he incorporates related concepts from other texts, including ‘necessity’ (ἀνάγκη),⁹² ‘space’ (χώρα),⁹³ ‘unlimitedness’ (ἄπειρία),⁹⁴ ‘the universal receptacle’ (πανδεχές),⁹⁵ ‘the visible

⁹¹ Proclus, *in Tim.* I 387.12-14: “ὥστε οὔτε τὴν ὕλην οὔτε τὸ δεύτερον ὑποκείμενον σημαίνει, ἀλλ’ ἔστι τὸ ἤδη μετασχὼν τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ ἵχνη τινὰ ἔχον αὐτῶν καὶ ἐμφάσεις πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως κινούμενον.”

⁹² See Plato, *Timaeus* 47e.5-48a.2.

⁹³ See Proclus, *in Tim.* I 326 5-7: “There were three things before the heaven came to be: being, space (χώρα), and becoming’ [*Tim.* 52d.3-4]—that much-discussed realm of disharmony (τρία δὲ ἦν καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι, ὃν καὶ χώρα καὶ γένεσις δῆλον, ὅτι τοιοῦτον ἦν ἐκεῖνο τὸ θρυλούμενον, τὸ πλημμελές).”

⁹⁴ See Proclus, *de Mal.* 35.19-21: “And, what else is the unlimited in body but Matter? And what else is limit in it but Form? What else but the Whole is that which consists of both these things (τί γὰρ ἄλλο ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ ἄπειρον ἢ ἡ ὕλη; τί δὲ τὸ πέρας ἢ τὸ εἶδος; τί δὲ τὸ ἐκ τούτων ἢ τὸ σύνολον;).”

⁹⁵ See Plato, *Timaeus* 51a.7-b.2: “If we speak of it as an invisible and characterless sort of thing, one that receives all things [. . .] we shall not be misled (ἀλλ’ ἀνόρατον εἶδος τι καὶ ἄμορφον, πανδεχές, μεταλαμβάνον δὲ ἀπορώτατά πη τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ δυσαλωτότατον αὐτὸ λέγοντες οὐ ψευσόμεθα).”

whole' (πᾶν ὅσον ἦν ὄρατόν),⁹⁶ and 'the elements' (στοιχεῖα),⁹⁷ as well as some terms that Proclus either infers or draws from other sources, including the 'the second substrate' (δεύτερον ὑποκείμενον) from the passage above, 'potential being' (δυνάμει ὄν),⁹⁸ 'the bulk without quality' (ἄποιον σῶμα),⁹⁹ and 'the enmattered forms' (ἐνυλα εἶδη). Some are clearly distinct aspects to the material order, while others seem to overlap, to be redundant, or to speak more broadly or particularly about the same phenomena.¹⁰⁰ It might be possible to infer a kind of order from these diverse kinds of material, but we must remember that the order of Matter's receptivity will reflect the order of the Gods' processions. To see any meaningful order among these material terms we must strive to see them from a divine perspective.

2

In his *Parmenides* commentary Proclus also wrestles with the question of matter's receptivity, but does so in a theological way. As Proclus responds to the

⁹⁶ See *Ibid.*, 30a.3-4 quoted above.

⁹⁷ See *Ibid.*, 48.b-d and 53.c-54.d.

⁹⁸ See Proclus, *in Tim.* I 385.9-14.

⁹⁹ See Proclus, *in Parm.* VI 1119.9-11; 1123.11-14.

¹⁰⁰ This list was prepared with the great help of Gerd van Riel (2009, 2011) who makes an effort to offer a comprehensive account of the order of material substrates in Proclus. His work is a helpful guide to the many ways Proclus speaks of substrate; however, the necessity and logic of this order remains opaque in his essays. Opsomer (2017) has carried on the work, describing clearly the order in which receptivity develops, but this is explained apart from the order of the divine causes of the substrates.

problems that Parmenides poses to young Socrates, he takes up the question of participation, asking how forms and matter come together. Weighing the various images useful for describing their union—‘the reflection,’ ‘seal,’ and ‘image’¹⁰¹—he finally concludes with the comment that opened the chapter above. These images are useful, but it is necessary, most of all, to consider form and matter in a theological way, for “the things in this world that appear to be more imperfect are the products (ἀποτελέσματα) of more sovereign powers [. . .].” (*in Parm. IV 845*).¹⁰² This means that if we seek, as Proclus instructs us, “to know the principle that unites the power of the demiurge and the aptitude of the things subject to it,” then we will find that the Good itself is the cause of all unification” (*in Parm. IV 845*).¹⁰³

Through demiurgy the power of Gods becomes present in an active way as form and in a receptive way as matter; this is the world as “a moving image of eternity,” and a “shrine for the everlasting gods.”¹⁰⁴ As Proclus writes in the

Elements:

¹⁰¹ Proclus, *in Parm.*: IV 839-842.

¹⁰² Proclus, *in Parm.* IV 845.3-4: “τὰ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα δοκοῦντα εἶναι ἀτελέστερα τῶν ἀρχικωτέρων ἐστὶ δυνάμεων ἐν ἐκείνοις ἀποτελέσματα [. . .].”

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, IV 845.12-15: “Εἰ δέ γε πάλιν ἐπιποθοῖμεν ἰδεῖν τὸ συναγωγὸν τῆς τε δημιουργικῆς δυνάμεως καὶ τῆς τῶν δεχομένων ἐπιτηδειότητος, τὸ ἀγαθὸν εὐρήσομεν αὐτὸ πάσης τῆς ἐνώσεως αἴτιον ὄν.”

¹⁰⁴ Plato, *Timaeus* 37d: “ἰοῦσαν αἰώνιον εἰκόνα”; 37c: “τῶν αἰδίων θεῶν γεγονὸς ἄγαλμα”

Everything divine is by itself ineffable and unknowable to all secondary things because of its super-essential unity, but it may be known and apprehended from those that participate it. (*El. Theo.* § 123).¹⁰⁵

For this reason, just as each intelligible principle is necessary to the complete procession of diversity from the Gods, so too each aspect of the substrate is necessary to the reception of that diversity in generation: “every creative agent (τὸ ποιοῦν) works upon something which is by nature susceptible (τὸ παθεῖν) to it, a nature which receives this activity (ἐνέργειαν) into its potency (δυνάμενον)” (*in Parm.* IV 843).¹⁰⁶ And these active and receptive aspects must be suited to each other: “the subject that is fitted to receive, whatever the character may be, by its very aptitude presents itself as a collaborator with the agent that can create and it does so through its desire, for its approach is caused by desire for what it is moving towards” (*in Parm.* IV 843).¹⁰⁷ Giver and receiver are partner in generation, the first remaining in perfect productive power, the second reflecting that perfection in a receptive potency as an image. The two together making possible the participations that are distinct embodied substances.

¹⁰⁵ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 123: “Πᾶν τὸ θεῖον αὐτὸ μὲν διὰ τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἔνωσιν ἄρρητόν ἐστι καὶ ἄγνωστον πᾶσι τοῖς δευτέροις, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν μετεχόντων ληπτὸν ἐστι καὶ γνωστόν.”

¹⁰⁶ Proclus, *in Parm.* IV 843.1-3: “πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ πᾶν τὸ ποιοῦν εἰς τὸ παθεῖν πεφυκὸς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ποιεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ καταδέξασθαι τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ὥστε καὶ ὁ δημιουργὸς τι τοιοῦτον ποιήσεται.”

¹⁰⁷ Proclus, *in Parm.* IV 843.3-6: “τὸ δὲ ἐπιτήδειον εἰς ὃ τίποτε διὰ τῆς ἐπιτηδειότητος αὐτῆς ἑαυτὸ προσάγει τῷ ποιῆσαι δυναμένῳ, τοῦτο δὲ δι’ ἐφέσεως· ἡ γὰρ προσέλευσις ὄρεξιν ἔχει τοῦ ᾧ πρόεισιν αἰτίου.” For the implications of Proclus’ use of “desire” here, see *de Mal.* 32.28-31.

Accordingly, in the *Parmenides* commentary Proclus describes the order of divine powers, as well as the kinds of receptivity they produce, and this passage will be our guide:

What is the source of [matter's receptivity] and how does it arise? Shall we not say that it comes from the paternal and creative cause? For the whole nature of what underlies demiurgy, if we may rely upon those who are wise in divine things, comes about, first by the intelligible father, whoever this is; second, upon this another father who is also creator cast his own reflections; third, the creator who is also a father ordered it as a whole; and finally, the creator alone filled it with the creation of particulars. From these causes appear the following: first the matter before all forming; the universal-receptacle and shapeless kind of the *Timaeus* (51a); second, the receptacle of traces of forms but discordant and disordered; third, the whole cosmos made up of whole substances according to a unique and perfect paradigm; and finally, the fullness of all living things, both the mortal beings of diverse substances and everything before the causes of the cosmos as a whole (*in Parm.* IV 844).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Proclus, *in Parm.* IV 844.11-26: "Πόθεν δὴ οὖν ταύτην καὶ πῶς ἐγγενομένη — τοῦτο γὰρ ἐξῆς ἐπισκεπτέον — ἢ ἀπὸ τῆς πατρικῆς αἰτίας καὶ ποιητικῆς φήσομεν; πᾶσαν γὰρ τὴν ὑποκειμένην τῇ δημιουργα φύσιν, ἵνα τοῖς τὰ θεῖα σοφοῖς ἐπαναπαύσωμεν τὸν λόγον, παρήγαγε [a.i.] μὲν ὁ πατὴρ ὁ νοητὸς, ὅστις ποτὲ οὐτός ἐστιν, [a.ii.] ἐμφάσεις δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν κατέπεμψεν ἄλλος πατὴρ ἅμα καὶ ποιητῆς, [a.iii.] ὀλικῶς δὲ ἐκόσμησεν ὁ ποιητῆς ἔμπαλιν καὶ πατὴρ, [a.iv.] συνεπλήρωσε δὲ διὰ τῆς μεριστῆς δημιουργίας ὁ ποιητῆς μόνον. καὶ διὰ ταύτας τὰς τέτταρας αἰτίας, [b.i.] ἄλλη μὲν ἢ πρὸ πάσης εἰδοποιΐας ὕλη, πανδεχὲς τι οὔσα καὶ ἄμορφον εἶδος, κατὰ τὸν Τίμαιον, [b.ii.] ἄλλο δὲ τὸ δεξάμενον τὰ ἴχνη τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ πλημμελὲς καὶ ἄτακτον, [b.iii.] ἄλλος δὲ ὁ ὅλος κόσμος καὶ ἐξ ὅλων ὑποστάς πρὸς τὸ παντελὲς παράδειγμα καὶ μονογενὲς, [b.iv.] ἄλλος δὲ ὁ ἐκ πάντων συμπεπληρωμένος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ζώων καὶ πάντα <ἀθάνατά> τε καὶ θνητὰ λαβῶν, διαφόρων ὑποστησάντων ταῦτα πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου παντὸς αἰτίων." The text in lines 23-26 is very difficult. Steel's edition follows Dillon's and Morrow's choice to add ἀθάνατα and translate:

"and last the cosmos provided with all the living beings—the different causes producing all these creatures, <both immortal> and mortal, prior to the cosmos as a whole."

Van Riel (2009) retains the addition, but tries to recast the concluding prepositional phrase:

"and last the cosmos that 'teems with all the living beings in it, and that receives all <immortals> and mortals', whereby different causes have constituted them prior to the cosmos as a whole" (248).

The passage describes four orders of divine principles and four corresponding stages in the development of material receptivity. Let us begin by simplifying this passage's presentation.

Cause	Substrate
<p>The Intelligible Father (ὁ πατήρ ὁ νοητός)</p>	<p>The Matter before all Forming (ἡ πρὸ πάσης εἰδοποιΐας ὕλη)</p>
<p>The Father-Creator (πατήρ ἄμα καὶ ποιητής)</p>	<p>The Universal Receptacle (πανδεχέης) and Shapeless Kind (ἄμορφον εἶδος)</p>
<p>Creator-Father (ὁ ποιητής ἔμπαλιν καὶ πατήρ)</p>	<p>The Whole Cosmos Made up of Wholes (ὁ ὅλος κόσμος καὶ ἐξ ὅλων ὑποστάς)</p>
<p>The Creator alone (ὁ ποιητής μόνον)</p>	<p>The Fullness of all Living Things (πάντων συμπληρωμένος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ζώων)</p>

The language of 'fathers' and 'creators' is from the *Timaeus*, where Plato comments, "it is a difficult task to find the creator and father of the world [. . .]."¹⁰⁹ In his commentary, Proclus explains that calling the demiurge 'father' and 'maker' describes his status at the limit of the intelligible (νοητός) and

It is possible to make better sense of the syntax without Dillon's and Morrow's addition. Accordingly, "ὁ ἐκ πάντων συμπληρωμένος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ζώων" becomes "the complete fullness made up of everything with life in itself," (or, more simply, "the fullness of all living things"). Then, taking πάντα and ταῦτα together, the rest of the sentence follows: "both the mortal beings of diverse substances and everything before the causes of the cosmos as a whole." While the syntax is indeed uncertain, this reading makes more sense of all the elements in their context.

¹⁰⁹ Plato, *Timaeus* 23c.3-5: "τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον [. . .]" For Proclus' detailed discussion of this text and its history of interpretation, see *in Tim.* I 299.10 ff.

intellectual (νοερός).¹¹⁰ As a father he “receives the intelligible monads” (πληρούμενος μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν μονάδων), but as a maker he “projects from himself the entire work of creation” (προϊέμενος δὲ ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τὴν ὅλην δημιουργίαν).¹¹¹ From this distinction between the intelligible paternity and intellectual creation of the world, Proclus (following Syrianus) can describe four stages by which the world is made according to the same terms, just as in our passage from the *Parmenides* commentary above.¹¹² In addition, because of the correspondence between father-maker and intelligible-intellectual, we can also turn to the *Platonic Theology*, which describes the processions of the Gods in triads of intelligible and intellectual deities. Looking to Edward Butler’s interpretation of the *Platonic Theology*, and the logic by which the triads unfold from one another, we will discover, by comparison, both the logic of the Gods, who bring about the world as ‘fathers’ and ‘makers,’ and the logic of matter’s developing receptivity.¹¹³

It is central to our discussion that the ‘fathers’ and ‘creators,’ and the triads of the *Platonic Theology*, do not exclusively describe specific or individual

¹¹⁰ Proclus, *in Tim.* I 310.4-311.5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 310.9-11.

¹¹² For other examples of the scheme of ‘fathers’ and ‘makers,’ see *in Tim.* I 311.25 ff. and III. 168.15–169.9.

¹¹³ For his complete analysis of henadic cosmogony, see Edward Butler’s series of essays: “The Intelligible Gods in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus,” *Méthexis* 21 (2008): 131-143; “The Second Intelligible Triad and the Intelligible-Intellective Gods,” *Méthexis* 23 (2010): 137-157; and “The Third Intelligible Triad and the Intellective Gods,” in *Méthexis* 25 (2012): 131-150.

deities in themselves.¹¹⁴ They are four moments in the divine procession, which occurs in each God. These are, as Edward Butler describes the triads, not particular Gods, but “dispositions of henads.”¹¹⁵ ‘Dispositions’ refers to the orders of divine powers as they unfold in relation to one another, and unfold in each God. But what, in particular, does the matter at each stage describe? And how is it related to the Gods?

The four-fold order which we are following is fundamentally the process by which the Gods are revealed in relation to one another through their mutual contemplation, and matter’s emerging receptivity is a primary witness to the necessity in their power by which all things come to be. This necessity is the necessity that divine power be expressed in the world completely. But we understand this process in stages, which break the complete expression into parts. This means that at each of the four stages, matter’s incompleteness describes what else divine power must accomplish; the matter is a receptivity for the creation to come. Each God must completely express its power, and this expression is also the complete creation of being. Insofar as each disposition describes a part of a complete process, the matter of each disposition describes what is still incomplete—what is still necessary. For this reason, in order to

¹¹⁴ We follow here the arguments of Edward P. Butler, “The Intelligible Gods,” 133.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

understand matter's relation to the Gods we will examine each of the four stages below, looking to understand the progress of divine power's expression in the creation of the world.

2.1 The Father

The intelligible father (ὁ πατήρ ὁ νοητός) is each God as a distinct first and “nothing else than the One participated” (*in Parm.* VI 1069).¹¹⁶ As the *Elements* puts it, “Everything paternal in the Gods is of primal operation and stands in the position of the Good at the head of all the divine orders” (*El. Theo.* § 151).¹¹⁷ Accordingly, we understand ‘father’ to refer to each God according to itself. While the unparticipated One, beyond all thought and being, “is not even a father, but is superior also to all paternal divinity” (*in Parm.* 1070),¹¹⁸ each paternal God, is a first and a one, but is also participated by all being. We find the same understanding in the *Timaeus* commentary, where “Each of the Gods is the universe (τὸ πᾶν) and each in its own way” (*in Tim.* I 308),¹¹⁹ and “each contains all things” (I 312).¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Proclus, *in Parm.* VI 1069.5-6: “καὶ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν ἢ τὸ μετεχόμενον ἑν.”

¹¹⁷ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 151: “Πᾶν τὸ πατρικὸν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς πρωτουργόν ἐστι καὶ ἐν τὰγαθοῦ τάξει προϊστάμενον κατὰ πάσας τὰς θείας διακοσμήσεις.”

¹¹⁸ Proclus, *in Parm.* 1070.18-20: “ὁ δὲ πρῶτος θεὸς διὰ τῆς πρώτης ὑποθέσεως ὑμνούμενος οὔτε πατήρ, ἀλλὰ κρείττων καὶ πάσης τῆς πατρικῆς θεότητος”

¹¹⁹ Proclus, *in Tim.* I 308.3-4: “ἕκαστον εἶναι τῶν θεῶν τὸ πᾶν, ἄλλον δὲ ἄλλως.”

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, I 312.21-22: “ἕκαστον δὲ [. . .] πάντων ἢ περιεκτικόν”

In the *Platonic Theology*, Proclus argues that each God makes all things in the mixture of their limit and unlimitedness, which is the first intelligible triad. Limit, Proclus explains, “is a God proceeding to the head of the intelligible from the unparticipated and first God,” while “the unlimited is the inexhaustible power (δύναμις) of this God,” and the mixed is “the first and supreme order (διάκοσμος) of Gods.” (*Pl. Theo.* III 12).¹²¹ Insofar as the unlimited is the power of intelligible and paternal deity, their existence (ὑπαρξις) is their limit. And just as the mixture of limit and unlimited is the first order of Gods, by the relation between their existence (ὑπαρξις) and power (δύναμις), each God makes all being, as he “receives a multiplicity of henads and of powers and mingles them into one essence” (*Pl. Theo.* III 9).¹²² But we must keep in mind, as Butler argues, that “limit is not a particular God named, as it were, *Peras*, but a God as such, any God.”¹²³ In Proclus’ own words, “just as the intelligible Gods are henads in the first place, so too are they fathers in the first place” (*Pl. Theo.* III 21).¹²⁴ In the same way, the unlimited is not a distinct divinity, it is the “inexhaustible power” of

¹²¹ Ibid., III 12, 44.24-45.7: “Ὅν τὸ μὲν πέρασ ἐστὶ θεὸς ἐπ’ ἄκρῳ τῷ νοητῷ προελθὼν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀμεθέκτου καὶ πρωτίστου θεοῦ, πάντα μετρῶν καὶ ἀφορίζων [. . .] τὸ δὲ ἄπειρον δύναμις ἀνέκλειπτος τοῦ θεοῦ τούτου [. . .] τὸ δὲ μικτὸν ὁ πρωτίστος καὶ ὑψηλότατος διάκοσμος τῶν θεῶν”

¹²² Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* III 9, 40.7-8: “τὸ ὄν [. . .] πλῆθος ἐνάδων καὶ δυνάμεων εἰς μίαν οὐσίαν συγκεραννυμένων ὑποδεξάμενον.”

¹²³ Butler, “The Intelligible Gods,” 133.

¹²⁴ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* III 21, 74. 7-8: “καθάπερ ἐνάδες εἰσὶν οἱ νοητοὶ θεοὶ πρώτως, καὶ πατέρες εἰσὶ πρώτως” Translation by Butler (2008: 134).

each God, and the mixture of limit and unlimited is not the production of new Gods, but the *διάκοσμος* of the powers of every God that exists.

It is necessary to say something about the *διάκοσμος* of paternal mixture and how the first revelation of a divine order is also to the moment in which each God makes being in itself. Proclus explains that “the powers of the Gods exist beyond being and are consubstantial (*συνυπάρχουσαι*) with their unity;” and by these powers “the Gods are the parents of beings” (*Pl. Theo. III 24*).¹²⁵ While paternal deity is each God according to itself, in the mixture that is being, each God comes into relation with every other. But again, as Butler reminds us,

[This] is not a process in which a multiplicity of Gods comes to be from one, but rather a process in which a common intellectual space comes about *among* the Gods as a resolution of the opposition between unique individuality and universalizable potencies — that is, between existence and power — in *each* God.¹²⁶

Butler’s insight is that being emerges as the universal power which exists (that is, the mixture) of each God comes into relation with every other. The origin of being is this opposition between each divine power, all of which are unlimited and infinite, but all of which exist. Taking up Butler’s language, this opposition, or tension between limit and unlimited occurs in each God, and being is the expression of that opposition. It is the tensions between divine power and

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, III 21, 74. 6-8: “αἱ γὰρ τῶν θεῶν δυνάμεις ὑπερούσιοί εἰσιν αὐταῖς συνυπάρχουσαι ταῖς ἐνάσι τῶν θεῶν, καὶ διὰ ταύτας οἱ θεοὶ γεννητικοὶ τῶν ὄντων εἰσίν.”

¹²⁶ Butler, “The Intelligible Gods,” 145.

existence that makes all being and ‘drives,’ as it were, all procession. While we cannot yet spend time thinking about what this ‘tension’ is, or how it works, we can proceed from the understanding that each paternal God makes all being, and as a result, being receives the multiplicity of henads.¹²⁷

When we consider the matter relative to paternal deity, it must be a pure potential relative to the perfect power of each God. As Proclus explains above, the father is the source of the matter before all forming (ἡ πρὸ πάσης εἰδοποιΐας ὄλη). This matter is a sheer formlessness, absolutely nothing, but potentially all. It is a universal potential reflecting the universal power of each God as it exists.¹²⁸ It is admittedly difficult to conceive of what this matter might ‘be.’

According to what we discovered in chapter three, matter at this level is directly caused by the first principles and it must be the reflection of their simplicity. Since, at this stage, we have not yet discovered any form of determination whatsoever, matter too must be entirely without form. Still, matter from the paternal gods is a necessity that implies the potential of all that will follow. And this necessity is reflective of the opposition or tension between

¹²⁷ Proclus, *Pl Theo.* III 9, 40.6-8.

¹²⁸ In the *Timaeus* commentary, Proclus also relates a supreme order of causes to stages in matter, but does so breaking what corresponds to the ‘father’ into steps that relate to the intelligible triad of the *Platonic Theology*: “Matter proceeds from the One (τοῦ ἑνός), and from the unlimitedness before one-being (τῆς ἀπειριίας τῆς πρὸ τοῦ ἑνός ὄντος), and if you wish, from one-being (τοῦ ἑνός ὄντος) as well, since it is potential being (δυνάμει ὄν)” (*in Tim.* I 385.9-14).¹²⁸ These three stages seem to correspond to each God as limit, the unlimited power of each God, and the super-celestial order of Gods described in the passages from the *Platonic Theology* above.

divine limit and power described above. To the extent the Gods' power excludes all limit, so a matter proceeds without form, wholly unlimited, but to the extent that each God exists, it is as if each God looks to the unlimitedness proceeding from every other and is reflected there. In this moment of absolute indetermination, it is clear that matter receives all things, but not clear how it is that all things in matter will emerge.

2.2 The Father-Creator

The father alone is each God as it produces being uniquely; if we continue to follow the argument of the *Platonic Theology*, the father-creator (πατήρ-ποιητής) is one-and-being. Since being is made in each God and thereby receives a multiplicity of divine persons, the father-creator marks the beginning of divine community. This is expressed by the mutual contemplation from which this dispensation also derives the name intelligible-intellectual (νοητός-νοερός). At this moment each God is both thinking every other God, and the object of every other's thought. Proclus calls this community of contemplation the "intelligible watchtower (νοητῆ περιωπῆ),"¹²⁹ the meeting place of the Gods before they proceed to the intellectual activity of cosmogony. It is the intellectual heaven (ὁ

¹²⁹ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* II 12, 66.14.

νοερός οὐρανός), which is “whole and one, a united intelligence,”¹³⁰ and “binds all the manifolds of beings into an indivisible communion, illuminating each with an appropriate portion of connection” (*Pl. Theo.* IV 20).¹³¹

From the father-creator, matter becomes the universal-receptacle (πανδεχέας) and shapeless kind (ἄμορφον εἶδος), and receives its first real qualities. At this stage matter is already a composite, a combination of unlimited and limit from paternal God. It is infinitely divisible, yet has a limited extension, though one without any shape or form; it is even, by the authority of Plato, visible. This is the matter that the demiurge will ‘take up,’ as Proclus reads the *Timaeus*: “[The demiurge] takes over all that was visible, which was not in a state of rest but moving in a discordant and disorderly manner.”¹³²

We can get a picture of what this looks like by drawing on another place in the *Parmenides* commentary where Proclus discusses the emergence of likeness and unlikeness in demiurgy:

Consider that qualityless substratum of bodies which is between matter and the numerous proximate forms; you will find that it also has being and form and otherness and identity. How could it exist without being? How could it have three dimensions without diversity? And how could it hold together without identity? But likeness and unlikeness are not in it,

¹³⁰ Ibid., IV 20, 59.10: “ἔστι καὶ ὅλη καὶ μία καὶ ἠνωμένη νόησις”

¹³¹ Ibid., IV 20, 59.25-60.1: “οὕτω δὴ καὶ ὁ νοερός ἐκεῖνος οὐρανός πάντα τὰ πλήθη τῶν ὄντων εἰς τὴν ἀμέριστον κοινωνίαν συνδεῖ τῆς συνοχῆς τὴν προσήκουσαν ἐκάστοις μοῖραν ἐπιλάμπων.”

¹³² Plato, *Timaeus* 30a.3-4: “Οὕτω δὴ πᾶν ὅσον ἦν ὄρατον παραλαβὼν οὐχ ἡσυχίαν ἄγον, ἀλλὰ κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως [. . .].”

for it is without qualities; these are found in things already qualified. It is true that it has motion and rest—motion because it is in constant change, and rest since it never goes outside its appropriate receptacle—but has no differentiating qualities or powers (*in Parm. II 735-736*).¹³³

In this passage Proclus describes matter's reception of the greatest kinds of Plato's *Sophist*—same, other, motion, rest, and being. Just as the greatest kinds are the 'forms of the forms,' so their reflections in matter are the receptivity of form yet to emerge, the 'formal traces.' As Proclus explains, these traces are from the Gods and are the matter for demiurgy: "all of the orders of the gods prior to the demiurge irradiate these presences" (*in Tim. I 387*).¹³⁴ The necessity in matter for what must follow is represented by their discordant and disorderly movement which must receive form. It must be taken up and made into cosmos by the demiurge who is represented in the next stage as the creator-father.

2.3 The Creator-Father

The creator-father (ποιητῆς-πατήρ) is the beginning of demiurgy and "the first cause of production (ποιήσεως)" (*Pl. Theo. III 19*).¹³⁵ Unlike the father or

¹³³ Proclus, *in Parm. II 735.23-736.5*: "εἰ γὰρ λάβοις αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἄποιον ἐκεῖνο τῶν σωματίων ὑποκείμενον, ὃ μεταξὺ τῆς ὕλης ἐστὶ καὶ τῶν εἰδῶν τῶν πολλῶν πρῶτως [διαστατόν], εὐρήσεις αὐτὸ καὶ οὐσίαν ἔχον καὶ εἶδος καὶ ἑτερότητα καὶ ταυτότητα. πῶς γὰρ ἂν εἴη χωρὶς οὐσίας; πῶς δὲ τρεῖς διαστάσεις | χωρὶς διαιρέσεως; πῶς δὲ συνέχοι ταυτότητος χωρὶς; ἀλλ' ὁμοίότης ἐκεῖ καὶ ἀνομοιότης οὐκ ἔστιν· ἄποιον γὰρ ἐστὶ· ταῦτα δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἤδη πεποιημένοις· ἐπεὶ καὶ κίνησιν ἔχει καὶ στάσιν, ὡς μὲν γιγνόμενον ἀεὶ, κίνησιν, ὡς δὲ μὴ ἐξιστάμενον τῆς οἰκείας ὑποδοχῆς, στάσιν."

¹³⁴ Proclus, *in Tim. I 387.17-19*: "ταύτας δὲ ἐλλάμπουσι μὲν αἱ πρὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ πᾶσαι τάξεις τῶν θεῶν, [. . .]"

¹³⁵ Proclus, *Pl. Theo. III 19, 67.12-13*: "πρωτίστην εἶναι τῆς ποιήσεως [. . .] αἰτίαν."

father-creator, the demiurge is the first to be revealed as a distinct deity, who for the Hellenes is Zeus. According to the level of paternal deity, Zeus is not superior or inferior to any other God, all are first, and all are one.¹³⁶ However, as the intelligible passes more completely into the intellectual, a distinct order among the divine powers begins to emerge. As Proclus explains in his *Timaeus* commentary, once we have discovered the demiurge himself, we can also describe an order among the Gods:

Let there be one ruler, one cause of all things, one providence, and one chain [of beings]; but with this monad, let there also be a related manifold, many kings, various causes, a pluriform (πολυειδής) providence, and a diverse order. Yet, in every place, let multiplicity be gathered about the monad, the various about the simple, the pluriform about the uniform, and the diverse about the common, so that a golden chain might rule and all things be ordered right (*in Tim. I, 262*).¹³⁷

Following Butler's understanding of this stage, this is the moment in which the powers of each God qualify every other's as each God's unlimitedness come into relation with one another.¹³⁸ In the relation of their powers they are ordered around the creator-father who is the monad of this intellectual multiplicity. This

¹³⁶ See Proclus, *in Tim. I* 286.20.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, *in Tim. I*, 262.17-25: "ἀλλ' εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω καὶ ἐν πάντων αἴτιον καὶ μία πρόνοια καὶ εἷς εἰρμός, ἔστω δὲ καὶ ἅμα τῇ μονάδι τὸ οἰκεῖον πλήθος καὶ πολλοὶ βασιλεῖς καὶ αἴτια ποικίλα καὶ πρόνοια πολυειδής καὶ τάξις διάφορος, πανταχοῦ δὲ τὸ πλήθος ἐχέτω περὶ τὴν μονάδα σύνταξιν καὶ τὰ ποικίλα περὶ τὸ ἀπλοῦν καὶ τὰ πολυειδῆ περὶ τὸ μονοειδές καὶ τὰ διάφορα περὶ τὸ κοινόν, ἵνα σειρὰ τις ὄντως χρυσῆ πάντων ἐπάρχῃ καὶ πάντα διακοσμήται δεόντως."

¹³⁸ Butler, "The Third Intelligible Triad and the Intellective Gods," 137.

is the moment in which, as Butler puts it, “one God ‘sees’ the cosmos in another.”¹³⁹

The demiurge organizes the cosmos according to a vision of the paradigm, that is, a vision of the intelligibility of another God or of himself *qua* other. In this operation, *otherness* gives birth to *difference*.¹⁴⁰

The birth of difference is the beginning of generation. As Proclus says above, the creator-father is responsible for the whole cosmos made up of whole substances (ὁ ὅλος κόσμος καὶ ἐξ ὅλων ὑποστάς) according to a unique and perfect paradigm.

The process of demiurgy has two steps, that of wholes and that of parts.¹⁴¹

The creator-father governs the demiurgy of wholes and universals. Accordingly, the creator-father endows matter with the elements, which are corporeal universals, those constituents of all bodies composed from parts. These elements are the first truly hylomorphic compounds, and the receptivity of matter from this point forward is directly from the order of the forms it receives. The elements themselves are composed of a common matter and emerge in a geometric logic, as Proclus reads in the *Timaeus*,¹⁴² from triangles, the simplest shape. The forms of the triangles are the matter for the forms of the other

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴¹ These sections (III.3.3-4) are greatly enriched by Jan Opsomer’s notes on the substrate and demiurgy in “The Natural World,” *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*, edited by Pieter d’Hoine and Marije Martijn (Oxford: University Press, 2017), 139-166.

¹⁴² Plato, *Timaeus* 53.

elements, and the forms of these elements matter of the bodies they will compose. Matter's receptivity continues to develop in this way according to the order of formal precedence, starting with the most universal and moving towards that composed of parts.

2.4 The Creator Alone

The creator alone completes the process of demiurgy through the production of parts. This demiurgy unfolds in time according to the cycles of birth and death in generation. As Proclus explains above, the creator produces “the fullness of all living things (πάντων συμπληρωμένος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ζώων), and the mortal beings of diverse substances (θνητὰ τῶν διαφόρων ὑποστησάντων).” This is the realm of ordinary hylomorphism—particular bodies composed of forms and their materials. We have here followed Proclus as he bridges the gulf between the universal and particular matters we read about in the introduction. We began with the unformed matter of the paternal gods which is nothing in itself, and finally we have reached the matter inferred from ordinary sense-experience, the material which persists through change, the gold which can be shaped and reshaped, the body of a living soul.

Looking back through the steps of matter's development it is clear, on the one hand, that matter is no one thing. In corporeal bodies, what we call matter, is just a formal quality that is receptive of another form. It can begin to seem like the concept 'matter' is simply an abstraction made after reflecting on the order of formal qualities. But on the other hand, as we follow the logic of receptivity back further than the corporeal compounds of form and matter, we realize that both of these principles are expressions of the perfection of divine power as it is revealed in the being that it makes. From the 'father' matter is a universal receptacle, a potency prior to all form. From the 'father-creator' matter is discordant and disordered, bespeaking its capacity to receive form. These stages of receptivity are necessary to the demiurgic completion of generation, but what are these materials apart from any form?

In this process, matter emerges as a necessity in the relation of the power and existence of each God. As each God makes all being there is a tension between the infinite potential of every divine power, and the ineffable unity of each divine person. The procession of being is, as Butler puts it, a "pluralization occurring *within each 'existential' henadic individual,*" and this pluralization unfolds by the "the differentiation of that individual's *powers* or attributes, which are potential universalities, from the *huparxis* itself which, as the very *uniqueness*

of the henad[.]”¹⁴³ This tension between power and unique existence is, as Butler puts it, the ‘engine’ driving the procession of being, from each individual intelligible God, to the divine assembly, to their mutual contemplation. The resolution of this tension is only in the revelation of an order according to that monadic center in the world of time, change, and generation: “a shrine for the everlasting Gods.”¹⁴⁴ At each stage of being’s procession, the tension between divine power and henadic existence produces a necessity for the level of completion that must follow. This necessity is the receptive substrate of the next dispensation. The necessity of what must come is the matter that each stage produces.

For each paternal God according to itself, matter is the totally unlimited and unformed receptivity that emerges from the relation between the power and existence of each God. This primal matter is the unlimited receptivity or possibility of being in the power and existence of each God considered in their ineffable aspect before all mixture. In the next moment, being receives a multiplicity of henads, and matter becomes the universal receptacle, disordered, but receptive of all order. Then, in the turn to demiurgy we get the first actual corporeal matter, which is only now beginning to receive form. But crucially this

¹⁴³ Butler, “The Third Intelligible Triad,” 133.

¹⁴⁴ Plato, *Timaeus* 37c: “τῶν ἀιδίων θεῶν γεγονὸς ἄγαλμα [...]”

matter is only 'potential' insofar as it is also 'actual,' a real substance. At this stage matter is relative to wholes, but it still embodies the necessity in universal demiurgy for what must follow, for 'whole' necessarily implies 'part.' And finally, there is the material of each individual body, the receptivity implied in the activity of each form, the final moment of necessity, and the final substrate, brought to a total completion in their union.

To summarize, far from being simply the dregs of being, or the result of the God's dwindling power at the end of procession, matter is a way of talking about the receptive side of the progressive resolution of the super-essential tension between divine power and existence which makes being. This conclusion, that matter is 'a way of talking' about divine necessity, might be surprising, for it implies that matter itself has no ontological status. But however surprising the conclusion may be, this is entirely in accord with what we receive from Plato's *Timaeus*: the receptacle must be nothing in itself, and it only receives as it 'shares' in intellect. Even still, we must spend the next chapter considering more carefully the implications of this conclusion, in two ways. If there is an opposition or tension, as we said above, driving the procession of being as the unlimited power of each God mixed with their unique existence, and if matter is a way of talking about the necessity in each moment of that procession, then how is the opposition resolved in demiurgy? How is the world of generation the

conclusion? And what does soul, the unique agent active in all life and death, have to do with it? This brings us to the second task of the next chapter, particular soul. Being, as we have seen, proceeds in the revelation of the Gods, but it is the embodied soul of the human who receives this revelation. Furthermore, if matter is a 'way of talking,' it is this same soul who speaks its existence. As our inquiry concludes, we will discover that particular soul is the mediator in whom the tension driving the procession of being is resolved. As soul fulfills its office, it discovers the 'nothing' at the heart of being, calling it both 'One' and 'Matter.'

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The previous chapter followed the development of matter's receptivity in a series of substrates that mirror the entire order of divine principles. However, along the way a central conclusion from the third chapter on the *Elements of Theology* fell from view. In the *Elements* we realized that the vertical procession of causes and their substrates are only completed by the circular return of beings that transverse their order. This means that while it is possible to demonstrate that matter's receptivity to form is the product of divine power, it is also necessary to see that the world of generation works out the completion of that power's expression. If there is a divine tension driving the procession of being, that tension is resolved in generation through the life of soul. This fact is evident in Proclus' reading of the *Parmenides*, which, as we will see, demonstrates that particular embodied soul is the mediation of all things. In the life of the human, the entire series of divine causes and their receptive illuminations come together, or as Jean Trouillard puts it, "L'âme récapitule donc tous les modes selon lesquels le Principe s'exprime [...]".¹⁴⁵ This means that we are the union of diverse divine manifestations: "Notre matière elle-même nous rattache à la divinité, d'une autre façon que notre forme, mais de façon irréductible."¹⁴⁶ We

¹⁴⁵ Jean Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972), 77.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

have been seeking in this thesis to understand the relation between matter and the one, and the difficulty has been that matter and the One are not 'things' at all. How is it that these two forms of nothing become related in being through soul? The purpose of this final chapter is to understand the significance of this mediation.

1

We can begin to understand soul's mediation through Proclus' discussion of cosmic order in the *Elements of Theology*. Proclus explains there that "every divine order has an internal unity of threefold origin, from its highest, its middle, and its last term" (*El. Theo* § 148).¹⁴⁷ This proposition applies to the divine order participating in each God, but what if it is understood with respect to the order of all things proceeding from the One itself? Our driving question has been concerned with the relation between matter and the one, and our attention has been drawn to the beings that are given and received between them. What of this middle that is apparently necessary to the unity of the entire order?

The first place to turn is Proclus' commentary on the *Timaeus*, where he devotes much energy to the question of soul. Soul's intermediate place in the cosmos becomes particularly crucial for Proclus as Plato writes, "in the middle of

¹⁴⁷ Proclus, *El. Theo*. § 148: "Πᾶσα θεία τάξις ἑαυτῇ συνήνεται τριχῶς, ἀπό τε τῆς ἀκρότητος τῆς ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς μεσότητος καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ τέλους.

the body [the demiurge] placed soul, extending it throughout the universe and then covering the body externally with it” (34b).¹⁴⁸ What does “in the middle” mean, Proclus asks, for it cannot mean some location or dimension in the ‘middle’ of the corporeal world. According to Porphyry’s interpretation, “in the middle” means between the sensible and intelligible¹⁴⁹—as Plato writes in the *Timaeus*, “he fabricated the universe by constructing intellect with soul, soul with body” (30b).¹⁵⁰ Proclus follows this reading and draws the following conclusions:

If we take the words in this way—that the universe has been composed from intellect, soul, and body and is a living being, ensouled and endowed with intellect (*Timaeus* 30b)—then we shall find that the soul is the middle term in this arrangement [. . .] It is always the case that the secondary things participate in the things that are prior to them, thus body participates in soul (the one being the last thing the other the middle) and soul participates in intellect which is prior, in turn, to it (*in Tim. II* 105).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Plato, *Timaeus* 34b.3-4: “ψυχὴν δὲ εἰς τὸ μέσον αὐτοῦ θεὸς διὰ παντός τε ἔτεινεν καὶ ἔτι ἔξωθεν τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆ περιεκάλυψεν [...].”

¹⁴⁹ Proclus, *in Tim. II* 105.8-15: “εἰ δὲ ἐκεῖνο λάβοιμεν, τὸ τὸ πᾶν ἐκ νοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος συμπεπληρωῦσθαι καὶ εἶναι ζῶον ἔμψυχον ἔννοον, μέσην εὐρήσομεν ἐν τῷ συστήματι τούτῳ τὴν ψυχὴν. [. . .] μετέχει γὰρ αἰεὶ τὰ δεύτερα τῶν πρὸ αὐτῶν, ὥσπερ σῶμα ψυχῆς, ἔσχατον δὲ μέσης, καὶ ψυχὴ νοῦ πρὸ αὐτῆς ὄντος.” Translations of *in Tim. II* are by or modified from Dirk Baltzly, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus: Book 3 Part I: Proclus on the World’s Body*, Volume 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 2007) and *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus: Book 3 Part II: Proclus on the World Soul*, Volume 4 (Cambridge: University Press, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Plato, 30b.4-5: “νοῦν μὲν ἐν ψυχῇ, ψυχὴν δ’ ἐν σώματι συνιστὰς τὸ πᾶν συνετεκταίνετο [...].”

¹⁵¹ Proclus, *in Tim. II* 105.8-15: “εἰ δὲ ἐκεῖνο λάβοιμεν, τὸ τὸ πᾶν ἐκ νοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος συμπεπληρωῦσθαι καὶ εἶναι ζῶον ἔμψυχον ἔννοον, μέσην εὐρήσομεν ἐν τῷ συστήματι τούτῳ τὴν ψυχὴν. [. . .] μετέχει γὰρ αἰεὶ τὰ δεύτερα τῶν πρὸ αὐτῶν, ὥσπερ σῶμα ψυχῆς, ἔσχατον δὲ μέσης, καὶ ψυχὴ νοῦ πρὸ αὐτῆς ὄντος.”

Soul incorporates properties of the superior and inferior in its own unified existence. These terms—intellect, soul, and body—represent the entire scheme uncovered in the previous chapter, and soul is at its center. Exploring this notion further, Proclus asks again, “How and on account of what is the soul said to be an intermediate?”¹⁵²

As the things which are moved by another are to those which are moved by themselves, so the things which are self-moved are to those which are without motion. [. . .] While it is, on the one hand, *included within* being that is immovable and always the same, on the other hand it *includes* the genesis that is moved by another. (*in Tim.* II 130).¹⁵³

Soul is intermediate insofar as it both ‘includes’ the world of becoming and is ‘included’ in being. This notion is supported by the *Elements*, where Proclus explains that soul is both ‘life’ (ζωή) as principle, and a ‘living thing’ (ζῶν);¹⁵⁴ this is the manner in which soul is both “included within being” and “includes genesis” in itself. Insofar as soul is ‘living’ it receives its life from a divine source, but insofar as it is a “principle” of life, it imparts the life it has received to others.

¹⁵² Ibid., II 127.27: “πῶς καὶ διὰ τί τὴν ψυχὴν μέσην φαμέν.”

¹⁵³ Ibid., II 130.12-20: “καὶ ἔσται ὡς τὰ ἑτεροκίνητα πρὸς τὰ αὐτοκίνητα, οὕτω τὰ αὐτοκίνητα πρὸς τὰ ἀκίνητα [. . .] καὶ περιεχομένη μὲν ὑπὸ τῆς ἀκινήτου καὶ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ἐχούσης οὐσίας, περιέχουσα δὲ τὴν ἑτεροκίνητον καὶ μεταβαλλομένην παντοίως γένεσιν”

¹⁵⁴ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 188: “Πᾶσα ψυχὴ καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶ καὶ ζῶν.”

To impart life is the life of soul. Soul is self-animated (αὐτόζως); “its being is being alive.”¹⁵⁵ By its own life, received from intellect and imparted to bodies, soul mediates between the indivisible principles and those which are divided.¹⁵⁶

Soul holds together the bond of beings (τὸν τῶν ὄντων σύνδεσμον) through its natural middle position, drawing out the unified causes and drawing together the dispersed powers of sensible things; it is both embraced by unmoved and eternal being and embraces all moved and mutable becoming (*in Tim.* II 130).¹⁵⁷

This is what it means to call soul a mediator: “the procession from first things must be born into the last through the intermediates (μέσα).”¹⁵⁸ Or, as Trouillard puts it, “It faut que la divinité passe par elle pour engendrer du devenir.”¹⁵⁹ In the language of the Chaldean Oracles,

[Soul] holds the “guidance of the universe”¹⁶⁰ and “receives into her own womb the procession from the intelligible;”¹⁶¹ and, being filled by

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., § 189.4-5: “καὶ ἡ ὕπαρξις αὐτῆς κατὰ τὸ ζωτικόν”

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., § 190: “Πᾶσα ψυχὴ μέση τῶν ἀμερίστων ἐστὶ καὶ τῶν περὶ τοῖς σώμασι μεριστῶν.”

¹⁵⁷ Proclus, *in Tim.* II 130.15-20: “συνέξει τὸν τῶν ὄντων σύνδεσμον διὰ τῆς οἰκείας μεσότητος ἀνελίπτουσα μὲν τὰς ἠνωμένας αἰτίας, συνάγουσα δὲ τὰς διαπεφορημένας τῶν αἰσθητῶν δυνάμεις, καὶ περιεχομένη μὲν ὑπὸ τῆς ἀκινήτου καὶ αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἐχούσης οὐσίας, περιέχουσα δὲ τὴν ἑτεροκίνητον καὶ μεταβαλλομένην παντοίως γένεσιν.”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., II 128.11-13: “μέσα δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν [. . .] δι’ ὧν χρὴ πάντως γίνεσθαι τὴν πρόοδον ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα” For a more literal rendering: “there are intermediates of these [qualities of being and non-being] through which it is necessary in every way for the procession from first things to be born into the last.”

¹⁵⁹ Trouillard, *L’Un et l’âme selon Proclus*, 101.

¹⁶⁰ See Plato, *Statesman* 272e.

¹⁶¹ Ruth Majercik discerns that this passage is largely a quotation from the Chaldean Oracles. Cf. *The Chaldean Oracles, Text Translation, and Commentary* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 120-1.

intellectual life, she “sends forth the channels of corporeal life and contains in herself the centre of the procession of all beings.”¹⁶²

All this accords with the principle expressed in the proposition we read above (*El. Theo.* § 148): “every divine order has an internal unity of threefold origin, from its highest, its middle, and its last term.” Consider the proposition’s proof with respect to the order of all things:

The highest term, having the most unitary potency of the three, communicates its unity to the entire order and unifies the whole from above while remaining independent of it. Secondly, the middle term, reaching out toward both the extremes, links the whole together with itself as mediator; it transmits the bestowals of the first members of its order, draws upward the potentialities of the last, and implants in all a common character and mutual nexus—for in this sense also givers and receivers constitute a single complete order, in that they converge upon the mean term as on a centre. Thirdly, the limiting term produces a likeness and convergence in the whole order by reverting again upon its initial principle and carrying back to it the potencies which have emerged from it. Thus, the entire rank is one through the unifying potency of its first terms, through the connective function of the mean term, and through the reversion of the end upon the initial principle of procession (*El. Theo.* § 148).¹⁶³

¹⁶² Proclus, *in Tim.* II 130.23-28: “καὶ τοῦ μὲν <παντὸς ἔχουσα τοὺς οἴακας>, ὑποδεχομένη δὲ τοῖς ἑαυτῆς <κόλποις> τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν προόδους εἰς αὐτήν, καὶ πληρουμένη μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς νοεῖας ζωῆς, προῖεμένη δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ <τοὺς ὀχετοὺς> τῆς σωματοειδοῦς ζωῆς καὶ συνέχουσα τὸ <κέντρον> τῆς προόδου τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἐν ἑαυτῇ”

¹⁶³ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 148.3-16: “ἡ μὲν γὰρ, ἐνικωτάτην ἔχουσα δύναμιν, εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτὴν διαπέμπει τὴν ἔνωσιν καὶ ἐνοῖ πᾶσαν ἄνωθεν, μένουσα ἐφ’ ἑαυτῆς. ἡ δὲ μεσότης, ἐπ’ ἄμφω τὰ ἄκρα διατείνουσα, συνδεῖ πᾶσαν περὶ ἑαυτήν, τῶν μὲν πρώτων διαπορθμεύουσα τὰς δόσεις, τῶν δὲ τελευταίων ἀνατείνουσα τὰς δυνάμεις, καὶ πᾶσι κοινωνίαν ἐντιθεῖσα καὶ σύνδεσιν πρὸς ἄλληλα· μία γὰρ οὕτως ἡ ὅλη γίνεται διάταξις ἐκ τε τῶν πληρούντων καὶ τῶν πληρουμένων, ὥσπερ εἷς τι κέντρον εἰς τὴν μεσότητα συννευόντων. ἡ δὲ ἀποπεράτωσις, ἐπιστρέφουσα πάλιν εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὰς προελθούσας ἐπανάγουσα δυνάμεις, ὁμοιότητα καὶ σύννευσιν τῇ ὅλῃ τάξει παρέχεται. καὶ οὕτως ὁ σύμπας διάκοσμος εἷς ἐστὶ διὰ τῆς

Our question has been how the orders of highest and lowest principles are brought to a completion, or unity. From this proof we can see that the unity of cosmic order is from the first but communicated through the middle, which “reaches out towards both extremes” and “links the whole together with itself as mediator,” “drawing upwards the potencies of the last.” As Proclus explains in his *Timaeus* commentary,

The One binds (συνδεδει) all things, but in a transcendent way (ἐξηρημένως) [. . .] while the soul binds all *as it is within them* (ὡς ἐν αὐτοῖς οὖσα). Like in an analogy the middle term is the unity of what is bound, so soul is the middle term of beings; as both bound and binding insofar as it is substantially self-moving.¹⁶⁴

If the first communicates unity in a transcendent way, soul must be the immanent mediation of that unity in whom the whole is perfected.

2

The preceding provides an outline of soul’s intermediate place in the cosmos, but the most comprehensive place to consider the mediation of soul is his interpretation of the *Parmenides*. Proclus understands the first five hypotheses of the *Parmenides* to articulate the logic of the One as it unfolds in every order of

ἐνοποιοῦ τῶν πρώτων δυνάμεως <καὶ> διὰ τῆς ἐν τῇ μεσότητι συνοχῆς καὶ διὰ τῆς τοῦ τέλους εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν προόδων ἐπιστροφῆς.”

¹⁶⁴ Proclus, *in. Tim.* II 131.31-132.3: “συνδεδει γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐν τὰ πάντα, ἀλλ’ ἐξηρημένως [. . .] συνδεδει δὲ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐν αὐτοῖς οὖσα, καὶ ὡς ἐν τῇ ἀναλογίᾳ τὸ μέσον ἐν ἐστὶ τῶν συνδεομένων, οὕτω καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν μέσην θετέον τῶν ὄντων, συνδέουσιν ἅμα καὶ συνδεομένην, ὡς αὐτοκίνητον ὑπάρχουσαν.”

existence. If we look to one of Proclus' summaries of the entire logic, we can see that it affirms many things we have discovered so far:

The first [hypothesis] is about the One God, how he generates and gives order to all the orders of gods. The second is about all the divine orders, how they have proceeded from the One and the substance which is joined to each. The third is about the souls which are assimilated to the gods, but yet have not been apportioned divinised beings. The fourth is about the enmattered, how they are produced according to what rankings from the gods. The fifth is about matter, how it has no participation in the formative henads, but receives its share of existence from above, from the supra-essential and single monad; for the One and the illumination of the One extends as far as matter, bringing light even to its boundlessness (*in Parm.* IV 1063-1064).¹⁶⁵

From this summary it appears that everything we accomplished in the previous chapter was more or less an exposition of the relation between the second and fourth hypotheses. The logic of divine processions is the logic of the participated One which is each God, the subject of the second hypothesis. But what about the unparticipated One in the first? Our very first conclusions in the second chapter demonstrated a rapprochement between the One and matter. But how does the rapprochement between the unparticipated One and last matter relate to the

¹⁶⁵ Proclus, *in Parm.* VI 1063.16-1064.10: "τὴν μὲν πρώτην ὑπόθεσιν τίθει περὶ τοῦ ἑνὸς εἶναι θεοῦ πῶς γεννᾶ καὶ διακοσμεῖ πάσας τὰς τάξεις τῶν θεῶν· τὴν δὲ δευτέραν περὶ τῶν θείων τάξεων πασῶν πῶς προεληλύθασιν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνὸς, καὶ <περὶ> τῆς συνεζευγμένης ἐκάσταις οὐσίαις· τὴν δὲ τρίτην περὶ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν ὁμοιουμένων μὲν θεοῖς, οὐσίαν δὲ ἐκθεουμένην οὐ κληρωσαμένων· τὴν δὲ τετάρτην περὶ τῶν ἐνύλων, πῶς παράγεται [καί] κατὰ ποίας τάξεις ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν· τὴν δὲ πέμπτην περὶ ὕλης ὅπως ἀμέτοχος ἐστὶ τῶν εἰδητικῶν ἐνάδων, ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ μιᾶς ἐνάδος λαχοῦσα τὴν ὑπόστασιν· μέχρι γὰρ τῆς ὕλης τὸ ἐν καὶ ἢ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἔλλαμψις ἦκει, φωτίζουσα καὶ τὸ ταύτης ἀόριστον." See also *ibid.*, VI 1040-1.

henadic processions and their substrates? And how does soul, as a mediator, draw them together? The answers to these questions begin to become clear as we rearticulate the order of the hypotheses:

First	<i>negative by excess</i>	One
Second	<i>affirmative as paradigm</i>	Indivisibles
Third	<i>affirmative and negative</i>	Soul
Fourth	<i>affirmative as image</i>	Divisibles
Fifth	<i>negative by defect</i>	Matter ¹⁶⁶

As Trouillard makes clear, each of the five correspond to a level of being, all of which are constituted in related stages of negation and affirmation. The One and matter are both negations, the One by excess (*καθ' ὑπεροχήν*), and matter by privation (*καθ' ἔλλειψιν*), and these negations are relative to the affirmations of the intelligible and en-mattered forms.¹⁶⁷ But it is Soul alone who is both negation and affirmation and thereby their resolution with one another. To see what this means, let us consider this structure more carefully.

3

The first hypothesis proceeds by negation (*ἀπόφασις*), denying every kind of being to the One. The dialectic must begin by negation because the One is “snatched away beyond all the processions of beings.”¹⁶⁸ We cannot simply begin

¹⁶⁶ Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, 122.

¹⁶⁷ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* I 12, 57.24.

¹⁶⁸ Proclus, *in Parm.* VI 1071.3: “ὑπερήρασταται δὲ πασῶν τῶν τοῦ ὄντος προόδων.”

the argument ‘beyond being,’ since intellect is active according to the orders of being.¹⁶⁹ It is therefore necessary to make, by negation, an “ascent from One-being to the very One itself.”¹⁷⁰ The negation of everything that is lifts the dialectic from being to the One beyond all participation.

But how is this negation superior to affirmation (κατάφασις), since as Proclus admits, “in every class of being, assertion is superior (κρείττων)?”¹⁷¹ This is only true according to form, but not according to being as a whole. With respect to the whole,

assertions (κατάφασις) slice up reality, whereas negations (ἀποφάσεις) tend to simplify things from distinction and definition in the direction of being uncircumscribed, and from being set apart by their proper boundaries in the direction of being unbounded (*in Parm.* VI 1074).¹⁷²

Negation moves towards the universal. However, even while negations are fit to those “who are being drawn up from what is partial towards the whole,”¹⁷³ the One is even beyond these distinctions: “neither assertion nor negation is properly relevant.”¹⁷⁴ So we conclude finally with the negation of even negation itself.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., VI 1072.3-4.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., VI 1071.5-6: “ἀναδραμεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνὸς ὄντος ἐπ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ἕν ὡς ἀληθῶς.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid., VI 1072.37-1073.1: “ἐν πᾶσιν ἄρα τοῖς οὖσι κρείττων ἢ κατάφασις ἀπλῶς τῆς ἀποφάσεως.”

¹⁷² Ibid., VI 1074.6-9: “ἀποτεμαχίζουσι γὰρ αἱ καταφάσεις τὰ ὄντα, ἀναπλωτικά δέ εἰσιν αἱ ἀποφάσεις ἀπὸ τῶν περιγεγραμμένων ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπερίγραφον καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν διηρημένων ὄροις οἰκείους ἐπὶ τὸ ἀόριστον.”

¹⁷³ Ibid., VI 1074.13-14: “πρέπουσαι τοῖς ἀναγομένοις ἀπὸ τοῦ μερικοῦ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., VI 1073.11-13: “δῆλον ὡς ἐπὶ τούτου κυρίως οὔτε κατάφασις <οὔτε ἀπόφασις> ἀρμόσειεν ἄν.”

This is the kind of negation that gives way to the willing affirmations of the second hypothesis and all that is:

Just as the soul produces the body because it is incorporeal, and just as intellect, since it is in some sense inanimate (for it is not soul) makes the soul subsist, so the One, since it is not many, makes the entire manifold subsist, and since it is not number, gives subsistence to number, and since it is without shape, gives subsistence to shape, and so on. For each principle has nothing of what it makes to subsist [. . .] If we know all things through assertions, we reveal the nature of that entity by negation from each other thing in the universe, and thus *this form of negation is productive of the multiplicity of assertions*. [. . .] [A]s many as the primal entity generates in the first, so many are produced in the second and proceed forth in their proper order (*in Parm.* VI 1075-1077).¹⁷⁵

The negation of the One, as Trouillard puts it, “ne retranche pas seulement la détermination, mais aussi l’indétermination qui la sous-tend.”¹⁷⁶ For this reason, all procession is the negation of the anterior nothing which becomes the “totality of affirmations” in the second hypothesis.

4

Here, in the negation of the nothing of the One we find again the tension that was driving the processions of being in the previous chapter. In chapter four this tension was between the divine power and existence of each God, or

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., VI, 1075.19-1077.13: “Ὡς γὰρ ἀσώματος οὐσα ἡ ψυχὴ τὸ σῶμα παρήγαγεν, ὡς ὁ νοῦς οἶον ἀψυχὸς ὢν, ὅτι μὴ ἐστὶ ψυχὴ, τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπέστησεν, οὕτω τὸ ἐν ἀπλήθυντον ὄν πᾶν τὸ πλήθος ὑπέστησε [. . .] καὶ οὕτω τοῦτο τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἀποφάσεως γεννητικόν ἐστὶ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν καταφάσεων [. . .] ὅσα γὰρ γεννᾷ τὸ πρῶτον ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ, τοσαῦτα ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ γεννᾶται καὶ πρόεισιν ἐν τάξει τῇ οἰκείᾳ.”

¹⁷⁶ Trouillard, *L’Un et l’âme selon Proclus*, 136.

between limit and the unlimited. Here we see the same tension, but between the negation of the first hypothesis and the affirmations of the second. The first hypothesis contains the method by which we discover the unparticipated One of the first hypothesis, and it is equivalent to the unlimited power of the Gods before their participation.¹⁷⁷ This power is before mixture with limit and thus has no existence. It is an ineffable nothing that is potentially all things. The affirmations of the second hypothesis are the actual expression of this infinite nothing as it mixes with the limit of each God and by this mixture makes being. But each of the two can't ever be resolved in the other. The 'tension' drives all procession, and the complete expression of all procession works out the tension's resolution. As we will see, the resolution of this tension is soul, which passes between both the negation of unparticipated divine power and the affirmation of its existence. This is why the divine procession ends with soul.

In the terms of the *Parmenides*, this tension is understood as the movement from the first hypothesis into the second. As the negation of the One becomes the affirmation of the One-that-is, the One-that-is becomes two, for it is both 'One' and it 'is.' Then, if it is two, as Trouillard explain, "il est tous les nombres,

¹⁷⁷ For the relation between the unparticipated One and an instance of the unlimited beyond the series of limit, see *In Parm.* VI 1123.22-1124.37. Van Riel makes this connection clear in his own work on Proclus and Matter: "the ineffable One transcends the opposition of *πέρας* and *ἀπερία*, being *ἄπειρον* in a higher sense than the *ἀπερία* opposed to *πέρας*. At the bottom we find a reverse copy of this structure, in which the *ἀπερία* of the first substrate is void of all *πέρας*" (2009) 252-253.

puisque dans le moindre il est impossible d'arrêter la division de chaquechaque unité."¹⁷⁸ However, as Trouillard continues, this divided unity is not a pure and separate multiplicity. Every particular number remains one, since "aucune multiplicité ne peut être conçue ni posée sinon à partir de l'un et en participant à l'un."¹⁷⁹ And so we find ourselves again in the first hypothesis:

La seconde hypothèse qui pose l'un multiple nous renvoie ainsi à la première, et nous serons rejetés sans fin de l'une à l'autre sans trouver dans l'unité le repos que nous escomptions.¹⁸⁰

The resolution is simply that this tension *is* soul, who passes discursively between the negation of the first and affirmation of the second in dialectic. This is why soul is mediator: "Elle est l'un qui concentre et refuse affirmations et négations [. . .] Elle est *tout et rien*."¹⁸¹

The entire dialectic of the *Parmenides* unfolds, and can only unfold in soul as soul's own confrontation of itself: "par ce conflit même, l'âme va se construire en déroulant les négations."¹⁸²

Nous avons donc une sorte de procession qui est suspendue tout entière au déroulement primordial des négations et qui est en quelque façon enveloppée par lui. Or ces négations, c'est l'âme qui les pose. Et en les posant elle se pose elle-même à travers toutes ses conditions.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁸² Ibid., 140.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 134.

Soul only negates by the negation of the One, but the One can only negate itself (and therefore give itself) in the life of soul: "elle accomplit en elle le cycle de l'apophase sous la motion négatrice de l'un."¹⁸⁴ The resolution of that tension driving the procession of being from the Gods is this life through which the entire cosmos is bound together.

5

As we try to understand the meaning of this mediation, there is some difficulty added by the fact that Proclus' extant commentary on the *Parmenides* ends before the third hypothesis. Thankfully, the complete commentary of Damascius exists. While the question of the relation between these two thinkers is too great for the present task, Joseph Combès' explanation of Damascius' solutions to these problems provides much for our discussion.

We have followed Butler's understanding that being proceeds from the tension between henadic power and existence. Likewise for Damascius, Combès explains that "l'origine de la procession s'en trouve différée,"¹⁸⁵ (106-7) such that "L'Un de l'être s'épanche dans le devenir, entendu ici non comme à la fin de la 2^{ème} hypothèse dans ses propriétés exemplaires, mais dans sa réalité sublunaire

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Combès, *Études néoplatoniciennes* (Jérôme Millon 1996), 106-7.

qui implique le temps successif et périssable.”¹⁸⁶ This difference is produced by the absolute negation of the first: “Plus l’ineffable se retire, plus l’esprit devient fécond par conversion à absence.”¹⁸⁷ Fecundity from the conversion to absence, as the affirmations of the second hypothesis are ever drawn back into the negations of the first, must be given in both the perfect existence of “propriétés exemplaires” and in “le temps successif et périssable.” But these gifts are not contraries: “L’être se fusionne avec ce devenir, et telle est l’âme humaine dans sa constitution même.”¹⁸⁸ The soul of the third hypothesis alone is the resolution of difference.

Par son ἄκρουν, elle participe sans doute toujours des espèces, étant par là davantage *un* et *plusieurs* et *être*, donc plutôt *intemporelle* et *indivisible* ; par son ἔσχατον, elle est davantage *non-un*, *non-plusieurs*, *non-être*, donc plutôt *temporelle* et *divisible* ; mais, par son μέσον elle est les deux à égalité, dans une hypostase simple qui intègre l’opposition et la déploie divisible et indivisible.¹⁸⁹

By this life which draws both the indivisible and divisible together in a single existence, Soul is the mediation of the divine processions and material substrates:

[C]’est dans la même immédiation que l’âme se convertit et procède dans son autoconstitution et dans son expérience. Mais sa procession intemporelle et temporelle, de même que sa conversion, supposent la résistance de sa structure négative : par son fond d’être-devenu l’âme déploie l’antitypie [. . .] qu’elle projette mêlée encore à la spécification

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 109.

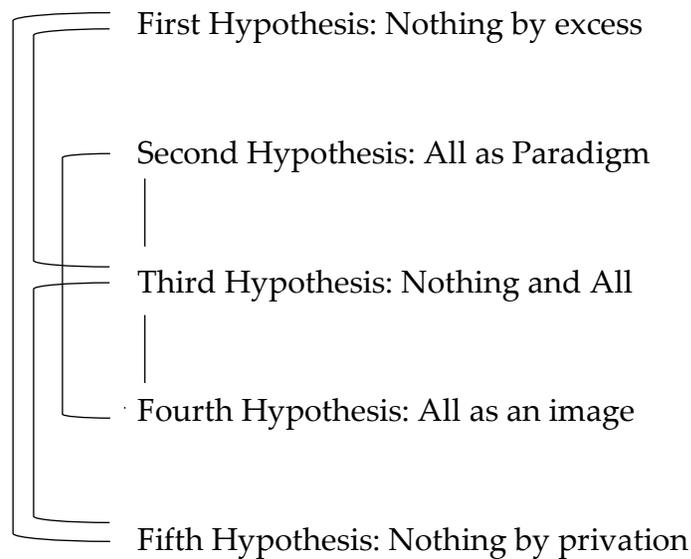
¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 110.

dans le *espèces matérielle* (4^{ème} hypothèse), [et] pure antitypie dans le rien privatif de la *matière* (5^{ème} hypothèse)[.]¹⁹⁰

The conclusion is that the entirety of the movement from the excessive negations of the first hypothesis to the privative negations of the fifth, is simply the self-constitution of Soul as it encounters and mediates all things. Combès provides the following scheme which emphasizes this mediation.¹⁹¹



For Soul, negation is “un retour à soi-même, une reprise de soi à l’origine.”¹⁹² “Cette âme les projette en son sein comme des principes constitutifs pour elle-même, et sur les confins des *autres*.”¹⁹³ The negation of every quality to the One produces

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 114.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹² Trouillard, *L’Un et l’âme selon Proclus*, 137.

¹⁹³ Combès, *Études néoplatoniciennes*, 111.

the affirmation of being, but it is soul who posits these negations, and as soul posits them, it posits itself.¹⁹⁴

6

The purpose of this thesis has been to describe the relation between matter and the One in the philosophy of Proclus. In the second chapter we understood that there is a sympathy between matter and the One that is necessary to generation. In the third chapter, we discovered that this sympathy is from the fact that matter is a pure simplicity proceeding from the One alone. And from this simplicity, matter is, like the One, potentially all things. However, there is a difference between them, for the One is potentially all things as it gives them, but matter is potentially all as it receives. Accordingly, in chapter four we sought to see that matter is simply the 'receptive' aspect of their power unfolding from triad to triad. And then in the present chapter confronted the consequence that ultimately, the relation between matter and the One can only be encountered in the existence of those beings that are given and received. But the problem, as the logic of the *Parmenides* makes clear, has been that these 'first' and 'last' things are not really 'things' at all. They are beyond and beneath being, and so also beyond all thought and language. In both cases, to name them is merely to gesture or to

¹⁹⁴ Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, 134.

look from the beings that proceed or are born to those ineffable realities which comprehend them. Proclus expresses this conclusion in the *Parmenides* commentary:

If then, one must give a name to the first principle, 'One' and 'Good' seem to belong to it; for these characters can be seen to pervade the whole of existence. Yet it is beyond every name. This feature of the One is reproduced, but in a different way, by the last of all things, which also cannot be represented by a name of its own; how could it since it has no determinate nature? But it is named 'Receptacle,' 'Wet-Nurse,' 'Matter,' and the 'Substrate' after the things that come before it, just as the first is named after the things that come after it (*in Parm.* VII 513).¹⁹⁵

We only call the first 'One' as it is revealed in the unity of what proceeds.

Likewise, we only call the last 'Matter' as we infer from that which underlies change and difference. Both, in the end, cannot be known by any name except the ones revealed, or by any mode except negation, which simply demonstrates that both are nothing. From the first nothing every being proceeds to the end of its procession, where, at the brink of its own existence, it is received at the last by another nothing which appears as the inverse of the first. Damascius, who presses this rapprochement even further than Proclus writes,

What is it, then? That which the first is and is not, that should also be what the last is and is not. For the very first must reach as far down as the last,

¹⁹⁵ *in Parm.* VII 513.7-14: "Si igitur nomen aliquod oportet primo adducere, uidentur le unum et le bonum ipsi conuenire, que utique et uidentur penetrantia per omnia entia, quamuis et ipsum sit ultra nomen omne. Propter quod et quod omnium ultimum, dissimiliter illud imitans, neque ipsum per nomen suum manifestare aliquo modo possibile — quomodo enim quod sine specie? — sed ab hiis que ante ipsum nominatur *dexameni*, (idest suscipiens) et *tethini* et materia et subiectum, sicut ab hiis que post ipsum le primum."

in order to be the cause of all things. *If then the First is ineffable, not being and not one, as we have shown, the last must be conceived of likewise.*¹⁹⁶

The “last” may “proceed from the first alone,”¹⁹⁷ implying two distinct entities.

But what if the thing “distinct” is not a thing at all and does not exist in any way?

What if its cause is not in any way participable, and its mode of “procession” incomprehensible, for it in no way reverts?

What then is the relation between matter and the One, the relation between these two nothings which are discovered in the negation of all that exists? We have discovered that the key terms in this question, ‘matter’ and ‘One,’ are not ‘things,’ but rather activities of soul. Matter and the One are nothings revealed in negation, but this negation is the office of soul. It is soul who follows the argument of the *Parmenides*, moving between the negation of the first hypothesis and the affirmation of the second. Likewise, it is soul who receives and expresses the revelations of the Gods in paternal and creative triads. At each step, it is soul who converts ineffability into principle, and it is soul who abolishes the principle again. Matter and the One, as absolutely last and first principles, which we must also confess are in no way principles at all, are but

¹⁹⁶ Damascius, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, IV, 68.8-12: “Τί οὖν ἐστίν; ἢ ὅπερ τὸ πρῶτόν ἐστιν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν, τοῦτο καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον εἶη ἂν καὶ οὐκ εἶη. Δεῖ γὰρ τὸ πρῶτιστον φθάνειν ἐπὶ τὸ ἔσχατον, ἵνα πάντων αἴτιον ᾖ. Εἰ δὲ ἐκεῖνο ἄρρητον, καὶ οὔτε ὄν οὔτε ἔν, ὡς ἐδείκνυμεν, καὶ τοῦτο τοιοῦτον ὑπονοητέον.” Text edited by Joseph Combès, *Commentaire de Parménide de Platon*, 4 volumes (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997-2003). Translation from Gerd Van Riel (2011: 197).

¹⁹⁷ Proclus, *El. Theo.* § 59.

different names of the same ineffability. And they are named by soul. These two ways of talking, or points of view, belong to soul. We name the last and call it “‘Receptacle,’ ‘Wet-Nurse,’ ‘Matter,’ and the ‘Substrate’ after the things that come before it,” and likewise, it is we who “transfer names [to the First] by looking to that which comes after, to the progression from, or the circular conversions back to it.”¹⁹⁸ From this single ‘principle’ proceed the dispensations of the Gods and the orders of substrates, but both of these sides are simply modes of looking back towards that which produces the affirmations of all things in the excessive negation of its own nothingness. Thus, at the last, the relation between matter and the One is the life which speaks the ineffable and makes it present, recognizing the presence of that nothing at the heart of all things.

¹⁹⁸ Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* II.6 41.5-8: “Τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὀνόματα κἀνταῦθα πρὸς τὸ μετ’ αὐτὸ βλέποντες καὶ τὰς ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ προόδους ἢ πρὸς αὐτὸ κατὰ κύκλον ἐπιστροφὰς ἐπ’ ἐκεῖνο μεταφέρομεν ἐπάγοντες.”

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