

Time, King of Heaven and Earth: Timeless and Timebound Metaphysics in Proclus

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1. INTRODUCTION

“χρόνος νοῦς τις ἐστὶ,” Proclus claimed,¹ i.e. “Time is a Variety of Reason.”² As a claim about time this has been difficult to understand. Modern scholars have read it as an unhelpful “reification” of time, odd especially for coming after Plotinus’ grounding of time in the mind (*psuchê*)³ in his treatise *On Eternity and Time* (Enn III.7 [45]), which was a step towards explaining time in terms of something else

1. Namely at *In Tim.* III.25.9–16; 28.1–3; 14–24, *In Remp.* II.16.3–13; 17.21–18.10.

2. I discuss the translation “Variety of Reason” for *noûs tis* below. Throughout the article I will employ capitalization when referring to eternal and unchanging principles, like Forms, as opposed to principles subject to change, such as minds. I employ this and a few other unconventional translations for Proclus’ jargon, and I do so not in the expectation of replacing any standard translations, but rather of seeking renderings in English that are more adapted to Proclus’ understanding of the terms. These often, I admit, lose important relations of allusion between Proclus and other authors, but since it is the purpose of my text to situate Proclus in his relations to other authors, my translations are free of this burden. For insightful remarks on philosophical translation in general, see Ree (2001).

3. Here I am following a suggestion first put forth by Dillon (1990) and Emilsson (2007) with respect to Plotinus, not that *psuchê* in Plotinus means mind, but rather that he understands *psuchê* in a way that anticipates important aspects of the modern (and esp. Descartes’) notion of mind. Ross (2000) has opposed Dillon’s thesis on the ground that skeptical doubt about one’s own body is not raised by Plotinus. But this only shows that Plotinus never raised the modern mind-body problem, not that the problems of relation between *psuchê* and body are not fruitfully understood as mind-body problems, that is problems of the relation of a thinking substance to the body. Ross also raises a difficulty against Dillon arising from Plotinus’ theory of the undescended *psuchê*, but this is certainly not present in Proclus, for whom *psuchê* descends entirely. In general, *psuchê* is not for Proclus and other late Platonists in the first instance an animating cause, but a separate intellectual substance, that due to its essential intellectual activity is self-changing and thus alive and capable of imparting life to bodies. Immanent principles of vitality are typically called *indalmata* or *eidola tês psuchês* (e.g. EM 64.23, *PT* III 23.18–25) (on which see Opsomer 2006 for Proclus, See Caluori 2015 p.186–197, on Plotinus).

and thus quite the opposite of Proclus' apparent treatment of time as a self-subsistent entity. Sorabji (1983. chp.3) reconstructed a reason for such a reification in the case of Proclus' predecessor Iamblichus, as an attempted solution to Aristotle's paradoxes concerning the now, but he also observed that the paradoxes themselves did not need such elaborate theoretical machinery to be solved in the first place. (p.3) Understanding Proclus' thesis is my aim in this paper.

A straightforward way of making sense of Proclus' claim would be to reconstruct his arguments for it and to figure out precisely what it is that he says. In this paper, I will take, however, a shorter route, and illustrate what Proclus means to do by making his claims, and, in particular, in what debates is he intervening and what criticisms is he implicitly making. That is, instead of situating the claim "Time is a Variety of Reason" in its logical context, I will place it in its dialectical context.⁴ And I will propose that it is not (primarily) an intervention in the philosophy of time but rather an intervention into ancient natural theology, which posited Reason (*noûs*) as the first principle of nature.⁵ This context was first suggested by Simplicius, who wrote "if those who have sought the cause of time amongst Varieties of Reason and Gods have said

4. For this distinction and its importance in the study of the history of philosophy, see Skinner (2002), esp. chps. 5 & 6.

5. Throughout the text I employ "nature" in its more current English meaning to denote the whole realm of changeable things and agents of change, including incorporeal agents of change such as minds. One consequence of this is that "nature" here includes as a part of it human society. This is what Proclus understands by *kosmos*, which he takes to be essentially unique, *contra* Aristotle who could still conceive of there being a multitude of *kosmoi* (see *Physics* IV10 218b3–5, and Coope (2005, p.34) for an insightful necessity into the weak necessity of the uniqueness of the *kosmos* in Aristotle. For Proclus' arguments for uniqueness see *In Tim.* I 435.4–458.11, and *In Tim.* I 455.2 – 456.30, where he remarks on the restriction to non-essential causes in Aristotle's argument for uniqueness). There might be many worlds, and there might be worlds outside of this one, but they would all be equally a part of "nature", which is necessarily unique, and thus corresponds to what Proclus calls *kosmos*. Proclus also argues that all of nature is organized as a single totality and nothing changeable exists outside of this totality, so that the concepts "world" and "nature" in his philosophy share the same extension, but the claim that all of nature is united under a single order is distinct from the claim that nature is unique (see *In Tim.* II 65.14–67.16, esp. *In Tim.* II 66.3–8 for Proclus' arguments for the all-encompassing character of nature's order). For these reasons I often translate *kosmos* as nature in Procline contexts, and thus render what the reader might know as "the world soul" as "the mind of nature."

that it, too, is a Variety of Reason and a God, we must accept it. For if anyone seeks the first causes of change and becoming he will most certainly find them to be Reason and God.”⁶ If Simplicius is to be trusted, “Time is a Variety of Reason” is not (primarily) an answer to the question of Aristotle’s *Physics* IV.11 “does time exist? And what is its nature?” but rather an answer to the pre-Socratic question taken up in the *Phaedo* “what are the causes of change?” More specifically, it is an attempt to fulfill the Anaxagorean promise to explain all change by the direction of Reason (*Phaedo* 97b–e).⁷

That Proclus’ thesis is not some absurd claim about the perceptible phenomenon of time can be seen from the fact that when he does talk about the phenomenon, he does not call it simply Time but by many names, such as: “the change of Time” (*In Tim.* III 29.33), “the procession of Time” (*In Tim.* III 29.3) “participated Time”⁸ (*In Tim.* III 27.29) or “the external activity of Time” (*In Tim.* III 25.16). Following Proclus, I will refer to the Variety of Reason as Time (capitalized) and to the natural phenomenon as “the flow of time.” The latter is, of course, not a neutral description, as many contemporary philosophers argue that there is no sense in which time “flows,”⁹ and Aristotle himself attacked the claim that time is a change (*Phys.* IV.10 218b10–18). “The flow of time” embodies an understanding of time as a uniform change independent of all other changes, which Proclus takes to be contained in Plato’s description of time as a “moving image” “proceeding according to number” (*Tim.* 37d5–7).¹⁰

6. *In Phys.* 795.17–23: εἰ μὲν τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ χρόνου τὸ ἐν νοῖς καὶ θεοῖς ζητοῦντες νοῦν καὶ τοῦτο ἐστῶτα καὶ θεὸν ἔλεγον, ἀνάγκη δέχεσθαι καὶ γὰρ τῆς κινήσεως καὶ τῆς γενέσεως εἶ τις τὰς πρώτας αἰτίας ζητεῖ, νοῦν πάντως καὶ θεὸν εὐρήσει.

7. See Menn (1995) for discussion of Plato’s attribution of the Anaxagorean claim to “the wise” in general, Plato’s own defense and updating of the thesis with the postulation of a mind of the cosmos, and finally Aristotle’s adoption of the thesis and implicit criticism of Plato’s version of it.

8. though this is an ambiguous expression in Proclus. It can also mean the time that is manifest in the motion of the celestial bodies (*In Tim.* III 53.19), and also the particular lifespans of individual beings (*ET* 53). And it is even more treacherous because it suggests that Time itself is not participated, which Proclus however denies (*ET* 200). I take it that “unparticipated Time” (as in *ET* 53) express that which is “separately participated” (as per *ET* 81) by temporal things, and thus indicates the Variety of Reason itself as opposed to the participation in it.

9. For instance, Price (2011).

10. Time as a Variety of Reason, on the other hand, is taken by Proclus to be meant when Plato says that time is “an eternal image” and “an image of eternity”

My paper will have the following structure. Following this introduction (§1), I will discuss how Proclus' thesis about time criticizes attempts to ascend to the first principle by investigating the causes of change (§2). I will present not only what positions are being attacked, but also what exactly Proclus finds lacking about them. I will end by showing that Proclus here presupposes certain doctrines he takes over from Plotinus on time. This will require a separate discussion (§3), as Proclus and Plotinus are often taken to be at odds in their theories of time. I argue, however, that their differences with regard to time are actually differences with regard to their theories of the mind: Plotinus believes that the mind can have an eternal cognitive activity; Proclus thinks it cannot. How temporality constitutes a limit to human knowledge will be seen to be a shared concern in Proclus' engagement both with natural theology and with Plotinus. For this reason, I will end by sketching out Proclus' methods for overcoming the limit of time in metaphysics (§4).

2. PROCLUS ON THE LIMITS OF NATURAL THEOLOGY: ARISTOTLE AND THE STOICS

To the traditional challenge to show that Reason was "king of heaven and earth" (*Phil.* 28b6–8) there were two significant answers outside of the Platonic school: the Aristotelian conception of the primary and unchanging Agent of Change as *noêsis noêseôs*, a partless activity of self-explication,¹¹ and the Stoic conception of the seminal rational structure (*spermatikos logos*) of the world, an embodied art of worldmaking pervading the cosmos and knowing all the particulars of cosmic history.¹² Something of what Proclus is doing with his philosophy of time is showing that it is a particular

(*Tim.* 37d7) and that the flow of time proceeds according to a "number" which he identifies with Time as a Variety of Reason.

11. "self-explication", since in the case of Reason for Aristotle (*Metaph.* XII 1075a3–5) and later in all cases for Proclus (see *In Tim.* II 243.26–246.9 for a discussion of the six kinds of *noêsis*) the activity of *noêsis* is not a matter of grasping an external object of knowledge, but of making known the object of knowledge that one is. I take this to be the upshot of Aristotle's claim that Reason is identical with its object and Proclus' later claim that the object of *noêsis* is always within.

12. For a good presentation of this Stoic understanding of Reason and the global determinism that follows from it see Bobzien (1998), esp. chp.I. The Stoics are something of a muddle for Proclus, relying as he did on unfavorable Platonist reports and he may have read perhaps only Epictetus in the original, and I will be dealing them accordingly also *en bloc*.

Variety of Reason, namely the Variety of Reason responsible for the flow of time and its properties, that is the original cause of change, and that it plays the role of both the Stoic seminal rational structure of the world and also Aristotle's primary Agent of Change. Let me quickly show what I mean by this last claim.

Aristotle had understood Reason as a partless activity in order to explain the perpetuity of change: the unbroken continuity of change requires a single, necessarily active cause, and the best conception of a pure activity is one of Reason's self-explication. He argued that it had to have an "infinite power" to produce an everlasting change (*Phys.* VIII 10), that it was the unchanging Cause of change at which the chain of causes of change had to end (*Phys.* VIII 5, *Metaph.* XII 6), and that it was Reason (*Metaph.* XII 6–9). All three claims are repeated by Proclus, not only with regard to Time, but also with regard to the Parts of Time, such as the Year itself, the Day itself and the Month itself, which take over the roles of the causes of the unchanging Agents of Change of the individual heavenly spheres in Aristotle. Thus Proclus argued that for each celestial body, the infinite succession of its cycles through the Zodiac required a separately existing Variety of Reason as a cause of infinite power (*In Tim.* III 88.30–89.4, see also *In Tim.* III 36.5–10; 40.31–41.3), and ascribed to Time infinite power for similar reason (*In Tim.* III 20.22–21.5). Similarly, Proclus appropriated Aristotle's argument for an unchanging Cause of change by arguing: (a) that Reason as such was entirely unchanging and thus incapable of being the immediate cause of a change, and furthermore; (b) that Time was a Variety of Reason that produced an entirely uniform change (viz. the flow of time) and was thus capable of being the original cause of change in the cosmos (*In Tim.* III 26.3–15). He further claimed that Time was a Variety of Reason, as we have seen, and made the same claim for the separately existing Parts of Time, arguing in both cases on the basis of the premise that "according to each perpetually moving body there is a Variety of Reason, which bounds both the life within it and its corporeal return to the same point" (*In Remp.* II 16.12–14). We see, therefore a complete absorption into Proclus' theory of time of Aristotle's theology of unchanging Causes of celestial motion.¹³

The role of the Stoic seminal rational principle of the world

13. For a more detailed look into Proclus' arguments in this regard see Vargas (forthcoming).

was in turn to explain the world's organic unity: the sympathetic connections between terrestrial and celestial phenomena were evidence for a unity between the world's parts akin to that found between different organs of a single animal.¹⁴ All bodies were thus limbs of a single animal, the greatest of all and thus perfectly rational (after all, the Sun in its perfectly regular orbit was one of its organs!). And like any animal for the Stoics its unity had a cause, a body mixed throughout the organism that gave it structure in space and in time, determining the stages of its growth, maturity and inevitable decay. In the perfectly rational world, the principle of its connection was Reason, uniting through its designs the rational heavens to the changeable Earth. This too was taken over by Time in Proclus' understanding, which he also called by the name "the number of world"¹⁵ (*In Tim.* III 57.14–27) and "the complete measure of the common conjoint cyclical return of all the incorporeal and corporeal changes in nature" (*In Remp.* II 11.19–12.1) thereby identifying it with the pre-established life plan of the cosmic organism. Proclus' Reason was not a body like the Stoic active principle nor did Proclus hold that the world underwent periodic conflagrations, as Proclus followed Aristotle on both the eternity of the world as well as the incorporeality of the unchanging Agent of Change, but it took over the role of determining the order of the united life of the cosmos.¹⁶

Time as a Variety of Reason was for Proclus thus both an eternal activity and a science of world making, assuring both the perpetuity of the world and its organic unity. Proclus was able to combine the pure activity of Aristotle's unchanging Agent of Change with the multitude of determinations of the Stoic active principle due to his particular understanding of Reason (*noûs*), which is closely allied to why he, unlike most previous thinkers, is happy to speak of Varieties of Reason (*noes*) in the plural. According

14. On Stoic Sympathy see Brower (2015). For an example of a Stoic argument from sympathetic connections to cosmic Reason see Sextus Empiricus *Against the Physicists* IX 78.

15. Here Proclus follows Aristotle's use of "number" to indicate the prescribed lifespan of a living being, a usage I discuss below.

16. Insofar as the Stoic active principle was Reason and contained the plan of the cosmos its role was taken over by time. Insofar, that it was an ordering principle dispersed throughout the world, however, it was taken over by the dynamism of nature in Proclus' system. See Martijn (2011, chp.2) for Proclus' theory of dynamism (*phusis*) as a cosmic principle.

to Menn (1995) the metaphysical use of “*noûs*” arose out of an ethical one: “*noûs*” is the knowledge that equips a human being to order their lives to the good. As a metaphysical principle “*noûs*” is this same knowledge, taken, however, as existing on its own, independent of a human mind, and ordering not a human life, but the whole cosmos towards the Good. It is not, as such, a subject of knowledge but a separately existing act of knowing, and on this account the translation “Reason” suggests itself, rather than “intellect”, the more common, yet infelicitously psychologizing term.¹⁷ It is true that Plato portrays Reason as a knowing subject in the *Timaeus*, where it is the cosmic Engineer, who looks upon “the most beautiful object of Reason, complete in every way” and acts upon the disorderly mass of the world to form it into a perfect living being, fully equipped with reason as a virtue, that is its own share in Reason itself. But Plotinus and subsequent Neoplatonists interpreted the Platonic image of nature’s Engineer according to Aristotle’s anti-psychologizing claim that Reason was identical with its object, not being a knower grasping an object known, but an activity of self-explication. Thus Platonists continued to understand *noûs* metaphysically not as an enlarged subject of knowledge but as a self-subsisting knowledge, which they (being Platonists) took to contain the Forms, the self-subsisting essences that ground the perceptible world. They thus fundamentally changed Aristotle’s picture of Reason by allowing it to contain and be a multitude of contents. Perhaps more innovatively, at first timidly with Plotinus and later openly with Proclus, Platonists come to speak about a plurality of “*noes*,” which I interpret accordingly as a plurality of “Varieties of Reason,” a plurality of different explications of the world of Reason’s objects. Each Variety of Reason knows “all things” (ET 170), but each of them does so using a distinct set of Forms, some of them knowing being through fewer, though more universal Forms, whereas others knowing it through a larger and more fine-grained set of Forms (ET 177). Since they are hierarchically organized according to their level of generality, the

17. A suggestion made by Menn (1995, p.10), who however prefers to simply transliterate “*Nous*” in his own work. “Reason” does have the disadvantage of not having a cognate verb to translate “*νοεῖν*” with, and on occasions where a detailed analysis of the activity of *νοῦς* is required I prefer the translation “Intelligence.” For a critical appraisal of Menn’s reading of Plato see van Riel (2013).

plurality of Varieties of Reason do not imply any vicious kind of relativism. Rather, they reflected Proclus' acceptance of many valid metaphysical perspectives. For instance, he took both Parmenides' poem and Plato's *Phaedrus* to both be acceptable metaphysics, although the former described true being as a unity, and the latter described it as a multitude of Forms. The multitude of Forms was, for Proclus, merely a more articulate representation of true being than Parmenides' One-Being. To support this, Proclus pointed out that Parmenides described being as somehow multiple, since it was described as a sphere in his poem (*In Parm.* I 708–709). Proclus thus recognized many Varieties of Reason, and on this account he approached the search for the causes of change in a different manner than Aristotle and the Stoics. It was no longer just a matter of showing that “Reason is king of heaven and earth”, but of showing precisely which Variety of Reason, which knowledge of being was reflected by the changing world. His answer was “Time”. or the Variety of Reason directly responsible for the flow of time.

In specifying one particular Variety of Reason as the principle of cosmic order, Proclus' philosophy of time was also an accusation of naiveté. He implies that whereas Chrysippus and Aristotle thought that they were talking in the culminations of their physical investigations about Reason as such, the highest principle of all, they were all the while only talking about Time. The latter was, to be sure, a Variety of Reason and a God for Proclus, but one with minor effects in reality as a whole.¹⁸ Why did time come to have such preeminence in the natural world for Proclus? Otherwise put: what did Aristotle and the Stoics fail to notice that led them to neglect time as just one more element in the furniture of the cosmos? Both Aristotle and the Stoics discussed time in connection to measurement, the former defining it as “the number of change according to prior and posterior”¹⁹ and the latter as “the interval

18. We can thus add this to the number of ironic parallels between Neoplatonism and Heidegger's critique of metaphysics: besides the parallels between a theology of Unity beyond Being and a non-metaphysical thinking of Beyng, in this paper there will be a number of parallels between Proclus' criticism of other natural philosophies and Heidegger's criticism of the unacknowledged role of temporality in metaphysical determinations of being. For the ironic role Heidegger played in stimulating research into Neoplatonism see Hankey (2004).

19. As per *Physics* IV 219b2–9. See Coope (2005), Roark (2011) for recent discussions on Aristotle's definition.

(*diastêma*) of change.”²⁰ Neither considered as part of time the phenomenon of the opportune moment (*kairos*), especially that created by the synchronization of celestial and biological cycles, such as when the lotus flower opens its petals just when the Sun is rising to receive its light, or that the lives of animals follow diurnal, monthly and annual cycles, following the periods of the celestial bodies.²¹ These synchronies assure the perpetuity of all natural kinds and are for Proclus amongst the great goods that time affords to “the entire heaven and all generation”. Merely physical accounts of time for Proclus consistently ignore this fact, that things happen just when it is time for them to happen, that time is a cause in nature.²²

It is not that physical philosophers ignore the phenomenon of the *kairos*. Aristotle holds that the dynamisms of living beings aim at measuring their lives out in natural periods determined by the celestial bodies, with each kind of animal possessing its own “number” (*arithmos*) that determines the length of its life.²³ Proclus quotes Aristotle approvingly on these matters (*In Remp.* II 13.10–14.8) and even expands his notion of “number,” so that not only each animal has its own number but so do inorganic bodies, such as walls and garments (*In Tim.* III 23.4–8), and celestial bodies (*In Tim.* III 57.14–27).²⁴ And as we saw above, the account of the synchronies between heaven and earth is just what led the Stoics to posit Reason as the world’s seminal rational structure. This too, Proclus accepted, to the point of identifying Time as a Variety of Reason with the “number of the whole world”, the pre-established plan for the lifecycle of nature.

20. See Long and Sedley (1987) 51 for Stoic sources on Time, Schofield (1988) for an insightful discussion.

21. The opportune moment for Proclus is not set in opposition to time, nor is it restricted to unique, entirely contingent opportunities. It is rather defined as a moment where the agent and a patient of an action, independently of each other and thus contingently from their respective points of view, come to be apt to act and be acted on respectively. Proclus develops this analysis at *In Alc.* 121.11–123.16 and *In Remp.* II 79.17–2. For a summary of Proclus’ texts on *kairos* see Brunner (1992). In this notion of *kairos* where natural cycles play a significant role, Proclus is taking up a Pythagorean understanding, on which see Kucharsky (1963).

22. A feature of Proclus’ account highlighted well by Baltzly’s (2013) introduction.

23. *GA* IV 10 777b16–b20: οἱ χρόνοι καὶ οἱ βίοι ἐκάστων ἀριθμὸν ἔχουσι καὶ τούτῳ διορίζονται; see also *GA* IV 10 777b30–778a10, *GC* II 10 337b10–15

24. Minds are also subject to fixed measures as is made clear by *In Tim.* III 18.27–19.9, and also *ET* 199.

Thus it was not that philosophers that acceded to Reason as a cause of nature had not observed the *kairos*.²⁵ What they failed to see by Proclus' lights was the causal power responsible for the existence of opportune moments. For Proclus, the rational ordering of the world testified to by the constant happy conjunction of natural cycles was the ground for past, present, and future and also was itself implemented through the flow of time, an absolutely uniform activity prior to all other changes. In his Neoplatonic physics, without a uniform beat, the dance of the world would not be in step, and in abstraction of the dance's choreography, stipulating a beginning, middle and end for the motions of each dancer, there would be no point in dividing the wholly uniform activity into the part that had been completed, the part that had been only announced and the current activity that connected what had been and what was yet to come.²⁶ Unpacking the metaphor, Proclus argued that a wholly uniform change, thus the flow of time understood as a change (despite Aristotle's criticisms of this Platonic position), was required as a cause for the order of changes stipulated by "the number of the world," the pre-established ordering of the world's changes that accounted for sympathetic phenomena.²⁷ Why should childhood precede adulthood, instead of the other way around, as imagined in *Statesman* 269a1–271c2? Because in the natural development of the animal, and in the natural development of the world, the animal's infancy comes first, whereas its adulthood comes second, that is, because there is a uniform and inherently ordered succession (first, second, third, etc.) to which the changing states of the world and its parts (such as childhood and adulthood of an animal) can be indexed. Furthermore, although the flow of time is uniform and undifferentiated, and the whole life of the world a unity,²⁸ Proclus claims it is correct to "divide this time

25. indeed, Proclus held the Stoics to have been led to the excess of corporealism by their fascination with it, or rather the harmony of agent and patient in it: see *In Alc.* 124.15–23.

26. On the metaphor of cosmic dance in Plotinus and Proclus, see Miller (1986).

27. For Proclus' discussion of time's flow and the need for its uniformity see *In Tim.* III 30.4–26. In particular Proclus insists that the procession of time must be "pure and undifferentiated" so that it might be the cause of order for both regular and irregular changes.

28. "A single day" in Plotinus' parlance. See *Enn.* IV 4 [28] II 7.4–12 on the continuity of the lives of the heavenly bodies. I take the unity and continuity of the

of ours three ways, into past and future and present, by reason of the triple powers of Time, the powers of closure, connection, and disclosure (*tên telesourgikên, tên sunektikên, tên ekphantorikên*).²⁹ Having compared this remark with similar passages,³⁰ I take Proclus to mean that Time as the pre-established order of all changes, determines for them all beginnings, middles and ends. It is in virtue of following such an order that a change can be said to be necessarily finite, and thus to come to a close and thus be past at some point. It is also in virtue of the connection of the many stages of a change in a single order that the change is judged to be present.³¹ And it is in virtue of being anticipated (“disclosed”) by such an order that a process can be said to be future.³²

What Proclus saw in connection with the *kairos* was thus the ultimate grounding of time as divided into past, present, and future and, at the same time, the necessity of positing a pure flow of time as an entirely uniform activity. In a word, what he discerned was the constitution of the measured time that non-Platonic philosophers took as a given. The postulation of a change identical with time had been attacked by Aristotle on account of the fact that every change belonged to a particular body in a particular place and that change could be quicker or slower, whereas time

flow of time to be also what is meant when Proclus says that time is “divisible in comparison with Reason” (*In Tim.* III 31.10–16): i.e. its only division is succession, being qualitatively homogeneous.

29. *In Parm.* VII 1236.11–15.

30. A detailed discussion of what these three powers are and how they ground the division of time into past, present and future goes beyond the limits of this study, but for the relevant passages in Proclus see: *In Parm.* VII 1235.11–20; *In Tim.* III 38.21–26 III 45.27–46.12; 48.16–21. Plass (1993) engages with the doctrines philosophically, but works with a corrupt version of Proclus’ text.

31. With regard to the connective role of the present Proclus is following Aristotle who writes “the now is the connection of time, as was said. For it connects past and future time and is the limit of time, for it is the principle of one and the end of another” (*Physics* IV 13 222a10–12: Τὸ δὲ νῦν ἐστὶν συνέχεια χρόνου, ὥσπερ ἐλέχθη· συνέχει γὰρ τὸν χρόνον τὸν παρεληλυθότα καὶ ἐσόμενον, καὶ πέρας χρόνου ἐστίν· ἔστι γὰρ τοῦ μὲν ἀρχῆ, τοῦ δὲ τελευτῆ). See also *In Tim.* III 45.27–46.12; 48.16–21 for the ascription of “connection” to Time quite generally.

32. As per *In Tim.* III 38.21–26, where “Time discloses what is not yet and connects what is present and brings what has come to be to a close” (ἐκφαίνει τὰ μῆπω ὄντα ὁ χρόνος καὶ συνέχει τὰ παρόντα καὶ τελειοῖ τὰ γεγυρότα). Yet in other texts it is the eternal Archetypes of changing things that are disclosed. How to understand this other aspect of disclosure is a matter I cannot discuss here.

was that with reference to which changes were judged quicker or slower. If there was to be a change of time, it would have to be an omnipresent change and an absolutely uniform one at that. Such a process Proclus, following Plotinus, found in the successive cognitions of nature's mind. The mind of nature was present in every place and every body as a whole, and it was directly responsible for the life of nature, which united in itself all natural processes. Furthermore, the activity of knowing was an entirely uniform one, a continuous, unbroken contemplation of the Forms.

3. PROCLUS ON THE LIMIT OF THE MIND: PLOTINUS

Proclus is often seen as rejecting Plotinus' theory of time wholesale,³³ but this is incorrect. Proclus does indeed hold that the name "Time" designates most precisely the cause known in Reason of the flow of time, which is a Variety of Reason, whereas Plotinus appears to call "time" the uniform succession of the cosmic mind's cognitions, and this is indeed a difference in terminology. But Proclus accepts that there is also a uniform flow that can be called time (or more properly the "change" or "procession" of time) and that the mind of nature produces it by its activity of knowing. Indeed, he explicitly says that nature's mind produces time.³⁴ What he rejects in his series of arguments against Plotinus at *In Tim.* III 21.6–24.30 is that the cosmic mind by "being active in a manner that is present all at once and changelessly"³⁵ produces the flow of thoughts and moments. On the contrary, Proclus insists in what

33. That there was a break between Proclus and Plotinus on time was until recently the consensus, as witnessed to the presence of the opinion in numerous scholars from Duhem (1913, p.253ff.) to Baltzly (2014). In Joly (2003) the difference between Proclus and Plotinus on time is taken to be paradigmatic for the wide range of differences between the two philosophers. Kutash (2011) is practically unique in seeing Proclus in a better light than Plotinus. There have been a few exceptions to this rule: Plass (1977) and MacIsaac (2002) both emphasize the continuity between Proclus and Plotinus' views on time.

34. See his account of the mind of nature's cognitive activity at *In Tim.* II 290.30–291.7, which ends by observing that the mind of nature "produced both a transition... and simultaneously, by dint of making this transition, it produced time" (μετάβασιν τε ἐγέννησεν οὕτως... και ὁμοῦ τῆ μεταβάσει χρόνον). Compare also to *In Tim.* II 292.6–7: και γὰρ και οὕτως συνυποστήσει τῷ δημιουργῶ τὸν ζωῶδη χρόνον; the mind creates together with the Cosmic Engineer the animate sort of time.

35. *In Tim.* III 21.8–11: "ἐνεργούσης... ἀθρόως και ἀμεταστᾶτως". Cf. also *In Tim.* III 22.13–17

he calls “the greatest sign that Time is not produced by mind, but is participated in by the first mind” is that Time perfects the mind. Here Proclus is extending to mind in general the (Iamblichean) argument that the human mind cannot have a part of itself that eternally contemplates the Forms, otherwise humans would be constantly happy. Thus, since the mind of nature belongs to the same class of beings as the human mind, it cannot have an eternal part. All mental cognition is successive and subject to time.³⁶

It is thus not only non-Platonic philosophers who failed to recognize the power of time, but even the “divine” Plotinus failed to do so. Plotinus’ error, however, is not the same as that of Aristotle and the Stoics. The latter thought they had transcended time in their theologies, which they had not. The origin of change is not Reason itself, but Time, the Variety of Reason that is the cause for the flow of time and the division of time into past, present and future. Plotinus, on the other hand, did genuinely transcend time in his metaphysics, distinguishing between the Reason of the world from Reason itself,³⁷ and positing beyond Reason itself the Good as the cause of all things.³⁸ He did not, however, transcend time in his psychology, which he thought he had. The only transcendence of time in mental cognition that Proclus admitted was one that Plotinus had reserved to the flow of cognitions that constituted time itself: since it was what everything else was measured in terms of, it itself did not have anything but eternity above it to measure it.³⁹ Thus for both Proclus and Plotinus the life of nature’s mind, like the life of the celestial bodies, was a single continuous activity, without

36. This is the well known post-Iamblichean criticism of Plotinus’ theory of the “undescended” mind. See Steel (1978) for an overview.

37. In Proclus’ review of previous opinions on the identity of the Engineer at *In Tim.* I 303.24–310.2, Plotinus is the earliest philosopher to exactly distinguish two principles of cosmic Engineering, Intelligence as such for its permanent features, and the cosmic Kind of Intelligence for its passing features (Proclus does not explicitly mark this novelty though).

38. In the preface to his *Platonic Theology* (PT I 5.1–8.15) Proclus identifies Plotinus with the who brought Plato’s philosophy back to light, and thus with the one who brought back to light the transcendence of Unity/the Good over Reason.

39. See *Enn.* III 7 [45] 12.22–25, 13.41–47 for this point. For Proclus it is not Eternity itself that measures the flow of time, but rather Time as an eternal Variety of Reason that measures it directly. See *In Alc.* 237.5–14. Nonetheless the contrast between what is measured by a succession, and what is measured by an eternal reality is preserved.

divisions. This life was “eternal” insofar as the flow of time does not follow upon a causally prior change, but is itself an entirely uniform activity that does not require a prior change to explain its order.

4. PROCLUS ON TRANSCENDING TIME IN PHYSICS AND METAPHYSICS

On the face of it denial of an eternal part of the mind is a serious obstacle to the Platonist aspiration to know the world of Reason’s objects, i.e. the eternal principles of being. Plotinus had concluded in his treatise on *Eternity and Time* that only by the mind’s having its own participation in Eternity could it possibly know eternal things, and his own account of time was intended to show that one could not even account for the existence of time if one does not posit a “descent” of the mind from eternity, and thus, implicitly, an eternal activity of the mind (*Enn.* III 7 [42] 7.1–7). It would seem that Proclus’ account of mental cognition as inherently successive makes this impossible. However, Proclus recognized the mind’s capacity to know eternal realities by distinguishing two powers of reason in the mind: one power was a knowledge obtained by the mind’s explication of its innate concepts or rational structures (*logoi*), the other was a knowledge obtained by divine inspiration.⁴⁰ The latter was taken by Proclus to be described in the myth of the contemplation of the Forms in the Place beyond Space in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and Proclus interpreted it as a participation in the activity of a Variety of Reason and ultimately of Time.⁴¹ Time as a Variety of Reason was thus not only the upper limit

40. at *In Parm.* IV 944.6ff Proclus describes the cognitive activity from the *Phaedrus*’ myth as sharing in “divine knowledge”, and at *In Parm.* IV 950.3ff he distinguishes between the “knowledge ($\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$) of the Forms of Reason”, which the Engineer has placed within the mind, and the “knowledge of the Forms of Reason and Reason’s objects”, which is achievable only by “God-possessed minds”. This is also the *noûs* of *In Tim.* I 246.10–248.6, the illumination of *logos* by *noûs* through which we know eternal things. In contrast to such divine knowledge *In Parm.* IV 948.31–38 describes the reason implanted within the mind as its cognition of the realm of being by looking at the images of that realm that it carries within itself.

41. See the connections between the *Phaedrus* and the activity of reason in the argument against Plotinus at *In Tim.* III 333.28–334.28, esp. 334.16–28; and also the discussion of the sense in which the mind changes at *In Parm.* VII 1157.2–21, with clear allusion to the *Phaedrus* myth. For Proclus’ account of this higher form of reason see *In Tim.* I 245.10–31 and more generally the exegesis of the *Phaedrus* myth in *PT IV*, esp. chps 4–9.

to the mind's activities but also the very bridge to Eternity the mind requires, i.e. the very Variety of Reason capable of being participated in by minds and at the same time being a knowledge of the world of Reason's objects. In this way, the flow of time itself became the privileged window onto the world of Reason's objects.

Proclus' criticism of Plotinus then at once pointed to a limit posed by Time and how to overcome it. What avenues did he propose to overcome the limits of natural theology he diagnosed in Aristotle and the Stoics? The natural theologians did not go beyond the world of change, when they thought they did, because they started from the world of change and could not rationally get any further than the principle of change. Proclus held, however, that Plato's *Timaeus* in its account of nature was able to ascend up to Reason itself and even higher principles in its search for the causes of nature. This had to do on the one hand, with the fact that the *Timaeus* deals not only with change but also with the permanent features of the universe. This can be seen in Proclus' division of the works of Reason in the *Timaeus* into ten successive "gifts", amongst which are its material composition, its shape, and its inclusion of every possible kind of matter.⁴² But these gifts are presented before Time itself, the eighth gift of the Engineer of nature. Since the gifts are ordered, according to Proclus as successive perfections of the world, the gift of Time presumably contains the preceding ones, and their investigation does not necessarily lead to the universe's transtemporal causes. But there are still two gifts after the gift of Time, namely the creation of the celestial bodies and of the filling of the universe with every kind of living being. There is some difficulty in accounting for why these gifts are higher than Time, as they appear to be simply putting additional beings in nature rather than fitting it with a higher principle.⁴³ But perhaps these are precisely the permanent features of the world that cannot be subsumed within the causality of Time but rather must be traced back to the Gods themselves, which, for Proclus, are prior to the Varieties of Reason.⁴⁴ These two features, and especially the presence of

42. Kutash (2011) has taken the division of the Engineer's ten gifts as the structuring principle of his monograph on Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*.

43. A problem raised by Dirk Baltzly in his contribution to the "Proclus after 1500 years" workshop in Berlin 7th of July 2012.

44. The metaphysicality of the Gods as such is a controverted question in Pro-

every kind of living being, would then be the permanent features of the cosmos that could lead a natural theology beyond Time.

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Abbreviations used: *Tim.* = Timaeus, *Phil.* = Philebus

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