

Proclus' Interpretation of the *Parmenides*, Dialectic and the Wandering of the Soul

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At the centre of Neoplatonic philosophy is Plato's dialogue the *Parmenides* and the enigmatic hypothetical method of its second half.¹ While the precise subject of the later hypotheses was the subject of debate within the school, the overall purpose of the second half was not: it was an account of the derivation of all things from a transcendent principle, the One, which is beyond thought and being, down to the lowest and most unstable parts of the material world. Plotinus quoted only selectively from the *Parmenides* and predominantly from its second half,² while Proclus' commentary on the dialogue is expansive, treating the text in detail from the opening of the dialogue until the end, as we have received it, of the first hypothesis (*Parm.*, 142a).

In his introduction he presents a small history of prior interpretations, discussing a total of five separate interpretations.³ He divides these interpretations into two main trends:⁴ one group saw the *skopos* of the dialogue to be a logical *gymnasia* (630.27–631.1) and the other understood it to be about reality itself (635.21).⁵ Proclus outlines these, I believe, to clarify how his

1. This paper is developed from my doctoral dissertation (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) which was generously supported by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council (SSHRC).

2. For a partial list of passages cited, see E.R. Dodds, "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the origins of the Neoplatonic 'One'," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928): 132–33.

3. For an account of Proclus' history, see C. Steel, "Une histoire de l'interprétation du *Parménide* dans l'Antiquité," in *Il Parmenide di Platone e la sua tradizione*, ed. M. Barbanti & F. Romano (Catania: CUECM, 2002), 11–40; C. Steel, "Proclus et l'interprétation logique du *Parménide*," in *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale*, ed. L. G. Benakis (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 67–92.

4. Cf. *The Platonic Theology*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey & L.-G. Westerink (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968), I.8–10.

5. Proclus, *In Parmenidem*, ed. C. Steel (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007). I use this edition and not *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, ed. A.-Ph. Segonds & C. Luna (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007). For translations of the commentary, I use Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*,

predecessors attempted to connect the parts of the dialogue with what they understood the *skopos* to be, which clarification would in turn help his own solution. In Proclus' account, for instance, the logical interpretation of the dialogue focused on the method section and the second half of the dialogue insofar as they thought these two sections outlined and gave an example of a refutation or helped clarify difficult concepts, but in no way did they think that the dialogue made positive statements about reality. The first reality interpretation reveals, however, a subtle shift in how each section is understood: the first section showed that Socrates needed training, while the logical exercise in the second section was introduced for the adumbration of reality in the third. As a consequence of this balance, Proclus notes, Parmenides "shows that the purpose of the inquiry now under way is an important one, and that the method introduced serves that important purpose and is understood as a necessary preliminary to the inquiry about Being ..." (636.12–14). In Proclus' presentation of the early Neoplatonic group (likely Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus), however, he does not discuss the connection of the parts of the dialogue to the whole, but only the development of the subject matter of the hypotheses that led them to connect separate levels of reality to different hypotheses. Clearly, there is a need in Neoplatonism for a training prior to the ascent to Being,⁶ but what is less clear is how the early Neoplatonists connected this philosophic-spiritual necessity to the structure and overall interpretation of the *Parmenides*.

Proclus' desire to articulate a unified interpretation of the whole dialogue means that he has to account for the two earlier sections explicitly within the sweep and true *skopos* of the dialogue. When regarded in this way, Proclus' own solution heavily depends on incorporating the insights of the logical *gymnasia* interpretation (though it has the wrong *skopos*) and the first 'reality' group (though it incorrectly identifies the subject of the hypotheses and is imprecise in its identification of the *skopos*) into a comprehensive Neoplatonic philosophy, completely informed by and woven into the *Parmenides* as its centre. Proclus' presentation of earlier interpreters should not be understood as merely polemical.

Turning to the method section of the dialogue, after Parmenides seems to destroy Socrates' theory of the forms, Parmenides tells Socrates that he must train himself. Socrates asks him what form this training should take and he responds that it should take the Zenonian form:

trans. J. Dillon & G. Morrow (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1987) and note my alterations. I use the pagination of *Procli philosophi Platonici opera inedita*, ed. V. Cousin (Paris, 1864), reprinted (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), but the lineation of Steel's *In Parmenidem*.

6. E.g., Plotinus, *Ennead* I.3.1 where he says that there are two stages to those who wish to ascend. This is a clear example and continuation of ancient philosophy as a spiritual exercise. Cf. P. Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 261.

[e]xcept for this: I admired it when you said, and said to him, that you would not allow the inquiry to wander (*planê*) among the things we see nor concern them, but rather concern those things which one would most especially grasp by rational account and believe to be forms.⁷

In the Platonic text we see that this metaphor of 'wandering' (*planê*) is somehow connected to the method of dialectic that Parmenides will propose. What I would like to examine, then, is how Proclus' attention to details of the method section of the dialogue, specifically this idea of 'wandering' (*planê*), radically changes how the Parmenidean dialectic is conceived, how the dialogue itself was interpreted by the Neoplatonists and, thus, how the Procline interpretation of the dialectic represents a significant departure from (or a radical deepening of) that tradition. Along with Plato's use of the cognates of *gymnazein* also employed in this section of the dialogue,⁸ Proclus uses these terms to find a preparatory middle dialectic in the *Parmenides*, a logical *gymnasia*, in addition to the inspired highest dialectic that alone, up until now, was thought to be found in the dialogue by Proclus' schoolmen.⁹

This paper will have six sections. First, we will outline basic epistemological presuppositions in the Neoplatonic system and some of Proclus' developments of it. Second, we will briefly address Plato's use of the word *planê*. Third, we will discuss in detail the metaphor of *planê* in Proclus' other works and his transformation of it into an important concept within his system. Fourth, we will return to a consideration of the problem of *planê* relative to the problem of dialectic in the *Parmenides* and discuss this in light of our examination. Fifth, we will discuss problems that arise from Proclus' development. Finally, we will make general conclusions about the role *planê* plays in Proclus' interpretation of the method in the *Parmenides*.

7. *Parm.*, 135e; trans. Allan, alt.

8. Cf. *Parm.*, 135c8, 135d4, 135d7 and 136a2.

9. The realisation that Proclus is attempting this is made more difficult by the fact that scholars often do not recognise the existence of middle gymnastic Platonic dialectic in Athenian Neoplatonism. For example, A. Longo, *Siriano e i principi della scienza* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2005), 225–92, suggests that when Syrianus in his *Metaphysics* commentary speaks of dialectic (as opposed to the Aristotelian first science), this dialectic referred to could not be that of Plato because the methods it employs are so logical. Longo suggests that Syrianus was referring to the Aristotelian dialectic (*ibid.*, 228ff). The description of dialectic in the *Metaphysics* commentary, however, perfectly coincides with the Platonic middle dialectic as presented by Proclus. Accordingly, in the *Metaphysics* commentary the Aristotelian first science corresponds to the Platonic highest dialectic and the dialectic there corresponds to the Platonic middle gymnastic dialectic. I will discuss Proclus' conception of this middle dialectic below.

I. EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN PROCLUS' THEORY OF DIALECTIC

Nous, the second divine principle, was for the Neoplatonists the origin and place of the Forms which are both thought and are thinking in one timeless activity and that strives, unsuccessfully, to imitate the pure unity of the One. Following both the description of the highest section of the Platonic line in the *Republic* (509d–513e) as well as Aristotle's first principle, the type of thinking associated with this was *noêsis*. After *Nous* came Soul. Like *Nous* that tries to be like what created it, this divine entity strives to be like *Nous*. However, just as *Nous* could not replicate the pure unity of the One, so also Soul cannot replicate the plurality of forms in unity of *Nous*. Accordingly, the sharper division between subject and object changes both the activity of the thinking as well as the object. The nature of thinking in Soul is *dianoia*, or discursive reasoning, which corresponds to the section below *noêsis* in the Platonic line. For Proclus, the objects that soul thinks are *logoi*, that is, intelligible objects which, like Soul, are derivative of *Nous* and so derivative of Forms.

As the name indicates, the divine Soul causes the particular human soul and so the human soul is most like it.¹⁰ For Plotinus, the source of scientific knowledge for the human soul is *Nous* because it is the cause and place of the Forms. Thus to explain how the human is able to attain timeless scientific knowledge, he subdivided Soul into two parts, asserting that one part of the Soul remained 'above' in *Nous* and so among the Forms and another part descended 'below' to the material realm.¹¹ Proclus rejects this division of the soul and asserts that the soul is completely descended and, instead, possesses an image of the cosmos in itself.¹² While the Procline soul does have a mode of existence and level of knowledge appropriate to it (that is, *dianoia* and its *logoi* as objects) it can act in ways alien to it. As a soul, it can 'descend' to or turn towards the level of sensation, images and opinion or 'ascend' or revert to *Nous* and even the One. In each case, it is as a soul that it acts or participates on these levels and so its constitution differs from that of the Plotinian soul. Proclus thus asserts that the soul has its own proper intelligible objects (*logoi*) and cognitive activity (*dianoia*) so that it need not leave itself (as a soul) to attain scientific knowledge. And yet that the soul nonetheless also has an image of *Nous* in it¹³ (and the One) and so also has

10. Accordingly, when I refer to the divine archetype I will use a capital 'S,' while with the human soul I will use the lower-case 's.'

11. Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead*, II.9.2.

12. Cf. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 948 ff.

13. To clarify, whenever Proclus speaks of the soul's ascent to *Nous* or the Forms, it is always to the Forms in the "*Nous* in us," not *Nous* itself. That is, the soul remains at its own rank as soul, but reflects on a higher part of itself, that is, the *Nous* in it. Cf. W. Beierwaltes, "Der Begriff des 'unum in nobis' bei Proklos," in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, v.1.2, *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1963), 255–66.

some sort of access to the 'true' Forms in *Nous* (and to the One) creates new tensions and epistemological problems within his system: what would the soul's activity that turns to the *Nous* in it look like and how would it differ from its more native cognition?

It is with this background that we can understand how Proclus conceives of dialectic and get some sense of the problems in it. Proclus divides dialectic into three parts or activities.¹⁴ The lowest is *elenchus*, designed to refute sophists and their double ignorance. The middle dialectic is for young men who have a natural aptitude for the life of the mind, but who, as Parmenides says, still need additional training (*Parm.*, 135e). This training is described as partly expositing truth and partly refuting falsity. The highest is for those who have already trained themselves and is considered the true dialectic. To the middle and the highest dialectic Proclus assigns different objects and modes of thinking associated with each. The middle 'gymnastic' dialectic is one which deals exclusively with *logoi* and uses exclusively *dianoia*. The highest dialectic begins with the Forms in *Nous* in us and involves *noësis* or has it as a necessary moment of it.¹⁵

Proclus' conception of dialectic, we see, introduces problems that overlap with the problem described just above: the middle dialectic that uses *dianoia* and *logoi* seems to be the one most connate to the soul, while the highest dialectic somehow has access to this higher part of the soul that is 'above' it. How the soul as dianoetic can have this higher form of knowledge is, again, a new problem or sharpening of it that emerges with Proclus' development of the Neoplatonic soul and epistemology.

2. PLATO ON *PLANÈ*

To get a better sense of what *planè* is, it is helpful to consider what general connotations it has in Plato. On the whole, it has somewhere between a neutral and negative meaning. The most obvious sense of the word *planè* is one that connotes movement, as the English derivative 'planet' plainly conveys. Thus fixed stars are ἀπλανῆ whereas others which "reverse their motion" 'wander' (*Tim.*, 40b). On the neutral side, it is similar to *zētēsis*, a searching or investigation.¹⁶

14. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 989.10–18 (cited below) and 653.3–655.13. Cf. also A. Lernould, "La dialectique comme science première chez Proclus," *Revue Scientifique de philosophie et théologie* 71 (1981): 509–36.

15. The complete character of the highest dialectic is unclear in Proclus' description. It is clear that it has *noësis* as a moment of it and an appropriate object (Forms in *Nous* in us). But the necessarily discursive nature of dialectic, of soul and its specific methods (division, collection, etc.) seem to require a discursivity at odds with the instantaneous and unified insight of *noësis*. Thus, it seems that even the highest dialectic must have a necessarily supplementary and lower activity than *noësis* alone.

16. Cf. *Apology*, 22a and *Sophist*, 245e.

In the *Republic* (602c), more negatively, it is associated with the false perception by the eye of a bent stick in water and also every confusion in our soul.¹⁷ In *Letters VII* (35d), Plato speaks of the vicissitudes of travel. More pointedly, in the *Phaedo*, while describing philosophy as a preparation for death to the Neopythagoreans, Simmias and Cebes, Socrates describes the soul that has lived rightly:

Very well, if this is [the soul's] condition, then it departs to that place which is, like itself, invisible, divine, immortal, and wise, where, on its arrival, happiness awaits it, and release from wandering and ignorance, from fears and uncontrolled desires, and all other human evils and where, as they say of the initiates in the Mysteries, it really spends the rest of time with God.¹⁸

This is Plato's most pejorative use of *planê*, associated with ignorance, enumerating it even as an evil. But importantly in this context it is associated with the state of the soul in the body, even a soul which strives for the Good, making the point that only release from the body at death will assuage these afflictions.

3. *PLANÊ* IN THE PROCLINE CORPUS

The metaphor of *planê* for Proclus undergoes a development as full and significant as his elaboration of the Neoplatonic universe. In general, we perceive two related trends in Proclus' conception of *planê* in relation to soul. The first relates more to the embodied state of the soul that must contend with the difficulties of the attraction of the generation of the sensible world, the forgetting of its true origin and self and how, consequently, it returns to or remembers itself through a scientific and unerring grasp of the forms. Thus for Proclus it carries the more mundane sense of circuitous travel,¹⁹ error²⁰ and movement in general²¹ and of bodies in particular.²² Proclus also identifies it, following the *Phaedo* (81a) cited above, with the descent of the soul into the body and, consequently, the depth of matter and the realm of generation and dissimilitude.²³ With *lethe* and ignorance, Proclus

17. Cf. also *Rep.*, 505c.

18. 81a; trans. Tredennick-Jowett; alt.

19. That is, of Odysseus' wanderings: *Essays on the Republic*, ed. W. Kroll (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899–1901), I.131.7; I.171.2.

20. Cf. *Commentary on Euclid's Elements*, ed. G. Friedlein (Leipzig: Teubner, 1873), 70.4; *Commentary on Alcibiades I*, ed. A.-Ph. Segonds (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985–1986), 229.7; 253.12; 273.19; *Commentary on the Timaeus*, ed. E. Diehl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1906), II.308.14. Plotinus speaks of the wandering about sensible objects. Cf. *Ennead*, I.3.4.9.

21. Not surprisingly, the term is ubiquitous in this sense in his *Timaeus* commentary.

22. Cf. *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.20.

23. Cf. *Commentary on Alcibiades I*, 53.12; 224.4; *Commentary on the Timaeus*, I.302.17; II.307.10; III.296.9; III.380.21.

even compares it to a poison. The reason why this sense of *planê* has such a negative connotation is because these are all below the level and dignity of soul. The particular embodied soul must continually contend with things that distract it from itself.

The second trend in Proclus' interpretation of the metaphor of *planê* relates to a consideration not of the distraction of soul in what is inferior to it, but a consideration of the essential nature of the soul in itself and is in no way derisive. For this we turn to Proclus' description of the divine Soul and its relation to *Nous* in *The Platonic Theology*, I 19.²⁴ In its essence, Soul is eternally identical, but in its activity it changes, takes part in time and thinks different intelligible objects at different moments, as Socrates says in the *Phaedrus* (246b), going from form to form.²⁵ *Nous*, however, is always the same, where its being and thinking are one, but its essence, faculties and activities are held together in eternity.²⁶ *Nous* does, however, have a multiplicity of intellections and objects of thought and so possesses not only identity to itself but difference from itself as well.²⁷ In a very limited sense, Proclus concedes that *Nous* could be said to 'wander' because, in its contemplation of itself, it unfolds itself and advances to plurality.²⁸ He also compares the nature of *Nous* and Soul earlier in his *Parmenides* commentary.

The divine and demiurgic Intellect contains plurality in unity, divisible things undivided and distinguishables undiscriminated. Soul is what first separates (διαίρουσιν) these contents that exist previously in perfect unity in that Intellect—not our soul only, but

24. For a detailed analysis of Soul's activity in time, cf. G. MacIsaac, "Projection and Time in Proclus," in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. J. Inglis (London: Curzon, 2002), 83–105 as well as É. Joly, "Le temps n'est pas un produit de l'âme: Proclus contre Plotin," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59 (2) (2003): 225–34 and W. O'Neill, "Time and Eternity in Proclus," *Phronesis* 7 (1962): 161–65.

25. *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.7–12. Cf. also *Commentary on the Timaeus*, II.243.22. And on participated souls, cf. *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), § 191. An important Plotinian text on this issue is *Ennead*, III.7.11.35–44; cf. also V.1.4.19–20. On *Nous*, cf. W. Beierwaltes, "Nous: Unity in Difference," in *Platonism and Forms of Intelligence*, ed. J. Dillon & M-É. Zovko (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), 231–45.

26. *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.12–16; cf. *Commentary on the Timaeus*, II.243.18; *The Elements of Theology*, § 169 & §170 and *Ennead*, V.1.4.13–19.

27. *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.16–19.

28. *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.19–26. In their edition of *Enneads* Henry & Schwyzer believe Proclus is referring here to *Ennead*, V.3.10.51. However, see also III.8.8.34–38 and VI.7.13.1–2. Shortly after this Plotinus discusses the necessity of the movement of *Nous* and, in a particularly florid description, its *planê*. With Plotinus' discussion of *planê*, we have an example where the terminology of the middle methodological section of the *Parmenides* could have influenced him. The difference between Proclus and Plotinus here is that Plotinus focuses on the *planê* of *Nous*, a point which Proclus only reluctantly concedes. Proclus, however, focuses on and develops the *planê* of Soul and souls.

the divine Soul too. For Soul has not been granted thoughts that are established on the level of eternity, but she aims at grasping the full actuality of Intellect; and in her striving for this perfection and for the form of comprehension that belongs to that one and simple being she circles around Intellect as in a dance, and in shifting her attention (ταίς μεταβάσει) she divides the undivided mass of the Ideas, looking separately (καθορώσα) at the Idea of Beauty and separately at the Idea of Justice, and separately at each of the others, separating each from the others and thinking of everything one by one and not all together (καθορώσα δὲ καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ καθ' ἕν πάντα καὶ οὐχ' ὁμοῦ πάντα νοοῦσα). For, to put it briefly, Soul is third in rank from the One and is naturally actualised in this way. For the One is one only and precedes thought, Intellect thinks all Ideas as one (ὡς ἕν πάντα), and Soul sees them all one by one (καθ' ἕν πάντα). So division is the peculiar function of Soul, since she lacks the power of thinking all things simultaneously in unity and has been allotted the thinking of them all separately—all, because she imitates Intellect, and separately, for this is her peculiar property; for the power to define²⁹ and divide appears first in Soul.³⁰

The determinate nature of Soul (and of particular souls) is thus one which changes, divides and thinks one by one in time. This description of the activity of soul in comparison to *Nous* is a clear parallel to those other places where Proclus discusses *planê*. Thus what Proclus is talking about here is the essential nature of the soul that must 'wander' when it thinks, holding no negative connotation whatsoever. The reasoning of the demiurgic Intellect is, in comparison, "not a search nor a puzzling nor a *planê*," but "in a stable thinking it thinks the multiple causes of being."³¹ Again citing the *Phaedo* (81a), Proclus says that the divine has no *planê* or ignorance.³² The objects, which constitute soul, soul does not immediately possess or cognise. Relative to *Nous*, Soul is somehow ignorant and must wander. Thus, even the divine Soul, which the descended particular soul is like as effect to cause, has the relatively imperfect activity of *planê* as its particular characteristic activity. The point here is that the concept of *planê* for Proclus does not merely have a pejorative sense to it, as we saw earlier. *Planê*, in the sense we are discussing now, is a positive description of the nature of the activity of soul.

If we take these two related streams of *planê* in Proclus (the first, the realm of generation and the potential attraction of the soul to levels of reality beneath its dignity; the second, a kind of positive attribute and cognition peculiar to soul), we begin to understand what the particular descended soul must contend with and is. *Planê* is both constitutive of what soul is as well as a negative effect of the descent into the body that it must endure. While

29. Reading ὀρίσμος in Cousin's edition. Steel's edition reads μερισμός ex G.

30. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 807.20–808.17; alt.; italics mine.

31. *The Platonic Theology*, V.17.62.19–22; IV.21.61.23–24.

32. *The Platonic Theology*, I.17.81.17–21. The Saffery & Westerink edition does not notice that this is a quotation.

related, the two can be accurately distinguished in Proclus' works. These two sides are nicely encapsulated in the following quotation:

[1] The sort of soul that merely has correct opinion wanders less than the irrational, though even it strays in a sense through its ignorance of the cause. [2] But further still, the extent to which the kind of soul that has scientific knowledge wanders is even less than that of the soul with merely true beliefs. For in this case only the mutable form of its life makes it wander. Since it hasn't oriented itself toward one intelligible object, it comes to be in different forms at different times. [3] Only *Nous* is inerrant in its essence, since it is always thinking the same thing, and is directed toward the same thing, and is active concerning the same thing.³³

A particular soul is able [1] to turn away from itself (the place its appropriate causes are) to a lower level of reality and so become what it is not, that is, ignorant of itself, its causes and its end. This ignorance becomes more acute as the soul reverts to lower levels of reality and even to matter.³⁴ This carries with it the negative connotation of *planê*. Nonetheless, [2] even when it returns to itself, contemplating and becoming what it is, and attaining scientific knowledge through causes which it possesses in itself and it is, it still wanders. This is the non-pejorative understanding of *planê*, simply of what soul is. Its form of life and thinking is one which, relative to *Nous* [3], is a kind of motion, activity or becoming.³⁵ Relative to Soul, *Nous* alone is *aplanes*. We note that he is not referring to the *noêsis* that belongs to soul, but rather *Nous*' own being and thinking. Thus Proclus' use of *planê* in this passage employs the two senses that I have delineated above.

4.A RETURNING TO *PLANÊ* IN THE *PARMENIDES*

Proclus discusses in the *Parmenides* commentary the *planê* of the particular descended soul that combines the two senses of *planê* confirming, in general, my presentation. There he discusses the various levels of faculties of the human soul according to the Platonic line and continues to help us place his description of the soul as a *planê*. With the lower half of the Platonic line in sensation and opinion, we find the negative sense of *planê*, whereas with the treatment of *dianoia* and the forms within soul, as we anticipate, there is a description of the activities that are inherent to soul by its nature. Proclus also treats the next segment on the Platonic line, *noêsis*, relative to soul. After treating Soul's relation to sensation and opinion, he writes the return of soul to itself in *dianoia*:

33. *Commentary on the Timaeus*, II.97.27–98.3; alt.; trans. D. Baltzly (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2006).

34. We will discuss this at length immediately below.

35. γιγνομένη; γίνεται, *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.12; προσβάλλει, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, II.243.22–23.

Fourthly, we must ascend to the ‘great sea’ of sciences (ἐπιστημῶν) (*Symp.*, 210d) and there contemplate by means of dialectic their divisions and combinations (τὰς διαίρεσεις αὐτῶν καὶ συνθέσεις) and in general the variety of the Forms within us, and by means of this contemplation, having perfected the weaving together of its structure, our soul itself³⁶ beholds that it must separate itself from composite things (συνθέσεως), and apply itself (προσβάλλειν) already intellectually (νοεῶς) to true being. For intuitive knowledge is superior to scientific (νοῦς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμης κρείττων), and life lived according to intuitive knowledge is more honourable than a life of science (ἢ κατὰ νοῦν ζωὴ τῆς κατ’ ἐπιστήμην). So then many are the wanderings and whirlings of the soul (πλάναι καὶ αἱ διευέσεις τῆς ψυχῆς). There is one at the level of imagination, another above this at the level of opinion, another again at the level of *dianoia*. Only life according to *Nous* (ἢ κατὰ νοῦν ζωὴ) possesses freedom from wandering (τὸ ἀπλανές), and this is the mystical mooring-place of the soul, to which the poem brings Odysseus after the multifarious wanderings of his life (μετὰ τὴν πολλὴν πλάνην τῆς ζωῆς), and to which we, if we wish to be saved, as we presumably do, will conduct ourselves.³⁷

In this passage *planê* is presented as a synthetic, yet scientific, activity that divides and combines its synthetic objects (the *logoi* in it). This activity is one which enables the perfection of the soul and, through this contemplation (διὰ τῆς θεωρίας), to transcend itself and address the level of reality superior to it, *Nous* in it. As such the *planê* of *dianoia* that the soul undertakes is a preparation for the unity and insight of *Nous*. Thus what we see here is a slightly different or fuller account of *planê* and its relation to soul. In place of a return to itself as soul, with its positive sense of *planê*, we find that the soul must even overcome that. It seems that it is only a life oriented to *Nous*, beyond itself as soul that uses its natural faculty of *dianoia*, that the soul is able to escape its own positive *planê*. Proclus’ conception of *planê*, then, is one in which the degree of wandering is proportional to the level of reality as indicated by Plato’s line, but which seems to end when and insofar as it orients itself toward *Nous*. The degree of *planê* is lower (and more internalised) as the soul ascends the levels of reality referred to in the Platonic line.

Proclus then returns to the original discussion of *planê* as occasioned by the passage in the *Parmenides* (135e)³⁸ and where he explicitly connects *planê* to the dialectical method about to be outlined. Proclus mentions the three kinds of forms: those found in nature, in soul (*logoi*) and in *Nous* (the Forms).³⁹ He then says that:

the *planê* of dialectic, which gives us a preliminary training and pre-instruction for the comprehension of the former Forms [the *logoi*], then, is necessary for the contemplation of these latter Forms [in *Nous* in us].⁴⁰

36. Dillon-Morrow translate this as ‘our intellect.’ This passage is a discussion of the faculties of the soul. Cf. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 1024.30–1025.1.

37. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 1025.15–28; alt.

38. Cited above.

39. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 995.7–11.

40. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 995.13–15. This translation is mine as the one in the

Proclus here clearly associates the metaphor of *planê* with the treatment and use of the forms in soul (*logoi*) and thus he establishes the middle dialectic as a necessary preliminary training for the correct apprehension of the forms which are 'above' soul in *Nous* in us. The significance of this is the following: Proclus interprets Parmenides' words that Socrates should wander about intelligible entities in the context of his general epistemological and hierarchical theory of reality, specifically in the second positive sense of *planê* we have outlined. Thus, according to Proclus, it seems that the dialectical method that Parmenides suggests to Socrates is a middle dialectic because it relies on the *logoi* in us and on *dianoia* and which prepares us for the higher forms and thus the higher dialectic. The outcome of this close reading of the middle section of the text and development of *planê* by Proclus is that it seems he is in the unlikely position of interpreting the dialectic of the *Parmenides* as a middle dialectic.

4.B ANOTHER SENSE OF *PLANÊ*: THROUGH CONTRARY HYPOTHESES?

Proclus elsewhere addresses the precise sense of *planê* that Parmenides intends. This is important for us because it seems to contradict what Proclus says above about *planê* and deeply complicates how one potentially understands the Parmenidean method.

Planê, indeed, seems to have four senses (1) a multiplicity of activities, even if they are all integrated (ὁμοῦ); (2) a multiplicity which proceeds transitively (μεταβατικόν); (3) a multiplicity which advances from opposites to opposites (πλήθος ἀπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων εἰς τὰ ἀντικείμενα); (4) a multiplicity of disordered motions. Of these four, dialectical training is said to be a *planê* in the third sense, since it proceeds by means of contrary hypotheses (ὁδεύουσα διὰ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ὑποθέσεων).⁴¹

Thus Proclus outlines four different senses of *planê*. The first corresponds to the *planê* that *Nous* undertakes;⁴² the second refers to the activity of soul that moves from one object to another and the fourth refers to the sensible realm of generation.⁴³ It is the third that interests us presently because Proclus

Morrow-Dillon translation is inaccurate and misleading. Δεῖ τοίνυν τῆς πλάνης τῆς διαλεκτικῆς πρὸς τὴν τούτων θεωρίαν τῶν εἰδῶν, προγυμναζούσης ἡμᾶς καὶ προτελούσης εἰς τὴν ἐκείνων ἀντίληψιν.

41. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 996.7–12; alt.

42. I take his description of this *planê* to refer to *Nous*; cf. *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.12–19 and *Commentary on the Timaeus*, II.243.18. The sense of ὁμοῦ seems to be synonymous with ἅμα that Proclus discusses in *Elements of Theology*, § 170: νοῦς πάντα ἅμα νοήσει πάς. εἰ γὰρ κατὰ μέρος καὶ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο τῶν εφεξῆς, οὐκ ἐν αἰῶνι The language in the last sentence refers to the activity of the soul which *Nous*, Proclus argues by a *reductio*, can neither be nor have.

43. Cf. *On the existence of evils*, ed. D. Isaac (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 29.16–21 and J. Opsomer, "Proclus and Plotinus on Matter (*de mal. subs.* 30–7)," *Phronesis* 46 (2001): 154–88.

says that this is the sense that Parmenides intends when he uses the word *planê* in association with dialectical training, that is, *planê* here indicates a multiplicity that goes from an hypothesis to its contradictory. (I will refer to this use as the methodological-refutative.)

There are two striking things here. First, the third definition of *planê* (3) seems to contradict what Proclus says elsewhere about his interpretation of the use of *planê* (2) in the *Parmenides* (that soul must think transitively one object at a time, in time). Second, it seems that Proclus connects this specific sense of *planê* (3) to the positive and negative structure of the hypotheses.⁴⁴ For us, it is unclear whether Proclus interprets Parmenides' use of the word *planê* in either the positive psychological-epistemological sense of it which he has affirmed just above (transitively, one object at a time, in time) or in this methodological-refutative (3) sense that proceeds using contrary hypotheses.

An additional problem is that, just before the previous quotation, Proclus connects the positive epistemological-psychological sense of *planê* with the movement between the positive-negative hypotheses of the methodological-refutative sense. Parmenides, Proclus says,

called it [the method he was about to outline] a *planê* in comparison to pure intuition and to unadulterated comprehension of the intelligibles, for *planê* involves not only the examination of how correctly to accept the truth, but also how through refutation to reject falsity by the same methods.⁴⁵

Thus Proclus suggests that an epistemological-psychological sense of *planê* (that is, what is lower than pure *noêsis*) is somehow connected to the refutation of the positive and negative hypotheses. As it stands now, it is unclear which sense of *planê* Proclus is employing relative to the method found in the dialogue.

44. Proclus' terminology to express contradiction and opposition in general and between the positive and negative hypotheses in particular is extremely fluid. He refers to their relation variously as *antikeimenon* (984.31–32; 997.19–20; 997.15–17; implied also at 996.8–9), *antiphasin* (623.24–26; 1001.9–10), *enantion* (1000.18–22) and *maxomena* (984.31–32; 1041.4–5). Gersh notes that "the later Neoplatonists refer to opposites in casual fashion However, study of a large number of passages dealing with opposites has convinced me that they are generally understood both as contradictories (to the extent that they exclude each other mutually) and contraries (to the extent that they have a determinate content)," S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 60, n. 157.

45. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 995.25–27; alt.: πρὸς τὴν νόησιν τὴν καθαρὰν πλάνην αὐτὴν προσεῖπε καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἀπλανῆν τῶν νοητῶν ἀντίληψιν, πλάνη γὰρ τὸ μὴ μόνον ἀληθῆ σκοπεῖν ὅπως ἀποδεκτέον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ψευδῆ διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν μεθόδων ἐκπεριτρέχειν ἐλέγχοντα. Cf. also *The Platonic Theology*, I.19.93.16–19.

This problematic reading that connects this 'proceeding through contrary hypotheses' with the positive *planê* of soul is confirmed elsewhere. While discussing Parmenides' use of the term *gymnasia*, he explains that, as we have seen, there are three activities of dialectic: one, purely elenctic; two, the opposite of this, "that which induces recollection of true reality" which "reveals truth unalloyed" (that is, the highest dialectic); and three,

a compromise between these two, partly refuting, partly stimulating the interlocutor towards the truth ... It is this entire question about arguing through opposing arguments (διὰ τῶν ἀντικειμένων λόγων) that it seems to me in these passages [Parmenides] calls 'exercise' and 'wandering',⁴⁶ and for this reason no longer to separate the method he is now about to impart from the dialectic he is so impressed by.⁴⁷

Thus once again it seems that Proclus understands that the movement between the positive and negative hypotheses is the sense of *planê* he intends. The problem with this is not only that it obscures our understanding of Proclus' employment of the metaphor of *planê* in relation to the method, it also makes Proclus' own interpretation very problematic, as we will now proceed to discuss.

5. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

There are three related problems that flow from our discoveries. The first is whether Proclus' development of the metaphor of *planê* and the statements connecting it to a middle dialectic make the method found in the *Parmenides* a middle dialectic. Second, use of the terms *planê* and *gymnasia* aside and assuming that Proclus still interprets the second half of the dialogue as an instance of the highest dialectic, there is no demonstrable example of a middle training dialectic in the *Parmenides* itself. Third, the most recalcitrant, is whether Proclus' development of *planê* and its application of the concept to dialectic threatens to reduce the second half of the *Parmenides* necessarily to a middle dialectic.

The solution to the first and the second problems is to be found in Proclus' goal of clarifying the correct *skopos* of the dialogue and explaining how the parts of the dialogue are related to that, which we discussed at the beginning of this paper. Earlier we noted that the first 'reality' interpretation (the Parmenidean) identified, in general, the *skopos* correctly and also had a nuanced account of the relation of each part to that whole, while with the early Neoplatonic account the specific content of the hypotheses may have become more precise yet the connection between the parts of the dialogue

46. Proclus here is commenting on the lemmata at *Parm.*, 135d. However, Plato does not use this term until a future lemma at *Parm.*, 135e2.

47. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 989.19–23; alt.

became less so. Proclus' own solution is to call the aporetic and method section 'aids.'⁴⁸ The first section, according to Proclus, shows the necessity of further training by helping Socrates understand the complexities inherent in the forms on each level of reality, while the second section gives the requisite form of that training.⁴⁹ Together, these lead to the true purpose of the dialogue in the third part: an investigation of highest reality. Proclus does affirm that there is a *planê* in the dialogue and he does ascribe *planê* to dialectic. But this affirmation applies (for the most part) only to the method section and this ascription of *planê* (and *gymnasia*) belongs (for the most part) only to the middle dialectic. The middle section is an 'aid' that trains and reforms the soul. Thus his statements regarding dialectic and concepts related to that in this part of the commentary (*gymnasia, planê*) must be understood in the context of his desire to account for each part of the dialogue and how each part is connected to the proper *skopos*. That is, before one enters the inner vestibule of the second half of the dialogue, one needs purification and training and this is precisely what the first two sections of the dialogue provide. In general, most of Proclus' statements that connect *planê* and the Parmenidean dialectic can be limited to the middle methodological section and to the middle dialectic found there. As yet, the second half of the *Parmenides* is still safely an instance of the highest dialectic.

The desire to account for the purpose of each section of the dialogue also helps explain Proclus' distinction between the logical form of the method (in the second section) and its actual application (in the third).⁵⁰ It also helps confirm that Proclus did not understand the dialectic of the *Parmenides* homogeneously. What Parmenides outlines in the middle section, according to Proclus, is an elaborate, even baroque, method to investigate systematically and comprehensively what a thing is. The result is that Proclus finds a total of 24 hypotheses in the logical form of the method.⁵¹ This is suited to a young person in need of additional training like Socrates, but for the wise and aged Parmenides the 24 hypotheses are not needed because he would adapt, according to Proclus, the method as the subject demands when executing the highest dialectic (that is, as he does in the third section of the dialogue).

The second problem is this: we have established that Proclus' development of *planê* shows that Proclus interpreted that there was a middle dialectic in the *Parmenides* in addition to the highest dialectic found in the second half. But the casual reader of the dialogue might be forgiven for being skeptical of

48. The first section (983.20); the second, δευτέραν δὲ ἄλλην ... βοήθειαν (983.26–27).

49. This section provides another element that we will discuss just below.

50. Cf. 1000.27–28: 'logical form' (λογικὸν) and 1042.2. That is, he makes a distinction between "the dialectical modes (τρόπους) and the hypotheses that are called such" (624.18).

51. For an outline of this, cf. J. Dillon, "Proclus and the Parmenidean Dialectic," in *Proclus. Lecteur et Interprète des Anciens*, eds. J. Pépin & H.-D. Saffrey (Paris: CNRS, 1987), 165–75.

this. Where is this middle 'gymnastic' dialectic, apart from Parmenides' bare insistence that Socrates train himself? The answer is that Proclus has to slip into his commentary a surfeit of examples of the training that Parmenides suggests.⁵² The examples of training he provides are as obtrusive as they are otiose, but when his interpretation that there is also a middle dialectic in the *Parmenides* is set against the obvious absence of it in the dialogue itself (if the second half is to be interpreted as an example of the highest dialectic), their peculiar existence in the commentary is now accounted for. Proclus, in a sense, had to ensure, or create the mirage of, the existence of a dialectical training using this method prior to entering upon the sublime insights of the second half. This oddity in the commentary is best explained with reference to Proclus' clear and over-arching goal of establishing the correct relation of the parts of the dialogue to its proper end. In short, Proclus' attention to the whole of the dialogue and the relation of the parts to the whole enables him to find a middle dialectic as well as a highest dialectic there. Thus when Proclus refers to a middle dialectic, including the development of *planê* in the *Parmenides*, he is referring to the middle, methodological section. These statements do not make the whole of the *Parmenides* a middle dialectic.

The final problem is the most difficult. The positive psychological-epistemological sense of *planê* (that one must think transitively one object at a time, in time) is one which must use *dianoia* and *logoi*. Proclus says this sort of wandering activity occurs in the dialogue in relation to the method. The methodological-refutative (3) sense of *planê* (the 'proceeding according to contrary hypotheses') is also said by Proclus to be the proper sense of Parmenides' use of the term *planê*. Additionally, these are somehow connected. This is problematic because *dianoia* and the middle dialectic are so clearly associated with *planê* (in this case, it seems, with the methodological-refutative sense of the term) and *gymnasia* that it could appear that any dialectical method that uses positive and negative hypotheses must be a middle dialectic. Thus the second half of the *Parmenides* might necessarily have to be understood as a middle dialectic.

One way to avoid this might be to suggest that the negative hypotheses in the second half of the dialogue were not really refutative, that Proclus understood these differently. However, it is precisely by correctly considering the absurd consequents of the negative hypotheses of the second half of the *Parmenides* that Theodore of Asine was able to discover the proper logical form of the method where true antecedents produced true consequents and false false ones,⁵³ a discovery that is central to Proclus' own interpretation.

52. Cf. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 1004–1015.

53. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 1057.6. That is, the Philosopher from Rhodes, whom Père Saffrey has identified as Theodore of Asine, "Le Philosophe de Rhodes est-il Théodore

True consequents cannot follow, Proclus notes, both sides of a contradiction.⁵⁴ More than that, this attention to the logical form of the second half of the *Parmenides*—precisely this refutative sense—also provided the framework for the Athenian Neoplatonic interpretation of the hypotheses whereby one need only look at the positive hypotheses (H1–H5) for clues about reality.⁵⁵ Referring likely to Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, who still sought to interpret levels of reality in the negative hypotheses, Proclus says that:

[a]ll these commentators share a common misconception, in that they do not see that the first five hypotheses produce true conclusions, whereas the last four lead to absurdities. This, after all, was Parmenides' stated purpose, to demonstrate how, if the One exists, all beings are generated, and how, if it does not exist, it eliminates everything and leaves nothing existent anywhere; and the whole procedure announces this is what it is demonstrating, both through the postulation of true hypotheses and through refutation of false ones (διὰ τῆς θέσεως τῶν ἀληθῶν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀναίρεσεως τῶν ψευδῶν).⁵⁶

We see here that the opposition between the positive and negative hypotheses in the second half of the *Parmenides* (and thus in the highest dialectic) and the refutation through absurdity of the negative hypotheses is as important as it is in the gymnastic activity of the method. The negative hypotheses are still, in a certain sense, refutative. One cannot, thus, explain away too easily the potentially 'refutative' character of the negative hypotheses, even in the second half of the dialogue.

While there is not an adequate basis on logical grounds (as presented by Proclus) to differentiate between the role played between the positive and negative hypotheses in the middle and highest dialectic, Proclus does provide a contextual and psychological-epistemological basis to distinguish them: obviously Parmenides does not need to be corrected or refuted regarding the existence of the One. The eye of his soul gazes on his essence and, so Being, unobstructed. This requires observing that essential to the philosophical training in the middle dialectic, according to Proclus, is the purification of the eye of the soul through testing and refuting ideas and so we return once again to the broader philosophical Neoplatonic presuppositions regarding the soul.

d'Asine? Sur un point obscur de l'exégèse néoplatonicienne du Parménide," in *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière: Antiquité païenne et chrétienne*, ed. E. Lucchesi & H.-D. Saffery (Geneva: Patrick Cramer, 1984), 65–76.

54. ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ ἀληθῆ τοῖς μαχομένοις ἀμφοτέροις ἀκολουθεῖν, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 1030.4.

55. As against Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. Cf. 1056ff and J. Dillon, "Iamblichus' Identifications of the Subject-matters of the Hypotheses," in *Il Parmenide di Platone e la sua tradizione*, ed. M. Barbanti & F. Romano (Catania: CUECM, 2002), 327–40.

56. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 1056.1–8.

Hypothesising contrary ideas in the middle dialectic is, one could say, significant because the untrained soul makes mistakes or mistakes itself. For example, a young student could believe, in fact, that sensation is knowledge (e.g., in the *Theaetetus*). For a Platonist, this premise would be false and need to be refuted. Accordingly, one could either follow the implications of this (revealing a series of absurdities) or one could hypothesise the opposite of this and follow the implications of this (revealing a series of sensible consequents). Ignorance and error affect our very being and so this discipline is necessary for us to return to our properly intelligible nature. We need to know what things are, what belongs to them essentially and accidentally and what does not. For without knowing these things, we do not and cannot know ourselves. Such a training is not necessary for someone who already understands these things, having gone through such preliminaries when they were young. However, 'the One is not' (as in the One itself does not exist) and 'sensation is science' are equally false and are equally opposed to 'the One exists' and 'sensation is not science' and so one must depend upon the context and the paedagogical or spiritual state of the person performing this positive and negative dialectic.

Elsewhere Proclus seems to indicate that the soul can only train and only wander. One might conclude thereby that, given what he has said in other places regarding how the middle dialectic and *planê* are related, the soul is essentially inhibited from the highest dialectic. Proclus, while providing us with an abundance of examples of his *gymnasia*, says this:

But what has he [Parmenides] set before us as the end of this exercise? Let us not understand 'truth' here in a general sense, but as being precisely that intelligible truth about which he has taught us elsewhere, for the sake of which there is the great struggle to see 'the plain of truth' (*Phaedrus*, 248b). So all our life is a *gymnasia* in preparation for that vision, and the *planê* of dialectic strives towards that goal.⁵⁷

To understand what Proclus says here, however, we must carefully consider this statement within his psychological-epistemological development of *planê* and as well his broader assertion of the fully descended soul. In the immediate area around this statement, Proclus gives us many examples of a dialectical *gymnasia* which belong plainly to the middle dialectic. But he raises the question of what the purpose of them is. The end of the middle dialectic, he says, is truth, which is the intelligible being found in *Nous*. But he also makes a larger point to justify this training: all our life is oriented to that vision. Proclus' statement about the *planê* of dialectic here could apply to the middle dialectic (as the context amply allows), but it equally applies to the general nature of dialectic that has been entrusted to soul and thus to

57. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 1015.27–1016.1; alt.

the nature of soul itself. The *planê* of dialectic one could say is the *planê* (in the positive sense) of the soul, striving for unity with its source in *Nous*.

This also helps us understand one of the other problematic texts cited above where Proclus says that the method Parmenides was about to outline was a *planê* in relation to the pure and simple comprehension of the intelligible. Proclus in this area is discussing the method section, but, as we have seen, this includes the purported examples of middle dialectic that Proclus sees being undertaken there. There is no problem for Proclus' system if in the middle dialectic the soul wanders while examining the positive and negative hypotheses. The problem is that, if we still wander while among the true forms in *Nous* (in us), then it seems we cannot escape the instability of the middle dialectic. The problem is once again solved by recourse to Proclus' broader system. In the first place, Proclus is clear that he speaks of the pure intuition of the intelligibles. This is only the first moment of the highest dialectic, for after the soul has had that insight, it must look to its image in its soul and unfold it.⁵⁸ It is at that point that *dianoia* is employed and, consequently, it then wanders. However, this wandering is not one that afflicts the soul in prodigal concern for sensation or opinion, nor yet of the studious and inspired pupil who still has much to learn about Being and himself. It is the wandering of the soul, truly reformed, contemplating itself uninhibited, attempting to imitate the perfect timeless, unifying and unified contemplation of the multiple content of *Nous*.

To make some summary conclusions about *planê*, therefore, we have found that there is a general activity that soul possesses in all its doings, whether in turning below it, to itself or above it. That activity might be crippled as the soul reverts to sensation and opinion. Here it wanders the most and most externally. Alternately, it might also strive to return to itself. Its spiritual activity is still present to it, but due to birth in this world or inordinate concern for sensation and opinion, it is not fully soul, that is, able to know and knowing itself. At this point, one would undergo the training of mathematics or the middle dialectic. Here the wandering of the soul, now more internalised and 'spiritual,' refers to the mistakes it makes and the ignorance it still must undo. It is still untrained and, as such, is not yet 'fully' soul. Yet, for Proclus, science is possible at this stage and in these disciplines.⁵⁹ The next kind of wandering relates to the soul that has reformed itself and is fully soul. It wanders, not because it cannot see its contents because the eye of its soul is sullied, but because it is a soul that exists in time and must unfold its thoughts in time. It may well begin from the forms in *Nous* (in it) and

58. Cf. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 985.10–986.29.

59. Cf. *Commentary on Euclid's Elements*, 30.5-7; *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 980.14–982.15.

noêsis (and so the soul engages in the activity of the highest dialectic), but the time-bound nature of soul must subsequently unfold that insight and so it must wander. Additionally, because the soul (even a reformed one) is not in immediate possession of its *logoi*, it must also verify its deductions within the positive hypotheses through the negative hypotheses.⁶⁰ Thus although Proclus says all our life is a *gymnasia* or a *planê*, this does not mean the soul is essentially inhibited from engaging in the highest dialectic.

6. CONCLUSION

We can now make some general conclusions about *planê* and its relation to the soul, the activities of dialectic, the method and the dialogue itself. We have seen in Proclus' commentary an example of how the attention toward the details of the early sections of the *Parmenides* influences and, here, makes problematic the interpretation of the later hypothetical section in a way simply not possible for early Neoplatonists. Just as the occasion to write a long commentary on the entire text of the *Parmenides* gives Proclus the opportunity to focus on and develop certain themes and concepts, so also it opens Proclus up to new difficulties and tensions. In this case, we see the important philosophical background and presuppositions within Proclus' system that dramatically transform this seemingly insignificant word used by Plato from a vague metaphor into a very specific concept with important implications epistemologically, for the interpretation of the structure of the dialogue and for the interpretation of the dialectic in the *Parmenides*. Plato's passing words now become intertwined within late Neoplatonism's development of the soul and the new philosophical difficulties that are attendant to it.

The most immediate and striking thing about Proclus' interpretation is that, as a Neoplatonist, he avers that Plato outlined and gave examples of a middle dialectic in the *Parmenides*. In addition to what we have uncovered in this regard, there are many other statements and indications in the *Parmenides* commentary that support this.⁶¹ As noted above, contemporary commentators have not noticed this surprising development for two reasons: they tended to focus in this commentary on Proclus' tantalising interpretation of the first hypothesis and its negative theology. Second, due to the publication of Saffrey and Westerink's Budé modern critical edition of *The Platonic Theology*, as well as the clear, systematic structure of the treatise as opposed to the sprawling character of commentaries, scholars have focused on statements

60. Proclus says that only with both the positive and negative hypotheses do what was deduced from the positive hypotheses become clear to us. Cf. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 998.7–19; 998.30–999.1.

61. E.g., 622.14–20; 652.21–654.13.

in that work and have referred to, for the most part, only tangentially to the *Parmenides* commentary. Third, in *The Platonic Theology* Proclus is at pains to exposit the hypothetical method of the *Parmenides* (in particular its first hypothesis) in its proper light, that is, as theological. In the introduction of *The Platonic Theology* in particular, he also wishes to deny a particular kind of logical *gymnasia* interpretation of the *Parmenides*.⁶² These factors have tended to obscure or overshadow what Proclus is doing in the *Parmenides* commentary, in particular his more nuanced and complete interpretation of the dialogue and the dialectic outlined (the method section) and executed there (the second half). I have uncovered a general, yet fundamental shift in the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides* in Proclus' commentary. In addition to this, it is also clear that Proclus still supports the traditional Neoplatonic view that the second half of the dialogue is the highest insight into reality. But this means that Proclus finds, somehow, two dialectics in the *Parmenides*. This also requires new philosophical or systematic developments by Proclus to account for this, as well as some hermeneutic creativity.

Proclus' history of interpretations of the *Parmenides* at the outset of his commentary is not accidental, for he sought (a) to connect the broader Neoplatonic need for training and purification with (b) a detailed and, for him, Neoplatonically orthodox, interpretation of this dialogue; surprisingly, the logical *gymnasia* interpretation and the first 'reality' interpretation of his predecessors enabled Proclus to bind these two desiderata together. Thus we see now how there is both training and positive theological exposition in the *Parmenides* as well as a plausible and clear account of the relation of the parts of the dialogue to its proper *skopos* that had so eluded previous interpreters. Interpretation and philosophical development are here inseparable. Thus most scholars have not only missed the surprising inclusion of a middle dialectic into the *Parmenides* by Proclus (in addition to the highest dialectic); they have missed what this means for Proclus' conception of dialectic in the *Parmenides*: it now provides a complete and clear philosophical system for the fully descended Procline soul, so accustomed to being oriented towards the instable ontological and epistemological objects of sensation and opinion that are below the dignity of the soul, to return itself from its torpidity through a rigorous dialectical training and then, finally, enter into the inner vestibule of the highest dialectic.

62. In *The Platonic Theology*, I.8–10, Proclus argues against those who see only a logical *gymnasia* in the *Parmenides*, that is, in particular, those who interpret the second half of the *Parmenides* in this way, as well as against those who would employ *endoxa* in dialectic (i.e., Aristotelians). Proclus, in his own account, interprets the second half as the highest dialectic/theologically, while also seeing in or himself inserting a (truly Platonic) logical *gymnasia* into the middle section of the *Parmenides*.

Proclus was successful in his goal to give a coherent and detailed account of the entire dialogue and explain how its three parts were connected to its *skopos* and the concept of *planê* (and *gymnasia*) plays a surprisingly important role in that endeavour. What is at first somewhat dissatisfying, however, is the realisation that even in the highest dialectic, we still must 'work,' wander. But, as we noted above, this is not as a result of Proclus' interpretation of the *Parmenides*; it is a result of his development of the soul and how it relates to itself and what is other than it. If we, as readers of Proclus, recognise the legitimate philosophical difficulties of incorporating the process of learning and, more pointedly, knowledge of first principles into a comprehensive account of man, world and god, we can, in fact, see a certain beauty and maturity in Proclus' insight regarding dialectic. This is what we are and must do as souls.

The benchmark for discussing the soul's wandering and *gymnasia* here is the unity and activity that *Nous* is and possesses: the plain of truth. Soul must endeavour to imitate, return to and strive to be like *Nous*, but can never do so completely and so soul dances around it as the broad circumference of a circle imitates its non-dimensional centre point. For Proclus, we remember, soul remains soul in all its activities. Even soul's perfection is, compared to *Nous*, imperfection. All dialectic is a training and wandering in comparison to the simultaneous intellection and being of *Nous*. Thus in the highest dialectic, the soul begins with the true forms in *Nous* (in it) and the soul experiences the least amount of *planê* possible for its nature and is, as much as is possible, *aplanes*. In this specific sense, given a disciplined and dedicated life, life lived according to *Nous* is free from wandering, as much as is possible. The wandering described here is, as it were, the ideal form of psychic transitivity that returns continually upon its source and, through itself, continually unfolds it. At this point, one need not be refuted and proceed, one by one, through a classroom logical training. Rather, the soul is pellucid to itself and having made itself like its cause, may return to it.⁶³ But, bound by time, it must yet do so continually.⁶⁴ Thus in those passages where Proclus says we still wander he is not saying we are trapped in the middle dialectic or that

63. Cf. C. Steel: "Conversion vers soi et constitution de soi selon Proclus," in *Retour, repentir et constitution de soi*, ed. A. Charles-Saget (Paris: Vrin, 1998), 161–75.

64. Cf. G. MacIsaac: "the overall determination which Soul originates is the inability to coincide with itself completely. *Nous* grasps its own multiplicity through its single cognitive act, while Soul grasps its multiplicity through a divided cognitive act. Its own essence, as its participation in *Nous*, its presence to it as an inexhaustible source of discursive projection, and so the *epistrophê* of Soul is not a completed projection of discursive *logoi*, but one which can continue indefinitely," "The Origin of Determination in the Neoplatonism of Proclus," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought. Essays presented to the Rev'd Doctor Robert D. Crouse*, ed. W. Otten, W. Hannam & M. Treschow (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 162.

second half of the dialogue is a middle dialectic. We must understand such statements within his general cosmological structure that assigns *Nous* and Soul overlapping but different natures.

Unlike our other treatments of *planê*, the final problem addressed above is not one caused by ambiguities that arise in the commentary from detailed exegesis. It is more due to Proclus' development of the conception of the soul as fully descended and thus due to the development of an authentic way for soul as soul to achieve or arrive at scientific knowledge (i.e., originating from *Nous*). Plotinus wrote quickly, often cryptically, and did not have to submit himself to the rigors of commentary. More importantly, his insistence that part of the soul remain above in *Nous* so that he could explain the existence and possibility of knowledge rather blurred the value of that knowledge insofar as the soul disappeared along with it. Proclus provides us with the possibility of a knowledge—that indeed arises from *Nous* (in us)—for soul as soul and so equally accounts for (in a way that Plotinus never did or had to) the labour intensive contribution that soul makes and must make in the attainment of knowledge (that is, as beginning from *Nous*). Reading and understanding the second half of the *Parmenides* is difficult, but that is both proper to the subject matter and to the subject who reads it. This is what the highest dialectic should look like for a soul.

For Proclus, our life at its best is a mere training and is merely a wandering, but he means this in a very specific, even positive sense. This 'highest' wandering refers to what souls are at their best and how they operate at their apex scientifically: for Proclus we have access to the forms in *Nous* (in us), but our role and nature as souls is to unfold them as they are in and for us (i.e., as *logoi*), to see their connections and differences from each other and we cannot but do this in time, contemplating each form individually. The descended Procline soul is essential to grasping the proper implications of this. Our exemplar is *Nous* that timelessly knows the multiple as one. It is in comparison to this that we can be said to labour and toil, train and wander, and it is for this that we also render these services.⁶⁵

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