

“A Shrine for the Everlasting Gods”: Matter and the Gods in Proclus¹

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In the works of Proclus, matter has a strange affinity with the One. The One is beyond being, and matter ‘beneath’ it; the One gives all things while matter receives them. But how can we understand a relation between two ‘principles’ which are nothing in themselves? The One is a nothingness in excess (καθ’ ὑπεροχήν) and matter a nothingness in lack (καθ’ ἔλλειψιν),² and in both cases, even the name ‘Nothing’ falls short. In fact, the first, Proclus explains, is only named ‘One’ or ‘Good’ for what comes after it, and the last is only named ‘Matter’ and ‘Receptacle,’ for what comes before.³ Just as the ineffability of the One is revealed in each God, so too we only discover ‘matter itself’ as if by looking behind and beyond the many receptacles which are together giving birth to the world. This rapprochement of last and first, we will see, is no coincidence, for the materials of the world are the reflections of the divine processions and a revelation of the power of the Gods.

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2 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I.12 57.24. Text edited by H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, *Proclus Théologie Platonicienne*, 6 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968-1997).

3 Proclus, *Parmenides Commentary* VII 513.7-14: Si igitur nomen aliquod oportet primo adducere, uideatur 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. Text edited by Carlos Steel, *Procli in Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria*, 3 volumes (Oxford: University Press, 2007-2008). Translations adapted from Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton: University Press, 1987).

The purpose of this paper is to describe this relation between the Gods and their material reflections. A theological understanding of matter is necessary because Proclus' complex material system is made more difficult by the fact that texts key to the discussion are lost. In Proclus' *Timaeus* commentary, for example, we find many different kinds of matter, but few clues about their unity. Even so, while Proclus describes many matters developing over many stages, matter's receptivity always develops in the same order as the processions of the Gods themselves. Matter and the Gods share the same dialectic. For this reason, the present inquiry seeks to understand matter as the revelation of divine power. We will see, in conclusion, that Proclus' theological approach to matter describes a vision of the world as it remains in the Gods, the temporal expression of divine life in eternity which is indeed "a shrine for the everlasting Gods."⁴

1

The basic contours of Proclus' understanding of matter can be found in the *Elements of Theology*, which provides the simple architecture for what, when one turns to Proclus' other works, ends up being a very complex system. Midway through the *Elements of Theology* matter emerges as the receptive side of the comprehensive power of the One. This receptivity is revealed in the dependence of divided beings on their causes for their completion. Divided being is the incomplete existence that belongs to the temporal world of sense experience and process. The eternal and simple existence of causes is divine and self-complete, while the perfection of the divided can only be achieved *in another*. Indeed, the temporal only proceeds from the eternal as it is received by a receptive principle more ancient. In the *Elements*, matter is this principle of reception. Thanks to matter, the self-complete include the incomplete in their own perfection.

4 Plato, *Timaeus* 37c: τῶν ἀδιδίων θεῶν γεγονός ἄγαλμα. Text edited by Ioannes Bunet, *Opera*, Volume 4 (Oxford: Oxonii, 1900).

Without this receptacle, the world of becoming could not exist. We arrive at this conclusion from the principle that whatever produces an effect, on account of being prior, also determines everything that effect causes in turn (§ 56).⁵ The immediate result is that prior causes also produce the effects caused by their offspring, and produce them to an even greater degree. Moreover, since the prior cause 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).⁶ This principle is the key to understanding the basic structure of Proclus' conception of the cosmos. Simplicity and complexity are not arranged as if in a pyramid, with the simple above giving way to more and more complexity below. No, the complexity of body is comprehended, both above and beneath, by orders of simplicity. Body is not at the 'bottom' of the cosmos but in the middle.

This order is one in which the productive power of prior causes comprehends the effects of the later. The later are compounded of more and more causes, becoming more and more complex (§ 58),⁷ but as the later causes reach the limit of their power and the prior continues to be effective, their effects become more simple again. Simplicity is both superior (κρείττον) and inferior (χειρόν) to the complex life which resides between (§ 59).⁸ The result is that embodied soul, at the 'centre' of the cosmos, is the most complex of beings. These partial souls are begotten by the

5 Proclus, *Elements of Theology* § 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" (Πάν τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν δευτέρων παραγόμενον καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν προτέρων καὶ αἰτιωτέρων παράγεται μείζονως, ἀφ' ὧν καὶ τὰ δεύτερα παρήγεται). Text edited by E. R. Dodds, ed., *Proclus: the Elements of Theology: a Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: University Press, 1963). Line numbers restart with each proposition.

6 Ibid., § 57: "Every cause is both active before its effects and gives rise to more terms after them" (Πάν αἴτιον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ αἰτιατοῦ ἐνεργεῖ καὶ μετ' αὐτὸ πλείονων ἐστὶν ὑποστατικόν).

7 Ibid., § 58: "Everything produced by a greater number of causes is more composite than that produced by fewer" (Πάν τὸ ὑπὸ πλείονων αἰτίων παραγόμενον συνθετώτερόν ἐστι τοῦ ὑπὸ ἐλαττόνων παραγομένου).

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

entire series of divine causes, sharing in all as one begotten by all. Plants are the products of fewer causes than a human being and are therefore more simple, and rocks again, of fewer than plants.

If one proceeds in this way, the conclusion is a matter which is absolutely last, 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; but the first is simple as being above (τὸ κρείττον) all composition, the other as being beneath (τὸ χεῖρον) it. And the same reasoning applies to all other terms.⁹

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. The result is that this 'last' matter, while inferior to all it receives, is also causally prior to them, for nothing received could subsist without it. This causal priority in matter follows from the greater persistence of the higher causes' power: "Every principal cause that is more universal (τὸ ὀλικώτερον, 'more whole,' or we might say, 'more comprehensive') both irradiates before the parts into their participants and are later to withdraw from their participation" (§ 70).¹⁰ For this reason, we may venture to call matter 'prevenient.' Matter 'goes before' and the result is an order of participation in each mortal being that reveals the order of divine causes:

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. 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).¹¹

9 Ibid., § 59.9-12: διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον τῶν ὄντων ἀπλούστατον, ὡσπερ τὸ πρῶτον, ὅτι ἀπὸ μόνου προέεισι τοῦ πρῶτου· ἀλλ' ἡ ἀπλότης ἢ μὲν κατὰ τὸ κρείττον ἐστὶ πάσης συνθέσεως, ἢ δὲ κατὰ τὸ χεῖρον. καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων ὁ αὐτός ἐστι λόγος.

10 Ibid., § 70: Πάν τὸ ὀλικώτερον ἐν τοῖς ἀρχηγικοῖς καὶ πρὸ τῶν μερικῶν εἰς τὰ μετέχοντα ἐλλάμπει καὶ δεύτερον ἐκείνων ἀπολείπει τὸ μετασχόν.

11 Ibid., § 71: Πάντα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἀρχηγικοῖς αἰτίοις ὀλικωτέραν καὶ ὑπερτέραν τάξιν ἔχοντα ἐν τοῖς ἀποτελέσμασι κατὰ τὰς ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἐλλάμψεις ὑποκειμένα πῶς γίνεται ταῖς τῶν μερικωτέρων μεταδόσεσι· καὶ αἱ μὲν ἀπὸ

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. The contingent existence of generation proceeds from the Gods and is conceived in their material reflections, who are, to use the image of the *Timaeus*, the mother of the world.

Turning to Proclus' other works with the doctrine of the *Elements* in mind, we expect an approach to matter that emphasizes both the hierarchy of its causes and the many layers of substrate that hierarchy produces. What we find, however, are detailed instances of both, but very little about how we should understand their relation. For example, while discussing the source of matter in the *Timaeus Commentary*, Proclus begins by illustrating the principle we have just learned from the *Elements*:

It has been shown that the 'first unlimitedness' which is before 'the mixed' is established at the summit of the intelligibles and extends its irradiations from that place to the last.¹²

As we expect, the power of the 'first unlimitedness' is both before and extends beyond its effects.¹³ As it reaches beyond, it is a primary cause of 'the last,' or matter. However, as the passage continues, the unlimited is not the only cause of matter, for the other supreme principles also cast their reflections:

Thus, according to [Plato], matter proceeds both from the One and from the unlimitedness which is prior to One Being, and, if you wish, inasmuch as [matter] is potential being, from One Being as well. Hence it is a good of a kind, a thing without limit, the most indistinct being, and is devoid of form, since it

τῶν ἀνωτέρων ἐλλάμψεις ὑποδέχονται τὰς ἐκ τῶν δευτέρων προόδους, ἐκεῖναι δὲ ἐπὶ τούτων ἐδράζονται· καὶ οὕτω προηγούνται μεθέξεις ἄλλαι ἄλλων, καὶ ἐμφάσεις ἄλλαι ἐπ' ἄλλαις ἀνωθεν εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ φοιτῶσιν ὑποκειμενον, τῶν ὀλιγωτέρων προσεργούντων, τῶν δὲ μερικωτέρων ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκείνων ἐνεργείαις τὰς ἑαυτῶν μεταδόσεις χορηγούντων τοῖς μετέχουσιν.

12 Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 385.9-12: δέδεικται δ' <ἐν ἄλλοις>, ὅτι τὴν πρώτην ἀπειρίαν, τὴν πρὸ τῶν μικτῶν, ἐν τῇ ἀκρότητι τῶν νοητῶν ἴδρυσεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν αὐτῆς διατείνει τὴν ἐλλάμψιν ἄχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων [...]. Text edited by E. Diehl, in *Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 3 volumes (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903-1906). Translations adapted 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).

13 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, § 56.

has these things before the forms and their manifestation. [...]

Matter first of all, then, arises from these principles, but it is also produced by secondary and tertiary intelligible and intellective causes, both supercelestial and encosmic. But why do I speak of the Gods alone? Matter is also produced by the nature of the All (with respect to its own existence, for it also participates the first causes), so too the Demiurge, who on the one hand is also the cause of last matter according to the henad in him by which he is also a God, and on the other, according to his existence as demiurge, is not the cause [of last matter], but [the cause] of bodies as bodies and of making bodies.¹⁴

In this way, Proclus begins to reveal the details of matter's origin, and the entire hierarchy of causes seems to contribute. Matter proceeds first from super essential-principles, from the One, the unlimited, and One Being. But it is also produced by the intellectual causes, both those beyond and within the cosmos. These are followed by 'the nature of the All,' who also has something to give matter, and finally matter's last qualities are received in the demiurgic process by which bodies emerge as the sensible substances we know in the world. There is a movement here in four general steps, from the super-essential, to the intelligible-intellectual, to the universal, to the partial. These steps will take on increasing significance as we continue.

Even if there is much to learn here, we must also ask what kind of receptivity is produced at each level. It is clear that there are many matters, but what are they? How do they differ from one another, and how do they work together? These questions are difficult, but not for lack of details. Proclus develops an entire material vocabulary inspired by the *Timaeus*. Terms like 'the traces,' 'the receptacle,' 'the elements,' 'the second

14 Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 385.12-17; 386.14-22: ὥστε κατ' αὐτὸν ἡ ὕλη πρόεισιν ἐκ τε τοῦ ἐνός καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀπειρίας τῆς πρὸ τοῦ ἐνός ὄντος, εἰ δὲ βούλει, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνός ὄντος καθόσον ἐστὶ δυνάμει ὄν. διὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν πῆ ἐστι καὶ ἄπειρον, καὶ ἀμυδρότατον ὄν καὶ ἀνείδεον, διὸ καὶ ταῦτα πρὸ τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ τῆς ἐκφάνσεως αὐτῶν. [...] πρῶτως μὲν οὖν ἀπὸ τούτων ὑφίσταται τῶν ἀρχῶν ἡ ὕλη, παράγει δὲ αὐτὴν τὰ δευτέρα καὶ τρίτα νοητὰ τε καὶ νοερά αἰτία καὶ ὑπερουράνια καὶ ἐγκόσμια. καὶ τί λέγω περὶ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῶν; ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ τοῦ παντός φύσις παράγει τὴν ὕλην καθόσον ἐστὶ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ὑπαρξιν· κατὰ γὰρ ταύτην μετέχει τῆς πρωτίστης αἰτίας· καὶ τοίνυν ὁ δημιουργὸς κατὰ μὲν τὴν ἐνάδα τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ, καθ' ἣν καὶ ἔστι θεός, ἔστι καὶ τῆς ἐσχάτης ὕλης αἴτιος, κατὰ δὲ τὸ ὄν τὸ δημιουργικὸν αὐτῆς μὲν οὐκ αἴτιος, τῶν δὲ σωματῶν ἢ σώματα καὶ τῶν σωματικῶν ποιητικῶν [...].

substrate,' all become distinct levels in matter's development. Consider this passage in which Proclus carefully sorts through the relations between different aspects of the receptacle:

['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' and reflections of them, 'moving in a discordant and disorderly manner.'¹⁵

Most of these terms in quotes are taken directly from the *Timaeus*, and we get a glimpse here of how Proclus strives to see an order among them. In this case, he argues that 'the visible' (ὄρατόν) is posterior to 'matter' (ύλην) and 'second substrate' (δεύτερον ύποκειμένον). Moreover, this 'visible' mass is related somehow to the 'traces of forms' (ίχνη τῶν εἰδῶν), and the 'discordant and disorderly movement' (πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως κινούμενον) they produce. The complexity poses many questions for Proclus' readers: Are these all distinct substrates with distinct causes? How does receptivity develop from one to the next? But these are not even the only terms involved. As Proclus proceeds, he incorporates related concepts from other places, including 'necessity' (ἀνάγκη),¹⁶ 'space' (χώρα),¹⁷ 'unlimitedness' (ἀπειρία),¹⁸ 'the universal receptacle' (πανδεχές),¹⁹ 'the visible whole' (πᾶν

15 Ibid., I 387.12-14: ὥστε οὔτε τὴν ὕλην οὔτε τὸ δεύτερον ὑποκειμένον σημαίνει, ἀλλ' ἔστι τὸ ἤδη μετασχὼν τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ ἴχνη τινα ἔχον αὐτῶν καὶ ἐμφάσεις πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως κινούμενον.

16 See Plato, *Timaeus* 47e.5-48a.2.

17 See Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* 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 δηλον, ὅτι τοιοῦτον ἦν ἐκείνο τὸ θρυλούμενον, τὸ πλημμελές).

18 See Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils* 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;). Text edited by H. Boese, *Procli Diadochi tria Opuscula* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960).

19 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 δυσάλωτότατον αὐτὸ λέγοντες οὐ ψευσομέθα).

σον ἦν ὄρατόν),²⁰ and ‘the elements’ (στοιχεῖα),²¹ as well as some terms that Proclus either infers or draws from other sources, including ‘potential being’ (δυνάμει ὄν),²² ‘unformed body’ (ἄποιον σῶμα),²³ and ‘the enmattered forms’ (ἔνυλα εἶδη). Some are clearly distinct aspects of the material order, while others seem to overlap, to be redundant, or to speak more broadly or particularly about the same phenomena.²⁴ It is, evidently, a very complex theory. And to make its interpretation more difficult, the portion of Proclus’ commentary that interprets the most crucial part of the *Timaeus* on the nature of the receptacle is lost to us.²⁵

The question then is how to proceed. We have on the one hand a sense of how many causes of matter there really are, everything from the One itself down to the makers of particular bodies, and on the other, we have names for distinct kinds of receptivity, but no comprehensive account in the *Timaeus Commentary* as to how their order works together. However, we can still be certain that these distinct orders, one of causes and the other of substrates, share the same metaphysical logic. This is thanks to Proclus’ dependence on the *Parmenides* of Plato in all his

20 See *ibid.*, 30a.3-4 quoted above.

21 See *ibid.*, 48.b-d and 53.c-54.d.

22 See Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 385.9-14.

23 See Proclus, *Parmenides Commentary* VI 1119.9-11; 1123.11-14.

24 This list was prepared with great help from Gerd van Riel (“Proclus on Matter and Physical Necessity,” in *Physics and philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism*, 231-257, edited by R. Chiaradonna and F. Trabattoni [Leiden: Brill, 2009]; “Damascius on Matter,” in *Platonism and Aristotelianism*, 189-213, edited by Th. Bénatouïl, F. Trabattoni and E. Maffi [Hildesheim: Olms, 2011]). His work is a helpful guide to the many ways Proclus speaks about matter, offering a schematized look at how the substrates are structured. Opsomer (“The Natural World,” in *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*, 139-166, edited by Pieter d’Hoine and Marije Martijn [Oxford, 2017]) has carried on the work, describing more broadly how receptivity develops from one step to the next. There is also a late-ancient account of the ‘platonic’ material system, which is likely a fairly accurate representation of Proclus’ own, in John Philoponus’ polemic against Proclus on the eternity of the world (See *Contra Proclum*, 407.16-410.5, available in *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World 9-11*, translated by Michael Share [London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2010]).

25 *Timaeus* 48 ff.

interpretation.²⁶ The structure of the Parmenidean hypotheses and their interpretation provide the means by which Proclus draws Plato's works into a consistent theological system.²⁷ Accordingly, in the second part of this paper we will seek to clarify the veiled dialectic of material receptivity in the *Timaeus Commentary* by seeing its necessary relation to the reciprocal dialectic of divine procession in the *Platonic Theology*, this unity all the while provided by the Parmenidean metaphysical structures which gather together both. We must, in this way, strive to consider matter according to Proclus' theology, looking to see how the orders of material principles are given shape by the Gods themselves.

2

In the first half of Plato's *Parmenides*, the dialogue's namesake scrutinizes Socrates' theory of forms. Commenting on their discussion, Proclus gives particular attention to the question of the unity matter and form must share. All bodies are composed of these two principles, but how are they brought together? Proclus considers various images used to describe their union, 'reflection,' 'seal,' and 'image,'²⁸ but he finally concludes that while these images are useful, it is necessary, most of all, to consider the problem theologically. This move typifies what is so characteristic about Proclus' approach to the natural world. The physical, sensible, and embodied are not finally a world separate from the Gods, but rather, are only comprehensible in light of the higher powers:

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-

26 See Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I.7 ff.

27 van Riel describes the importance of the *Parmenides* for understanding matter in Proclus and others in "Damascius on Matter," 2011.

28 Proclus, *Parmenides Commentary* IV 839-842.

principles. Endowed with these aptitudes, the substrate receives the visible cosmos and participates in the whole process of creation.²⁹

We find here the affirmation of much already discussed above. Just as in the *Elements of Theology*, the things that “appear more imperfect” are products of “more sovereign powers” and the indefiniteness of the corporeal imitates the “ineffable existence” of divine causes. The substrates “bear their reflections,” and the supreme powers of the Gods are 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.

For this reason, just as each divine 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. A little later in the same commentary, Proclus continues, “every creative agent (τὸ ποιούων) works upon something which is by nature susceptible (τὸ παθεῖν) to it, a nature which receives this activity (ἐνέργειαν) into its potency (δυνάμενον).”³⁰ The crucial term here is ‘susceptibility’ (τὸ παθεῖν). The 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.”³¹ Following the *Timaeus*, it is fit to emphasize the emptiness and

29 Ibid., IV 845.3-12: τὰ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα δοκοῦντα εἶναι ἀτελέστερα τῶν ἀρχικωτέρων ἐστὶ δυνάμεων ἐν ἐκείνοις ἀποτελέσματα, διὰ τὴν ἐκείνων ἀπερίγραφον περιοσίαν ἀρχὴ καὶ τῶν τελευταίων προῖέναι δυναμένων, καὶ τῶ ἀορίστῳ τῆς ἑαυτῶν φύσεως μιμεῖται τὴν ἐκείνων ἀρρητον ὑπαρξιν· 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 ὑποπληρώσεως τῶν δημιουργικῶν λόγων καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης συμπλοκῆς τὸν ἐμφανῆ κόσμον ὑπεδέξατο καὶ τῆς ὅλης μετέσχε ποιήσεως.

30 Ibid., IV 843.1-3: πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ πᾶν τὸ ποιούων εἰς τὸ παθεῖν πεφικὸς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ποιεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ καταδέξασθαι τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ὥστε καὶ ὁ δημιουργὸς τι τοιοῦτον ποιήσει·

31 Ibid., IV 843.3-6: τὸ δὲ ἐπιτηδειον εἰς ὃ τί ποτε διὰ τῆς ἐπιτηδειότητος αὐτῆς ἑαυτὸ προσάγει τῶ ποιῆσαι δυναμένῳ, τοῦτο δὲ δι’ ἐφέσεως· ἢ γὰρ προσέλευσις ὄρεξιν ἔχει τοῦ ᾧ πρόεισιν αἰτίου· For the implications of Proclus’ use of “desire” here, see Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils*, 32.28-31.

lack which are not qualities of the receptacle but are its very nature. Even so, this lack, after the reasoning of Plato's *Symposium*, is the condition of desire and receptivity. Matter contributes to the work of demiurgy by means of what it does not have, and as it gradually receives the developing activity of the creative causes, its receptivity also develops in an approach towards a complete world which is moved by the desire for that completion.

This partnership means that form and matter—the productive and receptive causes of bodies—develop according to a unified dialectic, and it means that the more we learn about the Gods, the more we should understand about the material principles of the world. In precisely this fashion, Proclus produces an account of matter's developing receptivity that mirrors directly reciprocal stages in the processions of the Gods. This sparse but crucial text provides the governing structure we require, and it will be our guide for the remainder of the inquiry:

What is the source of [matter's receptivity] and how does it arise? Shall we not say that it comes from the paternal (πατρικῆς) and creative (ποιητικῆς) 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 all-receiving and shapeless form of the *Timaeus*; 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.³²

32 Ibid., 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 νοητός, ὅστις ποτὲ οὐτός ἐστιν, [a.ii.] ἐμφάσεις δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν κατέπεμψεν ἄλλος πατὴρ ἄμα καὶ ποιητής, [a.iii.] ὀλικῶς δὲ ἐκόσμησεν ὁ ποιητής ἔμπαλιν καὶ πατὴρ, [a.iv.] συνεπλήρωσε δὲ διὰ τῆς μεριστῆς δημιουργίας ὁ ποιητής μόνον. καὶ διὰ ταύτας τὰς τέτταρας αἰτίας, [b.i.] ἄλλη μὲν ἢ πρὸ πάσης εἰδοποιίας ὕλη, πανδεχῆς τι οὐσα καὶ ἄμορφον εἶδος, κατὰ τὸν Τίμαιον, [b.ii.] ἄλλο δὲ τὸ δεξάμενον τὰ ἴχνη τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ πλημμελές καὶ ἄτακτον, [b.iii.] ἄλλος δὲ ὁ ὅλος κόσμος καὶ ἐξ ὅλων ὑποστάς πρὸς τὸ παντελές παράδειγμα καὶ μονογενές, [b.iv.] ἄλλος δὲ

Let us begin with a simplified presentation of the text.

<i>Cause</i>	<i>Substrate</i>
The Intelligible Father (ὁ πατήρ ὁ νοητός)	The Matter before all Forming (ἡ πρὸ πάσης εἰδοποιΐας ὕλη), All-receiving (πανδεχέας), and Shapeless Form (ἄμορφον εἶδος)
The Father-Creator (πατήρ ἅμα καὶ ποιητής)	The Receptacle of Traces of Forms (τὸ δεξιόμενον τὰ ἴχνη τῶν εἰδῶν), Discordant and Disordered (πλημμελές καὶ ἀτακτον)
Creator-Father (ὁ ποιητὴς ἔμπαλιν καὶ πατήρ)	The Whole Cosmos Made up of Wholes (ὁ ὅλος κόσμος καὶ ἐξ ὅλων ὑποστάς)
The Creator alone (ὁ ποιητὴς μόνον)	The Fullness of all Living Things (πάντων συμπληρωμένος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ζώων)

The simple presentation of this four-part structure of causes and effects makes use of a complex synthesis of various hierarchies at work in Proclus' reading of the *Timaeus*, the *Parmenides*, and in his *Platonic Theology*. First, the language of 'fathers' and 'creators' is from the *Timaeus*, where Plato writes, "it is a difficult task to find the creator and father of the world."³³ Proclus takes the distinction between these two terms, 'creator' and 'father,' very seriously, and his concern about their significance is clarified when he explains that calling the demiurge 'father' and 'creator' describes his status at the limit of the intelligible (νοητός) and intellectual (νοερός).³⁴

Consequently, we can see that these Timaeian terms are ordered according to a simplified presentation of the very complex order which gives shape to the divine processions of the *Platonic Theology*. 'Father' and 'Creator' correspond to the Intelligible

ὁ ἐκ πάντων συμπληρωμένος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ζώων καὶ πάντα <ἀθάνατά> τε καὶ θνητὰ λαβων, διαφόρων ὑποστησάντων ταῦτα πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου παντός αἰτίων.

33 Plato, *Timaeus* 23c.3-5: "it is a difficult task to find the creator and father of the world" (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.

34 Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 310.4-311.5. See also the very helpful article on the unity of this aspect of Proclus' system, Jan Opsomer, "To find the Maker and Father. Proclus' Exegesis of Plato *Tim.* 28c-3-5," in *Études platoniciennes II*, 261-283 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006).

and Intellectual and their four-fold order can be understood as a short-hand for the processions of Intelligible, Intelligible-Intellectual, Intellectual-Intelligible, and Intellectual Gods who are the subject of the *Platonic Theology*. The consequence is that we may look to the *Platonic Theology* to aid our understanding of the fathers and creators, who they are, and what is their cosmic office.

Finally, the divine orders of the *Platonic Theology* follow explicitly the logical exercises of Plato's *Parmenides*. As Proclus understands the first five hypotheses of the *Parmenides* they articulate the movement of the One from ineffability into all things as it passes from an apophatic vision of the One itself (1st hyp.), to the divine processions (2nd hyp.), through the mediations of soul (3rd hyp.), into enmattered bodies (4th hyp.), finally received by an ineffable matter which is reflective of the first (5th hyp.).³⁵ The version of Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary* we have received does not reach very far beyond the 1st hypothesis. This, however, can be supplemented by his account of the divine processions in the *Platonic Theology* which can be read as a kind of commentary on the 2nd hypothesis.³⁶ The order of substrates we are trying to understand would be included in an interpretation of the 5th hypothesis and to some extent, the 4th. Proclus' explicit commentary on these hypotheses is lost, but thanks to the

35 Proclus, *Parmenides Commentary* VI 1063.16-1064.10: "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." See also *Parmenides Commentary* VI 1040 ff.; for the history of the hypotheses' interpretation in the academy, H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, *Proclus Théologie Platonicienne*, vol. 1 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968), lx ff.; for an aid to interpretation, Jean Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972), 122. Gerd van Riel also describes the importance of the *Parmenides* for understanding matter in Proclus and other Neoplatonists in "Damascius on Matter," 2011.

36 In the *Platonic Theology* the Parmenidean hypotheses are used as a system by which Proclus interprets the theology of Plato's other dialogues as a whole. Proclus describes and defends this method at *Platonic Theology* I.7 ff.

dialogue's method, the relationships between the hypotheses can be inferred. Each hypothesis works dialectically through a series of qualities—'being,' 'wholeness,' 'plurality,' etc.—which follow logically from one to the next. Proclus understands these qualities in the 1st hypothesis with respect to the One, in the 2nd with respect to the Gods. Since the same series of qualities are used to articulate the order of the enmattered (4th hyp.) and matter itself (5th hyp.), these orders will be very instructive as we try to understand the necessary relations to the divine orders and the receptacles.

The four-fold order of fathers and creators is fundamentally the process by which the Gods are revealed in relation to one another through their mutual contemplation. This mutual contemplation is demiurgy, for as the Gods are revealed in one another, their revelation makes the world, which is the product or expression of their divine contemplation. The relations of material substrates to one another out of which embodied substances arise reflect what is potential in this divine thinking. Matter's emerging receptivity witnesses to the necessity in this divine power, which is necessarily complete.

In each of the four stages of Fathers and Creators, the imperfection of matter is a way of describing what else divine power must accomplish in the remaining process of demiurgy. The matter at each stage is a receptivity for the creation that is to come, and it is a reflection of the power that will accomplish it. Insofar as each disposition of Gods describes a part of a process which is complete in each God, the matter made by each disposition describes what is still, according to our reasoning, incomplete with respect to that divine whole. Working through these four stages with the *Platonic Theology* and *Parmenides* in mind,³⁷ we can

37 For this study we will look to Edward Butler's interpretation of the *Platonic Theology* in particular. The virtue of Butler's approach is his insistence that Proclus' theology remain polytheistic. This is primarily an issue of how we are to understand the relation between the henads and the One itself. Butler emphasizes the fact that the henads are, each of them, the One, and that the One is not 'a principle' apart from its identity as each God. For his complete analysis of his 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," *Méthexis* 25 (2012):

discover the logic of matter's developing receptivity in relation to the unfolding processions and dispositions of the Gods.³⁸ Following our passage step by step, we will look to see these two sides of divine power at work together in the creation of the world.

THE INTELLIGIBLE FATHER

The Intelligible Father (ὁ πατήρ ὁ νοητός) produces "the whole nature of what underlies demiurgy." This paternal cause of what *underlies* must be understood as each God according to itself, who is, as we learn in the *Parmenides Commentary*, "nothing else than the One participated."³⁹ In the *Elements*, Proclus explains that "everything paternal in the Gods operates first (πρωτουργόν) and stands in the position of the Good at the head of all the divine orders."⁴⁰ However, we must contrast these paternal henads with the unparticipated One, which "is not even a father but is superior to all paternal divinity"⁴¹—a distinction we will consider more in the conclusion. With the Intelligible Father we begin, not with the One alone, but with the 'One that is,' or 'One-being' (τὸ ἐν ὄν), the the fount of the 2nd hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. Each paternal God is 'a One,' but also, by its divine power, is participated

131-150.

38 Following a central theme of Butler's interpretation of the *Platonic Theology*, it is crucial to note here that the 'fathers' and 'creators,' as with the triads of the *Platonic Theology*, do not exclusively describe specific or individual deities in themselves. They are four moments in the divine procession which occur in each God. These are not particular Gods, but, to use Butler's terminology, "dispositions of henads" (Butler, "The Intelligible Gods," 133). '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, is the 'matter' that each disposition creates? How do these reflective levels of receptivity relate to the Gods and to the world they progressively receive?—these questions are our task.

39 Proclus, *Parmenides Commentary* VI 1069.5-6: καὶ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν ἢ τὸ μετεχόμενον ἓν.

40 Proclus, *Elements of Theology* § 151: Πᾶν τὸ πατρικὸν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς πρωτουργόν ἐστί καὶ ἐν τὰγαθοῦ τάξει προϊστάμενον κατὰ πάσας τὰς θείας διακομήσεις.

41 Proclus, *Parmenides Commentary* 1070.18-20: ὁ δὲ πρῶτος θεὸς διὰ τῆς πρώτης ὑποθέσεως ὑμνούμενος οὔτε πατήρ, ἀλλὰ κρείττων καὶ πάσης τῆς πατρικῆς θεότητος [...].

by all being. As Proclus puts it in the *Timaeus Commentary*, “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.”⁴² Being’s primordial production is the subject of the first three intelligible triads of the *Platonic Theology* and provides our first clue about the origin of matter’s receptivity.

We can understand the matter ‘before all forming’ which proceeds from the Intelligible Father by looking carefully at how Proclus describes the way each God makes being in the *Platonic Theology*. Proclus understands this process in three steps, which make up the three intelligible triads and follow the first three affirmations of the 2nd Parmenidean hypothesis, ‘being’ (τὸ ὄν), ‘wholeness’ (τὸ ὅλον), and ‘plurality’ (τὸ πλῆθος). The first step is the movement from the unparticipated unity of the 1st hypothesis to the One-that-is, which is immediately many because it is both ‘one’ and ‘is’;⁴³ second, since ‘one’ and ‘being’ are distinct, they are both parts of a whole;⁴⁴ and third, since the parts which make up this whole both *are* and *are one*, and can divide this way without end, they become an ‘unlimited plurality’ (ἄπειρον τὸ πλῆθος).⁴⁵ This relation between unity and multiplicity is the fount of all procession and also key to understanding why, at this superessential stage, matter must be already present. But to see this clearly, let us be more precise.

In the *Platonic Theology*, these three first steps of the 2nd hypothesis give shape to the three Intelligible triads, and Proclus identifies the Intelligible Father particularly with the first. In the first intelligible triad, Proclus expresses the relation between One and being according to the triad of Plato’s *Philebus*, ‘limit,’

42 Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* III 21, 74. 6-8: αἱ γὰρ τῶν θεῶν δυνάμεις ὑπερούσιαι εἰσιν αὐταῖς συνυπάρχουσαι ταῖς ἐνάσι τῶν θεῶν, καὶ διὰ ταύτας οἱ θεοὶ γεννητικοὶ τῶν ὄντων εἰσίν.

43 Plato, *Parmenides* 142.b5-c7.

44 Ibid., 142.c7-d9. As wholes and parts emerge here for the first time, Proclus distinguishes this kind of ‘intelligible wholeness’ (ὁλότης νοητή) from the wholeness which is ‘of parts’ and the wholeness which is ‘in parts,’ which play a role once ‘father’ has passed more fully into ‘creator’ (*Platonic Theology* III.35).

45 Ibid., 142.d9-143.a3.

‘unlimited,’ and ‘mixture.’ Limit, Proclus explains, “is a God proceeding to the head of the intelligible from the unparticipated, first God,” while “the unlimited is the inexhaustible power (δύναμις) of this God,” and their mixture is “the first and supreme order (διάκοσμος) of Gods.”⁴⁶ Consider again the first step of the 2nd hypothesis, the ‘One-that-is.’ The ‘being’ of this One is not, in the end, something separate from the Gods, but is rather the ‘mixture’ of their limited existence in supreme unity and unlimited power as infinitely potential. Furthermore, in that mixture there emerges a διάκοσμος of Gods who are, each of them, a limited unity and unlimited potential in relation to one another. In this way, we can start to see how emerging multiplicity in the Intelligible Father is not the sudden presence of something distinct from the Gods; it is rather the multiplicity of the Gods themselves as they are present to one another. Edward Butler is helpful here:

[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.⁴⁷

Each God makes being into relation to every other according to the tension between their ‘limit’ as a unity, and their ‘unlimitedness’ as an infinite power. This tension occurs in each God, and being is the expression of that opposition. It is the tension between divine power and existence that makes all being and ‘drives,’ as it were, all procession. And just as all procession expresses what is hidden in this tension in an affirmative way, the nothingness of matter witnesses to it through negation.

Proclus calls the matter proceeding from Intelligible Father the matter ‘before all forming,’ the ‘all-receiving,’ and ‘shapeless kind.’ This matter is envisioned as the mother who conceives being even as the intelligible father begets. Looking at the *Timaeus* itself, we can see how much the text informs the way Proclus understands these principles:

46 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* III 12, 44.24-45.7: Ὦν 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 μικτόν ὁ πρωτίστος καὶ ὑψηλότατος διάκοσμος τῶν θεῶν [...].

47 Butler, “The Intelligible Gods,” 145.

It is, in fact, appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother, the source to a father, and the nature between them to their offspring [...]. If we speak of it as an invisible and shapeless sort of thing, one that is all-receiving and shares in a most perplexing way in the intelligible, a thing extremely difficult to comprehend, we shall not be misled.⁴⁸

One aspect of the difference between father and creator is that the father begets while the creator orders. Accordingly, since Intelligible Father is a father alone and no creator or maker, his matter is 'before all form-making' (ή πρό πάσης εἰδοποιίας ὕλη). Each stage in matter's development furnishes a receptivity for what will be imparted in the next. As Plato insists, this matter must be nothing in itself since it receives all things and its receptivity is from its lack. But even in that all-receiving formlessness, we can already see that intelligible limit and unlimited have irradiated their gifts. On the one hand, from limit, matter is receptive of the 'totality,' or 'all,' a material limit that excludes all unlimitedness—nothing will lie outside of matter's all-receiving. On the other hand, matter is completely unlimited, for it is nothing in itself, "an invisible and shapeless sort of thing." These two qualities are clearly in tension, but this is a tension that simply reflects the tension driving procession in the Intelligible Father.

THE FATHER-CREATOR

If the Intelligible Father is each God as it produces being uniquely and we continue to follow the argument of the *Platonic Theology*, the Father-Creator (πατήρ-ποιητής) is the first order of Gods. In fact, this stage already began to emerge in the previous as the mixture of limit and unlimited which was "the first and supreme order (διάκοσμος) of Gods."⁴⁹ Indeed, each of these stages does not describe something 'new,' but rather unfolds the previous stage more completely. As being is made in each God it receives

48 Plato, *Timaeus* 50d.2-51b.2: καὶ δὴ καὶ προσεῖκάσαι πρέπει τὸ μὲν δεχόμενον μητρὶ, τὸ δ' ὄθεν πατρὶ, τὴν δὲ μεταξὺ τούτων φύσιν ἐκγόνου [...]. ἀνόρατον εἶδος τι καὶ ἄμορφον, πανδεχές, μεταλαμβάνον δὲ ἀπορώτατά πη τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ δυσαλωτότατον αὐτὸ λέγοντες οὐ ψευσόμεθα.

49 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* III 12, 45.7: ὁ πρόωτιστος καὶ ὑψηλότατος διάκοσμος τῶν θεῶν [...].

a multiplicity of divine persons, and the Father-Creator marks the beginning of this divine community. In the *Platonic Theology*, Proclus calls the mutual contemplation which characterizes this dispensation the ‘intelligible-intellectual’ (νοητός-νοερός), where each God is thinking every other God and is the object of every other’s thought. Proclus also calls this community of contemplation the ‘intelligible watchtower’ (νοητῆ περιωπῆ),⁵⁰ the meeting place of the Gods before they proceed to the intellectual activity of cosmogony. It is also called the ‘intellectual heaven’ (ὁ νοερός οὐρανός), which is “whole and one, a united intelligence,”⁵¹ and “binds all the manifolds of beings into an indivisible communion, illuminating each with an appropriate portion of connection.”⁵² These images depict the symposium of the Gods just as they begin to turn towards the activity of world-making.

But why does the Father-Creator contribute something distinct from the Intelligible Father, and why is this second stage before the complete turn to demiurgy necessary? If we continue to follow the dialectic of the 2nd hypothesis, with the Father-Creator arise ‘multiplicity’ (πολλά), ‘wholes/parts’ (ὅλον καὶ μέρη) and ‘figure’ (σχῆμα). These three are essentially the elaboration of what was implicit in the ‘plurality’ (τὸ πλῆθος) of the Intelligible Father. The movement from one term to the next is subtle (especially since ‘whole’ appears twice), but the development can be characterized as a move from an intelligible plurality understood primarily as a whole to the multiplying parts themselves and their emerging relations to one another.

This movement from wholeness to a *relation between parts* is key to understanding the transition between the office of Father and Creator, which we can understand loosely as a transition between he who makes something new and he who orders something

50 Ibid., II 12, 66.14.

51 Ibid., IV 20, 59.10: ἐστι καὶ ὅλη καὶ μία καὶ ἠνωμένη νόησις.

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

received. However, while with the Father-Creator we contemplate the parts which compose the multiplicity in the divine community, we do not yet know their relation. Indeed, it is the revelation of their relations to one another that will make the world. This is also our clue to what is distinct about matter at this stage, which proceeding from Father-Creator is a receptivity for order.

Accordingly, Proclus calls the matter proceeding from the Father-Creator the discordant and disordered (πλημμελές και ἄτακτον) receptacle of the traces of forms (τὸ δεξάμενον τὰ ἵχνη τῶν εἰδῶν). The divine symposium of the Father-Creator produces the matter which the demiurge proper (in the next stage) 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.”⁵³ We can get a picture of what this looks like by drawing on another place in the *Parmenides Commentary* where Proclus describes the transition between the matter of the Father-Creator and that of the Creator-Father in the next stage:

Consider that unqualified substratum of bodies which is between matter and the numerous proximate forms; you will find that it also has being and form and difference and identity. How could it exist without being? How could it have three dimensions without difference? And how could it hold together without identity? But likeness and unlikeness are not in it, 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 power.⁵⁴

This passage describes the transition in matter’s receptivity between the Father-Creator and the Creator-Father as the disordered traces of form develop into wholes with real attributes. Matter receives here the greatest kinds from Plato’s *Sophist*—same, other, motion, rest,

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

54 Proclus, *Parmenides Commentary* II 735.33-736.5: εἰ γὰρ λάβοις αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ἄπειον ἐκεῖνο τῶν σωμάτων ὑποκείμενον, ὁ μεταξὺ τῆς ὕλης ἐστὶ και τῶν εἰδῶν τῶν πολλῶν πρώτως [διαστατόν], εὐρήσεις αὐτὸ και οὐσίαν ἔχον και εἶδος και ἑτερότητα και ταυτότητα. πῶς γὰρ ἂν εἴη χωρὶς οὐσίας; πῶς δὲ τρεῖς διαστάσεις | χωρὶς διαίρεσεως; πῶς δὲ συνέχοι ταυτότητος χωρὶς; ἀλλ’ ὁμοίότης ἐκεῖ και ἀνομοίότης οὐκ ἐστίν· ἄπειον γὰρ ἐστὶ· ταῦτα δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἡδὴ πεποιημένοις· ἐπεὶ και κίνησιν ἔχει και στάσιν, ὡς μὲν γιγνόμενον ἀεὶ, κίνησιν, ὡς δὲ μὴ ἐξιτάμενον τῆς οὐκείας ὑποδοχῆς, στάσιν.

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, their ‘traces.’ In addition, it is no mistake that these formal traces are also the next qualities to emerge in the 2nd Parmenidean hypothesis, ‘motion/rest’ (κινεῖσθαι/ἔσταναι) and ‘identity/difference’ (ἀπὸ/ἕτερον). Moreover, Proclus is careful to say that likeness and unlikeness (ὁμοίον/ἀνόμοιον) are not yet present, and, in the 2nd hypothesis, these will be the very next qualities affirmed. 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.”⁵⁵ 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 as paternal activity passes more completely into creative order.

THE CREATOR-FATHER

The ‘Creator-Father’ (ποιητῆς-πατήρ) is the beginning of demiurgy proper and the first cause of production (ποιήσεως).⁵⁶ Unlike the Father or Father-Creator, the demiurge is the first to be revealed as a distinct deity, who for the Hellenes is Zeus. As a father, Zeus would be no more superior or inferior to any other God, and indeed, would not even yet be known as ‘Zeus.’ At that first stage, each is first and each is one. However, as the intelligible passes more completely into the intellectual, a distinct order among the divine powers begins to emerge.

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.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 387.17-19: ταύτας δὲ ἐλλάμπουσι μὲν αἰ πρὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ πᾶσαι τάξεις τῶν θεῶν [...].

⁵⁶ Proclus, *Platonic Theology* III 19, 67.12-13: πρῶτιστιν εἶναι τῆς ποιήσεως [...] αἰτίαν.

⁵⁷ Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 262.17-25: ἀλλ’ εἰς κοίρανος ἔστω καὶ ἐν πάντων αἰτίον καὶ μία πρόνοια καὶ εἰς εἰρμός, ἔστω δὲ καὶ ἅμα τῇ μονάδι τὸ

In order to understand the place of this divine order within the dialectic as a whole, we must remember that while demiurge is more a maker than father, he has not ceased his paternal activity. As a father the demiurge “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).⁵⁸ Following Butler’s understanding, this ‘receiving’ and ‘projecting’ is the moment at which

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.⁵⁹

In the demiurgic activity, each God qualifies every other as their unlimitedness comes into reciprocal relation,⁶⁰ or to put it in another way, as “one God ‘sees’ the cosmos in another.”⁶¹

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), governing the demiurgy of wholes and universals.⁶² 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*,⁶³ from triangles, the simplest shape. The forms of the triangles are the matter for the forms of the other elements,

οικεῖον πλῆθος καὶ πολλοὶ βασιλεῖς καὶ αἴτια ποικίλα καὶ πρόνοια πολυειδῆς καὶ τάξις διάφορος, πανταχοῦ δὲ τὸ πλῆθος ἐχέτω περὶ τὴν μονάδα σύνταξιν καὶ τὰ ποικίλα περὶ τὸ ἀπλοῦν καὶ τὰ πολυειδῆ περὶ τὸ μονοειδές καὶ τὰ διάφορα περὶ τὸ κοινόν, ἵνα σεβά τις ὄντως χρυσὴ πάντων ἐπάρχῃ καὶ πάντα διακοσμήται δεόντως.

58 Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 310.9-11.

59 Butler, “The Third Intelligible Triad and the Intellective Gods,” 144.

60 *Ibid.*, 137.

61 *Ibid.*

62 I follow here Jan Opsomer’s notes on the substrate and demiurgy in “The Natural World,” 139-166.

63 Plato, *Timaeus* 53.

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.

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 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 this 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 hylomorphic compounds, we realize that both of these principles are expressions of divine power as it is revealed in the beings that it makes.

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 differentiation of that individual's *powers* or attributes, which are potential universalities, from the *huparxis* itself which [is] the very *uniqueness* of the

henad.”⁶⁴ This tension between power and existence is the ‘engine’ driving the procession of being, from each individual 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. At each stage of being’s procession, the tension between divine power and henadic existence produces a necessity for the level of completion that will follow. At each stage, matter, which is the receptive substrate of what remains to be revealed, is that necessity itself.

CONCLUSION

Let us look, in conclusion, to one more text from the *Timaeus* Commentary which provides a summarizing witness to Proclus’ theological vision of the material world:

All things that exist are offspring of the Gods, are brought into existence without intermediation by them, and have their foundation in them. For not only does the continuous procession of entities reach completion as each of them successively obtains its subsistence from its proximate causes, but it is also from the very Gods themselves that all things in a sense are generated [...].

For this reason, even if you take the lowest levels [of existence], there too you will find the divine present. The One is in fact everywhere present, inasmuch as each of the beings derives its existence from the Gods, and even though they proceed forth from the Gods, they have not gone out from them but rather are rooted in them. Where, indeed, could they ‘go out,’ when the Gods have embraced all things, possess them before, and ever hold them in themselves? [...] All beings have been embraced in a circle by the Gods and exist in them. In a wonderful way, therefore, all things both have and have not proceeded forth.⁶⁵

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

65 Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 209.14-29: Πάντα τὰ ὄντα θεῶν ἐστὶν ἔκγονα καὶ παρὰ γέται ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἀμέσως πάντα καὶ ἰδρύεται ἐν αὐτοῖς. οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἢ κατὰ συνέχειαν ἐπιτελεῖται τῶν πραγμάτων πρόοδος, ἀεὶ τῶν ἔξης ἀπὸ τῶν προσεσχῶς αἰτίων ὑφισταμένων, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτόθεν ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν ἐστὶν ὅπῃ γεννᾶται τὰ πάντα [...]. διό, κὰν τὰ ἔσχατα λάβῃς, καὶ τοῦτοις παρὸν τὸ θεῖον εὐρήσεις· ἔστι γὰρ πανταχοῦ τὸ ἓν, καθὸ τῶν ὄντων ἕκαστον ἐκ θεῶν ὑφέστηκε, προελθόντα δὲ πάντα ἐκ θεῶν οὐκ ἐξελήλυθεν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν, ἀλλ’ ἐνεργίζονται ἐν αὐτοῖς· ποῦ γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἐξέλθοι, πάντα τῶν θεῶν περιεληφῶτων καὶ προκατειληφῶτων καὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐχόντων [...] πάντα δὲ τὰ ὄντα κύκλω περιεῖληπται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐστὶ. θαυμαστὸν οὖν τινα τρόπον καὶ προήλθε πάντα καὶ οὐ προήλθεν.

Consider the notion that even as beings “proceed forth from the Gods, they have not gone out from them but rather are rooted in them.” It is precisely this vision of divine providence and presence that Proclus’ doctrine of matter supports. Far from being simply the dregs of being, or the result of the Gods’ dwindling power at the end of procession, matter for Proclus is a way of talking about the revelation of divine power in the world which is making the world by that very revelation. The corporeal is only conceivable for Proclus as the aggregation of divine gifts given and received in one another. From this perspective, our world really is a “shrine for the everlasting Gods,”⁶⁶ their perfect power expressed in time as each of us is composed by irradiations of the Heavenly Hosts and received in powers more ancient.

Proceeding from the Intelligible Father, matter is the totally unlimited and unformed receptivity that emerges from the relation between the power and existence of each God. This matter is the possibility of being; it is a universal receptivity, potentially all. In the next moment, being receives a multiplicity of henads, and matter becomes a receptacle of formal traces, which provide everything the demiurge needs to make the world. Then, as the demiurge takes up the intelligible receptacle and imparts an order, we get the first corporeal matter, which is corporeal now because it has begun to receive form. At this stage, matter is relative to wholes, but it still embodies the necessity in universal demiurgy for what must follow, for ‘whole’ 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 which is brought to completion in the birth and death of living beings in time.

There remains, however, a crucial question, for there is still something ‘before’ these four stages of divine determination. The Intelligible Father, we learned is the One-participated; it is One-Being or the One-that-is. This father is each God. But what of the *unparticipated* One which is before being

66 Plato, *Timaeus* 37c.

and even before the community of henads? We must return again to One itself and recall the principle with which we began: “The last [...] proceeds from the first alone.”⁶⁷

Before the many orders of receptivity that develop in being there is a matter which is absolutely before and beneath all. We began this essay by considering the affinity between matter and the One, an ineffable relation in nothingness between excess and lack. Our inquiry followed the movement of divine gifts given and received in the gradual unfolding of being’s participation in the Gods. There is, however, a matter before this participation, and Proclus is very careful to preserve its unparticipated separation.

The henads of the Gods are superior to being, and before them is the One itself. It transcends all beings and is not participated by them, like as the henads which come after it and from it are described and are in fact participated by being. But the henads do not penetrate through to the lowest level. For we can neither call matter an ‘always-existing’ (we usually call it ‘non-being’), nor a ‘becoming.’ Matter can suffer no thing, lest it be destroyed and vanish altogether.⁶⁸

Proclus discusses here the manifestations of limit and unlimited at every level of reality, beginning with the paternal henads who make being by their mixture. However, if we look back to the One itself, we could describe this same moment in another way and say that limit and unlimited are the modes by which the One becomes present to beings.

There are two sides; on the one hand, the One is ineffably present to beings as their limit and as their unlimitedness, and on the other, the manifestations of the One as limit and unlimited is each God. Each God is the One to being, and the One in being is each God. But before being’s participation in the Gods, there is a matter which proceeds from the One

67 Proclus, *Elements of Theology* § 59.9-10: τὸ ἔσχατον [...] ἀπὸ μόνου πρόεισι τοῦ πρώτου.

68 Proclus, *Timaeus Commentary* I 226.15-22: κρείττους γάρ εἰσιν αἱ τῶν θεῶν ἑνάδες τοῦ ὄντος, καὶ πρὸ τούτων αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν ἐξήρηται τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων, οὐδὲ μετεχόμενον ὑπ’ αὐτῶν, ὥσπερ αἱ μετ’ αὐτὸ καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ μεθεκταὶ λέγονται καὶ εἰσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄντος ἑνάδες· οὔτε ἄχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων διήκει· τὴν γὰρ ὕλην οὔτε ὄν ἀεὶ φάναι δυνατόν, ἦν τὸ μὴ ὄν εἰώθαμεν καλεῖν, οὔτε γιγνώμενον, ἦν μὴδὲ πάσχειν δυνατόν, ἵνα μὴ παντάπασιν οἴχοιτο ἀπολομένη.

alone. The distinction between these two sides is participation itself. The One is unparticipated, and its matter, since it lacks all participation, is the receptivity of participation altogether.

It is as if the ineffable relation between matter and the One is the *source* of participation, but it would be difficult to understand what this means. How can we describe a 'relation' between two ineffabilities for which similarity and difference do not yet exist? How can these terms be the 'source' of something when we can not even rightly call them 'principles' at all? Matter and the One, we must conclude are but different names of the same ineffability; but it is we who name them. This is the crucial point: the 'difference' between matter and the One is a difference *for us*. These names for ineffability are, in the end, two points of view which 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."⁶⁹ From this single 'principle' proceed the dispensations of the Gods and the orders of substrates, but both of these sides are modes of looking towards that which produces the affirmations of all things in the excessive negation of its own nothingness. All things are given and received in an ineffability which, at the last, we must venerate, together with the One, in silence.

⁶⁹ Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 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 ἐπιστροφᾶς ἐπ' ἐκεῖνο μεταφέρομεν ἐπάγοντες.