

Proclus on Plenitude

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to fill a minor gap in Arthur O. Lovejoy's famous *Great Chain of Being*. In his major work of that name, Lovejoy presented in outline the history of a notion which he believed has guided Western metaphysical thought to an extraordinary degree, even when—as a metaphysical presupposition—the principle itself has often passed unexamined. To the notion Lovejoy gave the name “the principle of plenitude” and to the general thrust of its argument, the formulation that “no genuine potentiality of Being can remain unfulfilled.”¹ Lovejoy found the principle clearly explicated for the first time in Plato's *Timaeus*. He went on to point out how it is yet more explicit in Plotinus and by extension, in later Neoplatonism.

Lovejoy only mentions one of the late ancient Neoplatonists—Proclus—by name, and then only in passing. This is a shame, since Proclus' philosophy offers a fascinating example of a system where plenitude is truly put to work. What is more, Proclus' liberal and inventive use of the notion of plenitude could have helped Lovejoy to see past his rather limited understanding of the principle. For Lovejoy, the principle of plenitude primarily indicated a complete range of beings leaving no gaps, a *scala naturae*—hence the name of his study.² Recent scholarship has taken interest in a rather different understanding of plenitude. According to this second approach, every genuine possibility is realised *within infinite time*. Popular particularly in early medi-

1. A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being. A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: 1936) 52.

2. This notion of an existential hierarchy has also been explored by later scholars. The place to start is M.L. Kuntz and P.G. Kuntz, eds., *Jacob's Ladder and the Tree of Life. Concepts of Hierarchy and the Great Chain of Being*, rev. ed. (New York: 1987). On the Platonic tradition specifically see first D.J. O'Meara, “The Chain of Being in the Light of Recent Work on Platonic Hierarchies,” in Kuntz and Kuntz, eds., *Jacob's Ladder* 15–30; then, the magisterial E.P. Mahoney, “Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being According to some Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophers,” in P. Morewedge, ed., *Philosophies of Existence, Ancient and Medieval* (New York: 1982) 165–257. On Plotinus, see in addition O'Meara, *Structures hiérarchiques dans la pensée de Plotin* (Leiden: 1975) and by the same author, “The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus,” in L.P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: 1996) 66–81.

eval modal theorisation, the roots of this approach have been traced to certain features in Aristotle's modal thinking which allow for a frequential interpretation of the terms 'possibility' and 'necessity'.³

A survey of Proclus' views discloses how a fulness in creation can translate into all possibilities being realised in the fulness of time. This I believe warrants a look at a philosopher from the late Athenian school whose adherence to a vaguely defined "plenitude" otherwise hardly constitutes a discovery.⁴ Focusing on the *Elements of Theology* and the *Timaeus* commentary, I will in what follows (1) first trace how Proclus derives the principle of plenitude from his conception of the ultimate good. (2) I then outline the way plenitude is effected throughout the cosmos. (3) Instrumental here is the *apeirodynamis*, the infinite potency manifest on all planes of reality. (4) The workings of plenitude can by its means be traced through the level of Forms and further on down. The contrast between finite space and infinite time (5) brings us finally to consider the dispersal of possibilities on the temporal plane.

While there are several important aspects to the 'temporal' interpretation of plenitude, Proclus' treatment throughout indicates a tacit acceptance of one special formulation found already in Aristotle. Since the principle forms a recurring theme in our investigation, it is worth stating at the outset. "Where perpetual things are concerned, there is no difference between being possible and being" (*Phys.* 3.4, 203b30). This is something Proclus simply takes as a given: he never argues for it.⁵ So what does he argue?

3. Jaakko Hintikka's seminal 1957 article on the subject, "Aristotle on the realization of possibilities in time" is most readily available in a reworked reprint in S. Knuutila, ed., *Reforging the Great Chain of Being* (Dordrecht: 1981) 57–72. Hintikka directed his comments against Lovejoy, who had denied that the principle has a place in Aristotle's thought: this excited as much controversy as did his actual interpretation of Aristotle. For the debate on Lovejoy see the 1980 issue of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* and J. Hintikka, "Gaps in the Great Chain of Being: An Exercise in the Methodology of the History of Ideas," in Knuutila, ed., *Reforging the Great Chain* 1–17; on Aristotle and the medieval developments S. Knuutila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy* (London: 1993) as well as S. Knuutila, "Time in Modality in Scholasticism," in Knuutila, ed., *Reforging the Great Chain* 163–257. For the temporal interpretation of modalities in Islamic logic the best starting-point remains the series of studies by Nicholas Rescher.

4. Cf. e.g., the ample references to "plenitude" in John Dillon's "general introduction" to his and Glenn Morrow's translation of *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton, NJ: 1987).

5. Generally it was thought that Aristotle had demonstrated the principle's validity in the now-notorious chapter, *De caelo* 1.12. For the various attempts to explain Aristotle's argument see J.V. Rijen, *Aspects of Aristotle's Logic of Modalities* (Dordrecht: 1989) 73–102; also, T. Kukkonen, "Infinite Power and Plenitude. Two Traditions on the Necessity of the Eternal," in J. Inglis, ed., *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity* (Richmond: forthcoming).

PLENITUDE AS A PRINCIPLE

As a starting point we may take proposition 25 of the *Stoikheîsis theologikê*. Here Proclus formulates the general principle guiding the outward motion of procession—from the more perfect to the less—in the following fashion: “Every perfect thing goes on to generate what it can produce, in imitation of the single ground [*arkhê*] of the whole.”⁶ Proclus’ handling of the proposition displays several important features; the notion which finds expression in this proposition forms the basis for Proclus’ adoption for the principle of plenitude. Let us therefore see how Proclus defends his thesis.

Proclus first reminds us that the ultimate cause behind everything can only be One: the First Cause and ground of all Being. This Proclus takes himself to have proven in props. 11 and 12.⁷ The all-constitutive action of the One, Proclus next contends, is unitary by nature. Though the subject is not expanded on, other contexts tell us that this applies to the agent, the action, and the product alike. The One is indivisible in every way, it has a completely uniform action,⁸ and this action has the primary effect of bestowing unity upon its subjects.⁹ Going back to prop. 25, Proclus tells us how this same propensity is furthermore conferred upon all subsequent principles, so that they are “compelled” (*epeigetai*) to generate further beings: “Accordingly the complete is by nature productive to the limit of its power” (28.29–30). As produced is inferior to producer, each newfound being will always be less perfect and less powerful than its progenitor. It will consequently produce less.¹⁰ At the end of the existential ladder we then find that which is unable to produce anything more, so that that “which is most remote from the ultimate ground of everything is infertile and the cause of nothing” (29.5–6).¹¹

6. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology. A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, ed. and trans. E.R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: 1963) 28.21–22. Page and line references to the *Elements* are always to the Greek of this edition: this translation is mine; elsewhere translations from the *Elements* are from Dodds, if not otherwise mentioned.

7. The argument is traced also in the *Timaeus* commentary: see *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. E. Diehl, 3 vols. (Leipzig: 1903–1906) 1:228.9–25.

8. For the conceptual background see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.6, 1072a9–10: “for if the same exists forever, recurring in cycles, something has to persist and always act in a similar manner.”

9. Cf. *Elements* props. 1–3, 12 and 13. Whether this last doctrine goes back to Plotinus depends on how we interpret the latter: see L.P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: 1994) 9, and cp. with J. Bussanich, “Plotinus’s metaphysics of the One,” in Gerson, ed., *Cambridge Companion* 38–65, at 46.

10. Cf. also *In Tim.* 1:373.2ff., 403.4–7.

11. My translation: on the line of thought outlined here see more generally A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford: 1988) 98–107.

What is striking in the passage—keeping in mind our stated line of enquiry—is the profusion of broad modal allusions. Everything goes on to generate what it *can* produce, to the *limit* of its power. The maximal dispersal of power is a systemic requirement, a *compulsion* imposed on its members. With the metaphysics of potency dictating that power always dissipates as it proceeds further from its source and is divided among more subjects (props. 7 and 24, prop. 61ff.), what we finally arrive at is a last member of the series which is *incapable* of producing anything more. (Else it would not be last: prop. 25, 30.6–7.) Overall, everything seems to proceed with the force of necessity. This is in keeping with the aims of the *Elements*, intended as a systematic deduction of the fundamentals of rational theology.¹²

Still, have we missed something? Nowhere, it seems, does Proclus give us explicit reason *why* the One should give out of itself. We do have statements to the effect that for the world to take the form it does, it must have a First Cause which is identifiable as the highest good, or the Good-in-itself.¹³ But starting the other way around, we do not find in Proclus' early propositions in the *Stoikheîsis theologikê* anything indicative of the reason why the Good, or any absolutely self-sufficient entity *should*, of itself, come forth from itself and give out of itself. The omission on Proclus' part is significant not because it shows his reasoning out to be defective, but because it tends to confirm what Lovejoy proposed in his introduction to the subject of a "history of ideas": that among the conceptual presuppositions guiding our thought the most ubiquitous ones are often those left unaccounted for.¹⁴

It is furthermore remarkable how the gap we come upon here corresponds to just that puzzle which Lovejoy believes plenitude to provide the answer to. According to Lovejoy, the belief that a supreme entity would not tend simply and solely to itself is arrived at when a *moral* imperative is attached to the description of superlative being. Even though the best mode of being in the Greek conception is absolutely self-sufficient and in need of no other,¹⁵ it would still be somehow *less* than it is capable of being if it did not reach out and give of itself. Thus the generosity, the abundance which the Neoplatonists so laud in the One is added to the list of the essential features

12. Cf. J.M.P. Lowry, *The Logical Principles of Proclus' Stoikheîsis Theologikê as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos* (Amsterdam: 1980).

13. Proclus states that should there be a higher principle than "the Good," this would still have to act at least as well as the Good does: *Elements* prop. 12, 14.12–14.

14. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain* 7.

15. The term for this in Proclus is often "self-constitution" (*authypostasis*), and all spiritual reality possesses it to some degree: see S.E. Gersh, *Kinêsis Akinêtos. A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: 1973) 7ff. This entails that what Plato says of the Demiurge applies to every thing down to the level of Being—exactly what we have seen confirmed in prop. 25 above.

of divinity. This is the dialectical turn Lovejoy discerns in the *Timaeus*: the crucial finding is that if there truly were some kind of superior entity standing at the origin of things, it will be necessary that

He was good; and in the good no jealousy in any matter can ever arise. So, being without jealousy, he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself. That this is the supremely valid principle of becoming and of the order of the world, we shall most surely be right to accept from men of understanding.¹⁶

And so it was for all Platonic theology ever onwards. Of the fact that Plato himself came to be viewed as a “man of understanding” on the matter there is little doubt. The particular fortunes of the Platonic schools notwithstanding, most attempts at constructing a natural theology in the Western tradition have had recourse to this attractive idea at one time or another: that the goodness of creation is a natural outcome stemming from the essential goodness of its Creator.¹⁷ We thus have what must be regarded as our most fundamental principle: that the good by its very nature is diffusive of itself.¹⁸

In order to arrive at the notion of plenitude which Proclus inherited we need to further pursue the line of reasoning initiated in *Timaeus* 29e–30a through to its logical conclusion. If it is more proper of the good to give than to keep to itself, what is the proper measure of giving? Given the premises of our argument, the answer that comes naturally is that the good must give birth to all that it can. If it did not do so, it would remain niggardly in some respect. This would mean that the ultimate good, consequently, would truly realise “the all,” everything that is possible in the widest conceivable sense.

16. Plato, *Timaeus* 29e–30a; translation by F.M. Cornford in *Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato translated with a running commentary* (London: 1939).

17. Ample examples in the Christian tradition are produced by Lovejoy. Just to illustrate my point in the Islamic context, I would point to the way Galen's paraphrase of the *Timaeus* (cf. *Galen's Compendium Timaei Platonis*, ed. P. Kraus and R. Walzer [London: 1961] 5; Latin translation, *op. cit.* 39–40) is echoed in Averroes' defence of the philosophers and their doctrine of an optimal creation in the *Tabâfut al-tabâfut* (“The Incoherence of the Incoherence”), ed. M. Bouyges, S.J. (Beirut: 1930) 96.2–5: “if reason has no possibility of confirming one of the two opposites [i.e., an unlimited or limited creation] then let us revert to hearsay: but do not then pretend that this belongs to the realm of intellectual [enquiry]! We, however say that the First cannot refrain from the best action and do what is inferior, for this would be an imperfection.” (Emphasis added.)

18. This particular principle proved hugely influential in the Middle Ages under its Dionysean guise (cf. *De coelesti hierarchia* 4.1 in *Corpus Dionysiacum* 2, ed. G. Heil and A.M. Ritter [Berlin: 1991] 20) and provided the basis for much of its Platonically tinged cosmology. See K. Kremer, “Das ‘Warum’ der Schöpfung: ‘quia bonus’ vel/et ‘quia voluit’? Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Neuplatonismus und Christentum an Hand des Prinzips ‘bonum est diffusivum sui’,” in K. Flasch, ed., *Parusia: Studien zur Philosophie Platons und zur Problemgeschichte des Platonismus*, FS Johannes Hirschberger (Frankfurt am Main: 1965) 241–54.

Here we have the principle of plenitude proper; and this is how Proclus understands the divine goodness. (Cf. e.g., *In Tim.* 1:133ff., 365.19–366.2.)

Let us further examine Plato's conception of the good that admits of no envy. We have an obliging guide in Proclus, who serves up an extensive commentary to the *Timaieus* passage cited above. Proclus notes a double negation in Plato, where we have *oudepote* as well as *peri oudenos*. The reduplication in Proclus' mind is not superfluous: for Plato's assurance that the Demiurge is never jealous primarily signifies "eternal perfection" (*In Tim.* 1:362.20–21). This in turn entails that the best life-giving action is incessant and unbegotten: since the primary Good cannot be "at times good, at times not," neither can its benevolent actions have beginning or end.¹⁹ A more substantial relationship between possibility and time is established in the *Parmenides* commentary. In that work Proclus argues that the eternal act of creation must needs be a natural, not a volitional process, since will entails a choice between contrary possibilities and the opposite of action is inaction. The felt implication is that such a potential for inaction would necessarily be realised in the course of the Eternal's unceasing existence. This we can see is an application of the Aristotelian principle mentioned in our introduction. If there were a genuine potentiality for something in the eternal, then it would at one time realised.²⁰

As regards the fact that the Good does not harbor jealousy in *any* matter, this follows from the fact that there is nothing left to want for that which is *ex hypothesi* self-sufficient. As Proclus points out, Socrates in the *Philebus* (48b) treats envy as a "mixed passion," consisting of pleasure and pain alike. According to Proclus, this is because in envy there is both an apprehension of the good (which is good) and a recognition of its lacking in the self (which

19. See the first argument of the lost work *De aeternitate mundi contra Christianos*, preserved in Arabic and published by ^cA. Badawī in *Neoplatonici apud Arabes: al-Aflātūniya al-muhdathba 'inda al-^carab* (Cairo: 1955) 34; and cp. the 18th, as documented in John Philoponus' *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, ed. H. Rabe (Leipzig: 1899) 604–10. A more detailed and well-known argument of Proclus' states that if the actions of the perfectly Good had a beginning at some point, we should deem him either impotent or unwilling to give more. Both options are unacceptable. See *In Tim.* 1:367.2–6 and Badawī, *Neoplatonici apud Arabes* 34–35. A beginning to the Creator's actions would additionally imply His passage from potentiality to actuality, which is inconceivable (*In Tim.* 1:288.28–33; similarly, arg. 3 *contra Christianos*, at Philoponus, *contra Proclum* 42–43). Generally, if the cause exists, the effect co-exists with the cause: arg. 4 *contra Christianos*, *apud* Philoponus, *contra Proclum* 55–56. Proclus' arguments play off the Aristotelian description of the First Mover as pure *energeia* (cf. *Met.* 12.6–7). The notion that a good Creator would never be idle may go as far back as Aristotle's dialogue *On Philosophy* (see B. Effe, *Studien zur Kosmologie und Theologie der Aristotelischen Schrift "Über die Philosophie"* [Munich: 1970] 23–30) and was current from the Epicureans and Philo onwards.

20. *Procli commentarium in Platonis Parmenidem in Procli opera inedita*, ed. V. Cousin (Paris: 1864) 786–87. The argument is later reiterated by Simplicius as against Alexander: *In Aristotelis physicorum quattuor posteriores libros commentaria* (Berlin: 1895) 941.23–942.14.

is bad).²¹ Acquisitive love, the *erôs* of *The Banquet* is expressive of a *want* of good, and so cannot but be imperfect (*In Tim.* 1:363.23–26). By contrast, that which is good in itself and already possesses all good does not stand in need of anything outside of itself. It is thus free solely to give. Proclus likens this to the sun, “which generates light and which darkness is unable [*adynaton*] to approach” (ll. 28–29): “For what lack is there in such superabundance? What feebleness in the almighty divinity? And what participation in this fountain of all goods?” (364.2–4). The sun-and-its-rays metaphor goes back to Plotinus, who explains the same phenomenon in other words in a pivotal essay which in Porphyry’s edition bears the title *On the origin and order of the beings which come after the First*:

How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing in it that all things come of it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself.²²

Most of this is by now familiar; but Plotinus expands on the Platonic tradition in at least two respects, both of which grant him a place in our enquiry. First, Plotinus here and elsewhere attempts to construct something like a “Platonic theology” on the very basis of Plato’s remarks on the nature of the Good and the Creator. This makes Plotinus’ system a paradigmatic case of a cosmology where plenitude is everywhere operative—a fact that Lovejoy was not slow to seize upon. The principle that the universe is in every way maximally realised is expounded throughout the course of the *Enneads*.²³

21. *In Tim.* 1:362.32–363.2. In like manner, the pursuit of beauty tacitly admits that ugliness yet prevails (363.13–14).

22. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.2.1.3–9; translations from the *Enneads* are from A.H. Armstrong, in *Plotinus in Seven Volumes* (London and Cambridge, MA: 1966–86). Plotinus carries this to the point where he states that even the appellation “the Good” might best be changed to “the beyond-Good,” since the One “transcends good, and is good not for itself, but for the others” (*Enn.* 6.9.6.41ff.). This corresponds to our finding that the acquisitive goodness of self-perfection was seen to differ from the altruistic form of goodness that bestows good upon others.

23. See e.g., *Enn.* 2.9.3 for an account of the consecutive transferral of existence that closely resembles Proclus’. *Enn.* 5.5.12.44–47 has perhaps the most intriguing formulation: regarding the One: “He would not have cared if it had not come into being; and if anything else could have been derived from him he would not have grudged it existence; but as it is, it is not possible for anything else to come into being: all things have come into being and there is *nothing left*” (added emphasis). For more examples, cf. Gerson, *Plotinus* 22ff. and Lovejoy, *The Great Chain* 62–66 with references. There is a close parallel to prop. 25 in *Enneads* 5.4.1.23–34 (also, 5.1.6.30ff.) which ends with Plotinus wondering whether the first good, if presumed not to be productive would in that case be either envious or impotent (ll. 34–36: for reflections in Proclus, n. 19 above).

Second, in Plotinus the relation of the Good and Being comes under reinspection, with the Good being consequently conferred beyond Being.²⁴ While the full consequences of this exegetical move fall outside the scope of this study, we may note the strong showing the shift makes in Proclus' reading of the *Timaeus*.²⁵ Following upon Plotinus' analysis, Proclus can no longer contend that Plato's cosmic Demiurge is the same as the all-creator. Rather, Plato's "likely story" tells the literal tale of the *latter* phase of creation, from the realm of the Intellect downwards. As proof for his view Proclus quotes the fact that the Demiurge is simply called "good," rather than "the Good" in the *Timaeus*.²⁶

For all this, the *Timaeus* does convey several important universal principles, and often its ruminations on a particular aspect of creation can be fitted into a wider context. As we saw, Proclus reasons that *every* thing produces what it can, and his reasons for doing so accord with Plato's reasoning regarding the Demiurge. The first and best is also the most bountiful; in a descending order of perfection, all other beings, too exhibit their completeness by enabling the perfection of creatures lowlier than themselves. This also explains the infertility of the last in the series: it cannot anymore give anything, but only take. It has an infinite *want*, but no means of final satisfaction. (Cf. §3 below.)

Proclus' reasoning thus establishes plenitude as a general principle which can be applied universally at all levels of reality. The fact that plenitude is a systemic feature in Proclus' thought allows us to here pass over several problems having to do with the various orders of "demiurgic" or creative causes in Proclus.²⁷ Not to underestimate in any way the intrinsic interest of the

24. *Enn.* 6.9.2–6. For a defence of Plotinus' originality see M. Baltes, "Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's *Republic* Beyond Being?," in M. Joyal, ed., *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition*, FS John Whittaker (Aldershot: 1997) 3–23.

25. See e.g., K. Kremer, *Die neuplatonische Seinsphilosophie und ihre Wirkung auf Thomas von Aquin*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: 1971); on the cosmological implications, also M. Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach den Antiken interpretieren*, 2 vols. (Leiden: 1976–78). The second part of the study is devoted to Proclus.

26. *In Tim.* 1:359.22–360.4, commenting on *Timaeus* 29e (cf. similarly *Elements* prop. 133 on the Good as the primary God). Following Proclus' exposition in the *Timaeus* and in the *Elements of Theology* (cf. prop. 113), "the Good" in this paper designates the One. On Proclus' radical negative theology where the One is denied all names (finally even "the One") see now the fascinating C. Steel, F. Rumbach and D.G. MacIsaac, "The Final Section of Proclus' Commentary on the *Parmenides*. A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997): 211–67.

27. For Proclus' account of previous Platonist views, see *In Tim.* 1:303.24–312.26. Proclus expresses preference for the account of his teacher Syrianus, seeing as it in his estimation "accords best with the views of Plato" (1:310.6–7). What can be said with minimal controversy is that the Athenian scheme involves a multitude of creative causes on each level of reality, with triadic formations further deputising various functions to different agents. (Cf. e.g., *In Tim.*

issues involved, we may with relative safety assume that the net result of plenitude will turn out the same, whatever the answers to these questions. If *every* thing goes on to create to the limit of its power, and if all power is ultimately derivative on the One, then we shall expect to have a full diffusion at every stage, regardless of the precise route this dispersal takes. But what are the levels and what is the breadth of the fulness (*plêrôma*) Proclus credits creation with?

THE ORDER AND THE EXTENT OF THE PROCESSION

Plato had proclaimed that the Demiurge desired that, like himself, "all things should be good and, so far as might be, nothing imperfect," and proceeded to create accordingly. It was left to later generations to work out just how far the envelope of possibility could be pushed: how many things "the all" numbered, what their perfection consisted in, and how their procession from the Good and from each other might best be described.

On the basis of his account of power and causality Proclus can develop a deft argument to show just how far the fruits of providence must extend. There are those, Proclus says, who would leave the more base forms of existence out of creation. Such people "claim that if everything is good, then procession extends to the gods only. We, however, say that if procession should extend only to the gods, then all would not be good. For if the divine be infertile, how then is it good? But if it is last, then it will be infertile." (*In Tim.* 1:372.31–373.1.) Prop. 25 thus again finds application, this time confirming that if the world is to be good, then it must come to incorporate the less good, the less than divine as well. Proclus goes on to describe the ultimate reach of divine liberality:

Let there therefore be gods that have the first order: and after the gods let us posit everything all the way to matter, and let us give transition to all beings from the first to the last. None of the last indeed shall be lacking, nor shall there be any vacant place or void (*kenon*). For what void [could there be left], when the first have self-subsistence; the second come from these: the third come from these and otherness; the fourth, from otherness; and the fifth have the order of being other? And on both sides of all of these

3:174.17ff. on the relation of sublunary and intelligible Gods, and *In Tim.* 1:360–62 on the variable ways of looking at the motions within the intelligible realm.) Thus, "the Demiurge produces all things by self-intellection in so far as he is intellect; in so far as he is intelligible, he creates by his being himself; and in so far as he is god, simply by willing it [to be]" (*In Tim.* 1:362.2–4). For a refutation of Amelius, who had suggested three through and through separate Demiurges and whom "we as followers of Plato cannot accept" (ll. 5–6), cf. 1:362.6ff. One important aspect of this has just been tackled by John Dillon, in "The Role of the Demiurge in the *Platonic Theology*," in A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel, eds, *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*. Actes du Colloque Internationale Louvain (13–16 Mai 1998) En l'honneur de H.D. Saffrey et G. Westerink (Leuven and Paris, 2000) 139–50.

are those that are of a similar order in a dissimilar manner All in all, it can be shown that the progress of things goes on in many ways: the analogy, if you will, is preserved from the lofty to the last, after the orderly process of everything from the One. Let all this therefore be agreed upon, and the generation of beings [reach even] unto nothingness.²⁸

No gaps or “missing links,” no vacuum or void: this is as clear a statement of the “great chain” as one might hope to find.²⁹ It is more detailed than anything Lovejoy adduces in Plotinus’ name: indeed, we might well regard Proclus as the first exponent of that specific notion, more so than Plotinus, certainly more than Plato.³⁰

Cristina D’Ancona Costa has contrasted Plotinus’ and Proclus’ views regarding the gradation of reality on this very point. In her view, Plotinus follows the *Republic* of Plato “where the main realities of the suprasensible world are the Good ... and the Forms or true beings. In the background of the Proclean solution we discover as a prominent feature the ancient Academic model, according to which the One and the Indefinite Dyad are responsible for the production of various levels of increasing complexity within reality.”³¹ In other words, (1) the Plato of the dialogues is working with what is essentially a two-level model of reality, with the Form of the Good standing at its pinnacle;³² and (2) Plotinus’ main revisions concern the decisive elevation of the Good above Being and the elaboration of the mediating role of soul between the formal and corporeal levels. Moreover, (3) while some members of the early Academy had some ideas about the *aoristos duas medi-*

28. *In Tim.* 1:373.3–21. It is in the context of this kind of ‘Neoplatonic theodicy’ that Lovejoy sees fit to mention Proclus by name (*The Great Chain* 64). Cp. *Enn.* 4.8.6.12–13: “To this power we cannot impute any halt, any limit of jealous grudging; it must move for ever outward until the universe stands accomplished to the ultimate possibility.”

29. For other instances of the “no void or vacuum” principle see e.g., *Théologie platonicienne*, III, 2; ed. H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, 6 vols. (Paris: 1968–97) 3:6ff. and the treatise *De providentia*, in *Procli Diadochi tria opuscula*, ed. H. Boese (Berlin: 1960), cap. 7, §20.

30. As Lovejoy does acknowledge Denys’ espousal of the principle (*The Great Chain* 67), one has to wonder whether his choice to pass over Proclus was due to ignorance. To see how closely the Dionysean heritage follows the Proclean, cp. the above quotation with Denys in Aquinas’ *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, ed. C. Pera (Rome: 1950) cap. 4, lect. 16, §198 (the Latin translation begins “Quoniam, per universa vadens perfecta bonitas, non usque ad solas quae circa ipsam sunt proficiscitur sanctissimas substantias, sed extenditur ad ultimas ...”), coupled with Aquinas’ comments, n. 501. Cf. also W. Beierwaltes, “Primum est dives per se. Meister Eckhart und der *Liber de Causis*,” in E.P. Bos and P.A. Meijer, eds., *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: 1992) 141–69.

31. C. D’Ancona Costa, “The Causality of the First Principle,” in Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion* 356–85, at 380.

32. See Baltes, “The Idea of the Good” 5–8; on the relation of Forms and Principles in Plato see the sober remarks by H. Thesleff, *Studies in Plato’s Two-Level Model* (Helsinki: 1999) 91–107.

ating between the One and the worldly manifold, (4) it is with Iamblichus and the Athenian school that the principle of mediation gains central importance and mediating principles multiply to the point of diffusion.³³ As Sambursky and Pines expertly describe the dialectical progression in late Athenian ontology:

On the one hand, the multiplicity of levels above the sensible world will of necessity *enlarge* the gap between this world and the perfect reality of the One ... on the other, that same multiplicity will *narrow* the gaps between the adjacent levels and thus reduce to a minimum the discontinuity between the rungs in the ladder of hypostases.³⁴

Minimal discontinuity equals maximal continuity, so the Athenian solution by its very nature tends towards a "great chain" model, rather than one built in the image of "Jacob's Ladder." Let us briefly make note of some features in Proclus' conception of "Homer's golden chain."³⁵

a) Despite that the chain of being is continuous (or as close to continuous as possible), judging by the above citation Proclus can discern between five main orders (*taksi*). Each it seems receives its being from previous members of the scale; each consecutive level possesses less self-subsistence and more of "the other." Sameness and Otherness are then made into accessory agents in the dispersal of creation, as are the closely related pairs Unity—Plurality, Likeness—Unlikeness, and Limit and the Unlimited. (Cf. *In Parm.* 732ff.)

(b) A contrast drawn between Identity and Likeness allows Proclus to articulate what he sees as central in the overall process. Creation everywhere proceeds not by *identity*, but by *similarity*. (*In Parm.* 738–39; cp. *El. Th.* prop. 28.) This both deflects the potential accusation that the Good would not be good enough if it did not produce something just as good as itself (if this is not possible, then this is not a problem), and allows us to infer that the gradation of reality proceeds by minute variations. Thus, the five major orders reflect the only way in which the types of existents can be laid out: from being, the necessary next step is becoming, etc. Furthermore, we can rest assured that each order is filled from the highest to the lowest. Proclus can even infer that on the borders of adjacent orders there may stand media-

33. For some highly detailed studies, see Gersh, *Kinêsis akinêtos* and by the same author, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: 1978). In this context cf. also A. Charles-Saget, *L'Architecture du Divin. Mathématique et philosophie chez Plotin et Proclus* (Paris: 1982) 67–69.

34. S. Sambursky and S. Pines, *The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism* (Jerusalem: 1971) 13.

35. On the different metaphors involved see P.G. Kuntz, "A Formal Preface and an Informal Conclusion to *The Great Chain of Being*: The Necessity and Universality of Hierarchical Thought," in Kuntz and Kuntz, eds., *Jacob's Ladder* 3–14.

tors that belong in a way to both: such is the case with the ranks of Eternity and Time. (Prop. 55: cf. §4b below.)

(c) The categorising principles, plus the divine “henads” are themselves given reified status in Proclus’ metaphysics of participation. These provide us with the upper links of the great chain, those possessing self-subsistence of the first order.³⁶ By a fortuitous turn, this also allows us insight to the principles guiding the workings of plenitude on the subformal level of becoming. For in yet another derivative of the self-same proposition (prop. 25) we studied earlier, the recognition of causal agents above the level of Forms helps to identify how those Forms are reflected on the lower tiers of reality. The higher and more perfect cause has more effects and reaches lower (props. 57, 60);³⁷ thus for an explanation of the lower we must look to the higher.

(d) Hence, the true cause of matter—the very last member of the chain—is the One itself, rather than any intermediate principle (prop. 57, cor.). These two, “viz. *The one*, and matter,” are those two ultimate principles surrounding the ranks of existence from both sides, as Thomas Taylor the Neoplatonist rightly observed.³⁸ They are “of a similar order in a dissimilar manner,” since one is in every way above being, the other in every way below it. One is infinite potency *qua* activity, the other infinite potentiality *qua* receptivity. (Cp. *Enn.* 5.3.15.32ff.)

The claim that matter depends directly on God or the Good itself for its existence is remarkable: it tells us how literally Proclus wants the principle of plenitude to be taken. Nothing in creation is wrong, and everything perfect so far as possible, for even the last and most imperfect member of the series has been posited there by the Good itself.³⁹ The twin constellations of power

36. Since some of these principles (e.g., Limit and the Unlimited) are above Being (prop. 90, 82.34 Dodds), it would be careless to call this the great chain of *being* anymore. Much of the ground regarding the constitution of the suprainelligible principles has been covered by Gersh in *Kinēsis akinētos*: for the continuity of the chain of Gods, see *Elements* prop. 132 and for the extent of their downward causation, prop. 140.

37. Lloyd proclaims he is following Olympiodorus’ example in calling this the “Proclan rule” (*Anatomy*, 106–97). On the principle’s Latin history see E.P. Bos, “William of Ockham’s Interpretation of the First Proposition of the *Liber de Causis*,” in Bos & Meijer, eds., *On Proclus and his Influence* 171–89.

38. See *The Commentaries of Proclus on the Timaeus of Plato in Five Books; Containing a Treasury of Pythagoric and Platonic Physiology*, 2 vols. (London: 1820) 1:314, n. 1.

39. Cf. *In Tim.* 1:384.30–385.14 and *Tria opuscula: De malo* cap. 10, §§34–36. Calcidius tells us that of the Ancients, Numenius was of the opinion that the generation of matter is an uncouth doctrine spurned by all competent thinkers (see *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, ed. J.H. Waszink, 2nd ed. (London: 1975) cap. 295, 297.7–298.9); and Proclus reprimands Plotinus for regarding matter as an ungenerated principle. On the ancient controversy on the generatedness vs. ungeneratedness of matter see Michael Erler’s notes to the *De malo* passage in his German translation, *Über die Existenz des Bösen* (Meisenheim am Glan: 1978) 120–25 and Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung, passim* (for Proclus’ treatment of the question *op. cit.* 2:76–94).

and of infinity just mentioned are crucial for what follows. Let us pause to examine them for a while.

APEIRODYNAMIS

We take leave of the other categories in order to concentrate solely upon the Limit and the Unlimited. Now, as Plotinus had taught, the One is infinite, and this primarily in two ways: the One is above all finite conceptualisation (above intelligibility), and the One is apprehended primarily in its infinite power or potency. The One is the *dynamis pantôn*, the generating power behind all existence.⁴⁰ Similarly (though in a different manner), matter, too, is on its own merits unamenable to intellectual inquiry; and its fruits can likewise be said to be infinite. For matter is pure potentiality, which is to say potentiality for any and every thing. At the same time, matter when considered in itself is actually nothing; and of nonexistence already Parmenides had shown that it cannot so much as be spoken of.⁴¹

In the *Parmenides* commentary Proclus mentions each of the senses in which the One is said to be infinite, elaborating on each in detail: "We, however, accept all these suggestions as having a certain attraction, even though we incline to some more than others." (*In Parm.* 1118, trans. Dillon.) He goes on to remark that for the most part he opts to follow his master Syrianus. For one thing, this involves the assertion that properly speaking, the One is above all *dynamis*,⁴² as well as above finitude and infinity. How is this compatible with the notion that the One is *apeirodynamos*? Proclus resolves the conflict by drawing upon paradox. Even as the One is said to be infinite, so also "if in the *Laws* (IV, 716c) God is described as the measure of all things, one should not be surprised." For just as God unceasingly gives existence to countless things, He also provides the defining limit for all things.

40. That the One is infinite, not "according to number or size but in its power," is stated at *Enn.* 6.9.6.11–12 (also 5.5.10.20–23, and cp. Proclus on Being, *Elements* prop. 86); that it is not actual, for this would entail its numbering among the intelligibles, at e.g. *Enn.* 5.3.15.30–32. For the expression *dynamis pantôn* see *Enn.* 3.8.10.1, 5.1.7.9, 5.4.1.24–36, and 6.7.32.31; for the roots of the expression *apeirodynamis*, Aristotle, *Phys.* 8.10). For further remarks on the infinity of the One in Plotinus see J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: 1967) 25–37, coupled with the bibliographical notes at 250–51.

41. Cf. *Enn.* 2.4.14–16 and esp. 2.4.15.33–34: "Apeiron men dê par' autês tèn hylên lekteen antitakseî tēi pros ton logon." *Timaeus* 48e–49a (further 50dff.) is the ultimate source here, although Aristotle's depiction of prime matter (*Phys.* 1.7–9, *Met.* 7.3) was obviously influential as well.

42. See *Tb. Pl.* III, 9; Saffrey and Westerink, eds., 3:31.14ff. This mirrors the Aristotelian argument that an eternal activity (*energeia*) does not involve potentiality or the actualisation of potencies at all, since such actualisations would at some time let up and lapse into potentiality: *Met.* 12.6, 1071b17–19.

Indeed, it is God's greatest blessing to give "limit to the infinites: for this assimilates things to the good" (*In Tim.* 2:66.11–12; cf. *In Parm.* 1124). This is because definite character signals actuality and actualisation, this, the moment of ascension—return—and this in turn perfection, which is the very essence of goodness. In sum, if infinity is to potentiality as finitude is to substance and actuality, then God is equally the source of both.⁴³

Naturally, for Proclus the detection of such regulative principles will not do without their being assigned to appropriate hypostases. Thus, "Prior to all that is composed of limit and infinitude there exist substantially and independently the first Limit and the first Infinity" (*El. Th.* prop. 90). This allows Proclus to neatly sidestep the problem of the One's finitude and infinity. The One is neither, properly speaking: it lies beyond them both, since it has created both. (*In Tim.* 1:385.18–19.) In the final analysis all talk of divine Limit and Infinity refers to the two "junior gods" over the henads and below the One (*El. Th.* prop. 159). The notion of the Finite and the Infinite as guiding principles directly subservient to the One was derived from Plato's *Philebus* (23c–), as Proclus points out. (*In Tim.* 1:226.3–9, 384.22–26, 440.28–30.) Proclus additionally refers to the Orphic principles of Aether and Chaos, of which the one represents definite form, the other, indefinite matter. (*In Tim.* 1.176.12, 385.17–19; *In Parm.* 1121.26.) Since Limit and Infinity are second only to the First Principle itself, they pervade all the orders of existence between the One and matter. All existents are an admixture of finitude of infinity; in each case, finitude is privileged over infinity, as actuality presides over potentiality and unity over multiplicity. On the higher levels finitude is more prevalent, whereas on the lower infinity gains ground.⁴⁴

In both Plotinian and Proclean metaphysics, finitude and infinity are closely intertwined with the interplay of potency and actuality (*dynamis*, *energeia*). The Neoplatonic conception of power represents a substantial revision of the original Aristotelian categories.⁴⁵ Following Aristotle and later

43. *Th. Pl.* III, 9. This corresponds to the "whence" and "whither" of the causality of the Good in *Elements* prop. 113; cp. also the two senses of "good" laid out above, in § 1, and further the tripartite division goodness—*ousia*, will—*dynamis*, and providence—*energeia* at *In Tim.* 1:414.20ff. (corresponding to the triad *monê—prohodos—epistrophê*). On cyclical causality in Proclus see Gersh, *Kinêsis akinêtos* 49–80.

44. Cf. Syrianus, *In Met.* 112–13; Proclus, *In Tim.* 1:176 and 2:102–3; *In Parm.* 1116–23 (taking its cue from the infinity of the One, *Parm.* 137d); and *Elements* props. 89–92. On the triad *peras—apeiron—mikton*, cf. W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: 1965) 50–60 and L. Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neoplatonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh: 1996) 175–79.

45. On potency and act in Plotinus see H. Büchner, *Plotinus Möglichkeitslehre* (Munich: 1970); on late Neoplatonist elaborations Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* 27–45 and *Kinêsis Akinêtos* 27–48.

the Stoics, it was thought that "like creates like": or more technically, what actualises a potency must itself already possess that same quality in actuality.⁴⁶ Moreover, active and passive potencies are distinguished from each other, the one being the capacity to transform and the other the capacity for being transformed. The distinction is made explicit in late ancient school philosophy with the term "fitness" (*epitêdeiotês*) being reserved for passive potency.⁴⁷ Roughly speaking, the Aristotelian scheme is based on a kind of "balance of power" idea. Some beings are eternally actual and active, some pass between states of potentiality and actuality. Although Aristotle is sketchy on this, it was generally understood that as regards potencies for contraries, one's actualisation is accompanied by the other's lapse into potentiality, and *vice versa*.

All of this was carried over onto Neoplatonism: but in Neoplatonism there is the overriding conception of a dissipation of power through the layers of reality, an overflow which does not imply a diminution in the higher-order potency (props. 26 and 27). This connects with the principle that the cause is always greater than the effect, stated and argued for by Proclus in prop. 7 of the *Elements of Theology*.⁴⁸ The whole conception significantly upsets the notion of a "conservation of energy," since talk is here of an "inexhaustible fountain" whose flow actually peters *out* somehow at the other end of existence.⁴⁹ As Stephen Gersh has noted, with the late ancient Neoplatonists we must contend with the fact that more than one notion of *dynamis* is simultaneously operative. Gersh's comments can hardly be improved upon: discussing a passage in the *Platonic Theology* where the ranks of potency and actuality are explicitly conjoined with those of infinity (alternatively, incompleteness or imperfection, *ateleioitês*) and finitude (completeness or perfection, *teleioitês*), Gersh writes that

46. Cf. *Elements* props. 77–78 (falling back on Aristotle, *Met.* 9.8), coupled with Dodds' comments *ad loc.*

47. On *epitêdeiotês* as a technical term in Late Antiquity see S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (Princeton: 1962) 104–10; on early instances of the term and a useful categorization of its uses, Dodds at *Elements* 344–45.

48. For a study, cf. A.C. Lloyd, "The Principle that the Cause is Greater than its Effect," *Phronesis* 21 (1976): 146–56. As several scholars have noted (e.g., Dodds *ad loc.*), the corollary of undiminished power is needed to keep the picture of an eternal emanation/procession coherent. Armstrong traces the notion to the Stoic conception of the sun's incessantly giving heat: cf. his article "Plotinus," in A.H. Armstrong, ed., *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: 1967) 240.

49. Dodds puts it succinctly, *Elements* 245: there is an "intimate connexion in Neoplatonism between the notion of substance and potency ... the former is dependent for its continued existence upon the latter, which is indeed at bottom the stuff of which it is constituted." His reference is to *Enneads* 3.1.1.12–13, "for this is their being, the due output of a particular kind of activity." What should be noted is that the "activity" here is that of the first (*ta prôta*), the "being" that of those dependent on them: in Proclus this would correspond to the efficacy and *apeirodynamis* of the Forms, cf. §4c.

What is in fact implied is that a single principle is being passed down the hierarchy of reality, and that it begins its course among the highest orders and ends at the lowest ... both the complete and the incomplete are generated by this process. If we couple this with his [Proclus'] earlier remarks about the reflection of the higher by the lower, we are left with the distinct impression that the power of the higher is, at least predominantly, complete and is gradually replaced by the largely incomplete power of the lower orders, and that this process is continuous.⁵⁰

Rosán's compelling interpretation of this was that "reality consists of a continuous scale of hierarchy in which actuality is gradually replaced by potentiality in the descent." While reminding the reader that—considering the fragmentary evidence—a measure of caution in such theorising is advisable, Gersh, too, is inclined towards accepting this model as basically correct. This leaves us with the following picture: the more complete is by its own nature ever more definite and hence finite (hence, numerically closer to the One). Yet it has more power and is more productive, so that in that (i.e. the potency) sense of the term it is closer to the infinite. The converse applies to the less complete; thus, matter by its nature is completely incomplete and has no active potency at all, only infinite receptivity.⁵¹

The inexhaustible transfer of power leads us back to the notion of the Good giving without end and gives us our first instance of *apeirodynamis*. Proclus is of the opinion that infinity in the guise of power (*kata dynamin*) is in some way manifested on every level of reality (*In Tim.* 1:453.14–21). How is this?

FROM BEING TO BECOMING

In the *Timaeus* Plato states that the model on which the visible world is based "in itself embraces all intelligible living creatures, just like this world contains us and all other creatures assembled as things visible" (30c7–d1). Here we have our basic parameters for applying the principle of plenitude on the intelligible and sensible planes. In Proclus the two kinds of "living beings" are assigned to the orders of Eternity and Time, respectively. Eternity brings into being and embraces all things eternal, just as Time generates and embraces all things temporal.⁵² Lovejoy read Plato's first thesis as indi-

50. *Kinêsis akinêtos* 46.

51. We only have to remark that the highest reality of the One does not strictly adhere to this rule: in a sense, it is more *dynamis* than *energeia*. (For the complications in Plotinus see Bussanich, "Plotinus's metaphysics" 44–51.) The Arab scholars gathered as much from the paraphrase of the *Enneads*, Books 4–6 circulating as "The Theology of Aristotle," and were understandably dismayed over the discrepancy: see P. Adamson, "Forms of Knowledge in the Arabic Plotinus," in Inglis, ed., *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, forthcoming.

52. Cf. e.g., *Elements* props. 53–54. For a succinct account of the relation of Eternity and Time and the modes of being they incorporate see D.G. Maclsaac, "Eternity and Time in Proclus," in Inglis, ed., *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, forthcoming.

cating that there is a Form of every possible sort, that is, that all intelligible objects have intellectual existence. He believed that the latter statement indicates that all Forms which can be corporeally instantiated, are.⁵³ If we proceed from the top downwards to see about the facts in Proclus, we can see how this interpretation fares.

a) What constitutes the full reach, or plenitude (*plêrôma*) of possible Forms? First and foremost, are the Forms finite or infinite in number? We know that the question was disputed early on, for Plotinus subscribed to the view that the Forms are limited in number, whereas his contemporary Amelius held that an infinity of Forms more appropriately reflects the infinity of the Creator. (Cf. *Enn.* 6.5.8 and Syrianus, *In Met.* 147.2–5.) Interestingly, Amelius also thought that this infinitude of Forms requires an infinite time for it to become manifested on the corporeal plane.

Proclus quotes with approval the Middle Platonist Atticus, who had likened the productive principle to the carpenter who “creates all manner of artifacts, but each according to a different reason: this a ladder, that a bed” (*In Tim.* 1:366.9–11). Thus also the Demiurge creates all manner of things that can conceivably exist, that have their own distinct ‘rhyme or reason.’ As to the controversy, Proclus sides with Plotinus. He states unequivocally that “it is not prudent to postulate an infinity of intelligible Forms, as some say.” (*In Tim.* 3:102.24–25.) Since intelligible Being just means definite character, this must in turn entail finitude *in toto*. Syrianus’ notes to Aristotle’s discussion regarding the finitude and infinity of number suggest that the stance was standard among the Athenian philosophers.⁵⁴ Even as Proclus cites the conventional Aristotelian arguments against an actual infinite, he states as his opinion that Plato’s proof was the best and “most demonstrative”: as the paradigm is one, it cannot possibly be infinite in size (*In Tim.* 1:453.22–455.29, 456.2–6). In prop. 179 of the *Elements of Theology* Proclus further argues that “the intellectual series must be less in number than any subsequent manifold. It follows that it is not infinite”: this because the infinite cannot be exceeded. Dodds correctly sees this as referring back to prop. 62, where the general rule is established that every lower manifold numbers more members than the next higher. But there is a detail one would do well to catch here. For the argument to work, infinity does have to be instanti-

53. With regard to Plato this is controversial: against Lovejoy and for the possibility of “empty forms” in Plato see E. Maula, “On Plato and Plenitude,” *Ajatus* 29 (1967): 12–50 and against Maula and in defence of Lovejoy, M.D. Rohr, “Empty Forms in Plato,” in Knuuttila, ed., *Reforging the Great Chain* 19–56.

54. Cf. Syrianus, *In Met.* 145.20ff., commenting on Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 13.8, 1083b36ff. The whole line of argument is based on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 2, where it is stated that an infinite regress of ends is impossible, since it would be unintelligible.

ated at some lower level of creation. This is remarkable, even if the context does not afford any further light on the issue.

As regards the exact number of Forms, Proclus sensibly shies away from any concrete answer. He is content with noting that there *is* a certain number and also sufficient reason for its being such, and that this is why Plato in the *Timaeus* describes the Ideas as being “such and so many” (*hosas kai hoias*).⁵⁵ One might assume on account of plenitude that the intelligible order would encompass a *maximal* number of Forms: but it is not clear that this should necessarily be so. For any finite reflection of an infinite source might be thought to be equally (i.e., infinitely) lacking in exactitude.⁵⁶ In that case, the fulness of a given set of Forms might just as well be measured by the functionality it exhibits in spreading the fruits of the procession further on down. It is here that Neopythagorean dreams of the ultimately mathematical character of the intelligible world and of its axiomatisation enter into play, with attendant notions of the tetrad and the decad as fundamental figures to which all others may yet revert. We shall not engage in numerology: instead we only point out that in the *Parmenides* commentary Proclus provides a fairly comprehensive list of things that have Ideas and things that don't, and that the question has been studied in more detail elsewhere (*In Parm.* 811–33; cp. Syrianus, *In Met.* 107–08; and cf. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* 88ff.; on the term *plêrôma*, 83–86).

On Proclus' reading, all Forms partake of Eternity and possess full and undivided presence. And as prop. 84 of the *Elements of Theology* puts it, “all that perpetually is is infinite in potency.” This is the way in which infinite power is manifested on the intelligible plane. The Forms' infinite power is directed outward as well. The Forms are “complete” in the sense denoted in prop. 25. This makes them endlessly productive. The Forms are imitated unendingly, through infinite time: thus Amelius' insights, too, finally find a place in the Proclean edifice.

b) Prop. 85 continues the same theme as prop. 84: Proclus states that “all that perpetually comes to be has an infinite potency of coming to be.” The reference is to a mode of existence very different from that of the timeless Forms. This time around, talk is of a special class of existents holding an intermediate position between Being and Becoming. These are the everlasting aethereal heavens, the first of the corporeal created beings. In both the

55. Proclus, *In Tim.* 3:102.21–22. Again this harks back to Syrianus (*In Met.* 145.25–26), as Dodds observes (*Elements* 245). Cp. also Plotinus' typically paradoxical presentation, *Enn.* 6.6.18.

56. Norman Kretzmann has interpreted Aquinas as arguing in this way: cf. “A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?” in S. MacDonald, ed., *Being and Goodness. The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: 1991) 229–49, at 236–38.

Elements of Theology and the *Timaeus* commentary Proclus expends considerable effort in explaining the role these entities play within the cosmic scheme.

The sempiternal heavens are not properly eternal, since they are subject to at least one kind of change (locomotion) and are in that respect temporal.⁵⁷ Nor can the celestial bodies be said to enjoy the permanence of Being, since as finite corporeal particulars it is requisite that their existential power be replenished at steady intervals. (Cf. §5b below.) At the same time, the heavens do possess an excellence unequalled by other bodies. They are “ever in becoming,” as Plato had intimated in the *Timaeus*: they perdure for all infinity and are therefore unendingly receptive of a further acquisition of (finite) power. This makes them into ideal mediators between the orders of Time and Eternity. The finding provides Proclus with the opportunity to make a distinction between two kinds of perpetuity (*aidiotès*). While the truly eternal has simultaneous and timeless presence, that which merely endures gains its existence “diffusely, and is unfolded through being temporally extended” (*El. Th.* prop. 55, 54.1 Dodds). The latter mode of being corresponds to the “omnitemporal” (as opposed to the “atemporal”) interpretation of eternity: Proclus uses it repeatedly in order to clarify the existential status of the corporeal world in general (e.g., *In Tim.* 1:227–40, 290.26–29, 366–68, 2:123.2–13, 3:311.6–15).

c) With the creation of the corporeal heavens we have arrived at the description of the physical universe. We have already seen that it possesses unlimited duration. What of its size? Proclus accepts Aristotle’s claim (*Phys.* 3.5, *De caelo* 1.5–7) that the world must necessarily have a finite volume. Platonic grounds for the same doctrine are found in the *Timaeus* “unique world” argument. On the one hand the world contains all there is, because nothing could be left outside it either to corrupt it or to make it incomplete. (*In Tim.* 2:58.20ff.) It is, exactly in accordance with our best understanding of the divine liberality, at every moment both fully realised and perfect. But this raises another question.

“What, then: could the Demiurge not administer to many, or infinite worlds?” [One should reply that] the manifold and the infinite are not [signs] of power; instead, uniting the divided and setting limits to infinities are. For this assimilates things to the Good—towards which, indeed the Demiurge orients all of his creations. And this is demonstrated through many other arguments. (66.8–14.)

57. See *In Tim.* 1:139.5–8; and for the theoretical background *Elements* prop. 50. The groundwork is established in Aristotle, *Phys.* 8.7–9 (where circular locomotion is defined as the primary form of change) and *Met.* 12.2, 1069b25–27 (where the heavens are said to possess matter “only for the sake of moving from place to place”).

The turn towards the Good is of course the *epistrophè*, and as Proclus notes it consists in the retroversion of subsequent manifolds into prior monads. Thus the universe (*to pan*) even as the all is still the whole (*to holon*), and it finally reverts to a figure of one (or the One). To say that this is a sign of “wonderful abundance” (*periousias thaumatès*, 66:5) is to put it mildly: therefore it is best that there be only a single world. The shift from “many” to “infinite” worlds reveals Proclus’ indebtedness to Aristotle. Should the Demiurge’s model not form a unified whole, then there would rather be an infinity of worlds than a finite manifold. (Cf. *In Tim.* 1:438.15–17; cp. *De caelo* 1.8–9.) But this is not the case: as the paradigm forms an intelligible unity, so also the universe as its image has been made as unitary as it can be.

Proclus dutifully recounts former controversies surrounding the question. Already Porphyry had had to contend with the question of why there should not be several suns and moons, like matter provides occasion for a multitude of horses and of men. (*In Tim.* 1:439.22–29.) His answer had been that Ideas of incorruptible beings such as the celestial entities only require a single instantiation of each, an answer which had, however left Iamblichus unsatisfied: “for this was what was doubted from the start” (440.21). Iamblichus had preferred to view the procession in terms of progressively lessening sameness and rest and growing difference and motion. Proclus combines both of his illustrious predecessors’ accounts. Acting very much in character, he adds to Iamblichus’ list the principles of finitude and infinity. The more perfect Forms *need* numerically less instantiations: their perfection is quite properly reflected by their images possessing longer lives. At the far end of the spectrum, the celestial bodies are immortal, only-begotten, and the only representatives of their species.

Proclus defends Plato’s one-world argument in other ways which we shall pass over here. But one small detail merits our attention. In defending the perfect prolificacy of the Forms Proclus offhandedly remarks that every form of animal is *always* instantiated on the corporeal plane (442.29–31). This has sometimes been considered an application of the principle of plenitude; it is not clear that it should be regarded as such. References to this peculiar belief are scarce and arguments for it hard to come by. Proclus offers none, other than the bare claim that it is “necessary” that it be so.

The corporeal world, then is only-begotten and of a finite size; and it constantly reflects all the intelligible animals in the form of their “images” (*eikôn*). This is achieved through the infinite malleability of matter, which gives us our last instance of *apeirotynamis*. The finite size of the world puts a certain limit to what can take place at any one time. Not everything fits in at once. This allows Proclus to put forward a cosmological (and rather moralist) variation of the Law of Contradiction. Explaining Plato’s plenitudinal allusions and the universe receiving “what it can” from the Demiurge, Proclus

states that "the universe does not grudge salvation to those who can coexist with the whole, but that which cannot be governed together with the whole cannot abide in it" (*In Tim.* 1:106.23–26). In terms of possibilities this means that every earthly particular has its proper place and time. (This justifies periodical deluges and catastrophes.) For all of the Demiurge's creative possibilities to be realised, this has to happen through the world's entire history.

TEMPORALISING THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

All that remains for us is to give an account of those temporal creatures subject to becoming. Thus "talk of vivification proceeds further, filling all parts of the universe with appropriate kinds of living creatures and every kind throughout with appropriate numbers, and by generating all numbers through likeness to the model." (*In Tim.* 3:98.27–99.3.) Creation is made complete when the sensible world supplements the inferior forms of life.

It is necessary for the world to contain in itself all living beings, so that it may perfectly come to resemble the completeness of its model. Not only does it receive the whole plenitudes of the world and consist of that whole of wholes, but it also comprehends the partial animals by whose means every part of the universe is perfected, and all the divine and daimonical and mortal orders too. Thus is engendered the most perfect verisimilitude of the universe to the self-life. This is the Demiurge's tenth gift to the world, the greatest one of them all. (98.4–13.)

The generation of the imperfect paradoxically serves to bring out the excellence of the perfect, and this for two reasons. Only in this manner is the peculiar character of the divine activity brought on display; furthermore, those who would leave this part of creation out manage only to "strip away the makings of the cosmos, undermine the generating power of the wholes, and confuse with each other the nature of the first and last things" (*In Tim.* 1:375.7–9; cf. 104.22–106.31). Leaving the last uncreated would make the earlier uncreative, which we have already seen is unacceptable:

And if the universe were not filled to the brim with all manner of life it would not be perfect, nor would it sufficiently resemble the all-perfect animal. Not [willing to see] either of these happen, the first Demiurge thereby motions [forward] the second creation from his own lofty point of view. He pours upon [the first-created] vivifying and creative power: through these, and from themselves they then generate secondary substances, fill them with life, and grant them form (*eidopoïésousin*: *In Tim.* 3:227.14–22).

The "whole of wholes" is the complete range of Forms arrived at earlier; the "partial animals," or the sensible creatures subject to generation and corruption are its image; and the junior gods take part in the creation of one out of the other. How does this happen? Already Plotinus had suggested that the perfection of the corporeal world is to imitate the whole of the eternal intel-

ligible world temporally and discursively and that this happens by the aid of the mediation of the world-soul (see e.g. *Enn.* 3.7.4–5, 5.2.1–2). Proclus elaborates on the notion quite exquisitely. To him the very name “Eternity” bespeaks eternal Being (*to aei on*), while the etymology of Time reveals how its nature is to execute a choral dance around the mind of *nous*.⁵⁸ As sempiternal Time represents in discursive form the timeless whole of the Ideas (*In Tim.* 3:92.5–28), so the world-soul

by comprehending one thing at a time gains its return through the whole of time, which comprises the whole period of that which is divinely generated. With regard to the former [feature] it is inferior to the soul above the world; while with regard to the latter it is superior to the souls inside it. For all of these have [their] return in some part of the whole of time, whereas this, as if running around it, completes its period in the whole of time by intelcting the intelligibles of the one intelligible universe. For since it is the cosmic soul, it will of necessity circumscribe the whole intelligible universe: and through this it will effect the intellectual return of the cosmic period, in accordance with the perfect number and by way of producing the whole corporeal period. (*In Tim.* 2:290.6–17.)

The picture is clear enough in its general outline. The complete contents of the intelligible plane are copied onto the corporeal level by the world-soul’s drawing a discursive circle around the *nous*. In this fashion, all the imperfect images of the perfect exemplars may find their place within the finite world. We may add that the individual celestial souls each govern a share of the procession of sublunary existents and that each of the demiurgic viceroys effects a specific portion of corporeal creation, as the ancient astrologers serenely intimated. (*In Tim.* 3:189–94, 221–26.) This produces the “all-varied” natural world, one of Proclus’ favourite plenitudinal catchphrases.

But even if the main tenets are uncontested, there are still some details that need to be worked out. The “perfect number” might be thought to correspond to Plato’s great year in *Timaeus* 39d2–6, the period in which the eight heavenly spheres come in conjunction.⁵⁹ But Proclus’ scheme is made more complicated by the intra- and supracosmic souls mentioned earlier. Accordingly, though some have adopted a doxastic attitude towards the theory presented by Plato we should resist the urge to do likewise. (*In Tim.* 3:91.7ff.) The perfect number of Time cannot be captured in a period of 36,000 years, or any other convenient sum. Rather,

58. *In Tim.* 3:9.16–18; for the etymology of *aeon* cf. Aristotle, *De caelo* 1.9, 279a25ff. As for the circular motion of the visible cosmos, this is said by Proclus to have been emphasised by Iamblichus (*In Tim.* 2:72.6–73.26). The background is in Aristotle (*De caelo* 1.2, *Physics* 8.8–9), as Proclus also admits (2:73.27ff.); ultimately we may have to go back as far as Parmenides (fr. 8, 42–43 DK).

59. The quintessential study remains J. Adam’s *The Nuptial Number of Plato: Its Solution and Significance* (London: 1891).

Like the monad limits the infinity of number and comprehends in advance the indefinite [nature] of the duad, so also time measures the entire motion and converts its end towards its beginning (*to telos autês epistrephei pros tèn arkhên*). And because of this it is called a number, and perfect. For the month and the year are numbers, but not perfect, since they are parts of others. But the time [encompassing] the period of the universe is perfect, since it is not a part, but a whole, in order that it may imitate Eternity (*aiôn*): for the latter is primarily a wholeness. (92.13–20.)

Time as a perfect number has a dual nature: in itself and considered as a whole it is One, but as represented in its discursive form it is unending and unbegotten—that is, infinite. This leaves us with two problems having to do with the actualisation of all possibilities through the whole of time. Since Proclus is a metaphysician and not a modal theoretician, we shall not be too disappointed if neither of them finds any definitive answer. Still, let the questions be raised.

a) One point concerns the interpretation we give to the purported infinity of time. Does it come full circle at some point and then *begin again*? Or are there endless differences between different world-periods, so that the whole of time truly encompasses an infinity of events and only ever “joins beginning to end” in the figurative sense—on the hypostatic level? On the basis of what has gone before we can see how both alternatives would have a certain attraction for Proclus. Infinite variations would make for infinite possibilities, which would nicely reduplicate the infinite power of the One yet again. On the other hand, the finite content of creation is just as much a staple of Proclean metaphysics. Would not an infinite past give us a multitude of actual infinities, or even an “infinity of infinities,” as Philoponus would later phrase the question?⁶⁰ In light of these considerations most scholars have interpreted Proclus as promoting the idea of “endless recurrence.” Nevertheless there are some intriguing anomalies. We might, for instance, wish to know why the world precisely *qua* being infinitely extended through time is congenial to displaying the manifold of the intelligibles (*In Tim.* 1:437.19–20).

The dilemma is actually a variation on the long-standing question concerning the “forms of individuals,” as posed by Plotinus in that elusive treatise, *Enneads* 5.7. (Cp. Proclus’ talk of the “eidopoietic” gods above.) Plotinus says that the whole world-period contains *all* the Forms, and that “when it repeats itself it produces the same things again according to the same forming principles” (5.7.1.24–25). This would seem to be toying with the Stoic idea of eternal recurrence. Yet he does not seem content with leaving the matter at that. As regards eternal procession, Plotinus’ contention is that we “ought not to be afraid of the infinity which this introduces into the intelli-

60. Apud Simplicium, *In Phys.* 1179.24; cf. also Philoponus, *De aet.* 11.6–13.

gible world: for it is all in an indivisible unity and, we may say, comes forth when it acts" (5.7.1.25–27). What is going on in here?

Proclus provides us with some clues in the *Parmenides* commentary, where he explicitly argues against Forms of individuals. Proclus contends that if there should be such Forms, then an infinite amount of them would amass within the everlasting existence of the universe: and this is impossible. (*In Parm.* 825.1–6.) Now the Stoics posited the "return of the same" precisely so as to deflect the possible counterargument from an infinite intelligible content accumulating with the passage of infinite world-cycles.⁶¹ And Plotinus seems well aware of the discussion, since he himself employs the notion of "seeds and forming principles" in the context we have mentioned (at 5.7.3.21). So the debate really seems to have revolved around infinite past events: every party attempted to explain how a beginningless past does not on its own view entail an infinity of intelligible objects.

For the Stoics, obviously, the only workable solution is true recurrence, since the *logoi* for them are wholly immanent. But the Neoplatonists could well have recourse to other options. For the finite Forms might have potentially infinite (*to dynamei apeiron*) imperfect instantiations, due to the nature of matter. Thus e.g., the infinite gradation of "the more and the less" could produce an unending series of, for instance, more or less perfectly proportioned horses. This would not amount to an intelligible infinity, since what is intellected in each case is the perfect Form. This is what I believe Proclus is getting at when he describes "the fall of the *logoi*," how they are "unable to convert themselves to their principles", and how this results in their "receiving the same limit indefinitely" (*In Tim.* 193.3–11). Talk is here of the realm of all-varied otherness (192.5)—i.e., the world of the corporeal particulars and their accidents. The picture is not without its own problems—the special status of the immortal individual souls would prove a headache for the Muslim Neoplatonists centuries later—but it seems to fit in well with what Proclus generally wants to say.

b) The second question concerns the modal status of the heavenly bodies, introduced in §4b above. Baltes makes note of how the "appeal to the Aristotelian doctrine that every finite body only possesses finite power gives Proclus visible pleasure": and indeed the appeal is made sufficiently often to awaken the reader's curiosity.⁶² Proclus utilises Aristotle's principle (*Phys.* 8.10) to reach a conclusion the Stagirite himself had not drawn but which Plato, in Proclus' opinion, had: that the heavens need an unfailing source of energy for their continued existence and not just for their motion, and that

61. On the point see R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum* (London: 1983) 182–87.

62. M. Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung* 2:5; cf. e.g. *In Tim.* 1:266–68, 278–79, 291–95, 365–66.

they therefore possess a "repaired immortality" of sorts.⁶³ This ontological dependency is represented by the constant "tie" or bind (*desmos*) reaching from the One on down and providing creation with additional cohesiveness over the tug and pull of their own, partially chaotic nature.⁶⁴

Significant in all of this is that Proclus in adopting the "infinite power" argument from Aristotle takes over a goodly portion of the latter's modal thinking as well. The care which Proclus takes to attenuate the language involved is testimony to this. Proclus reminds the reader that it is wrong to say that the heavens could be destroyed (*dynamei phtharton*), or that they are receptive of corruption (*epitèdeios eis phthoran*). What is being said by the right-minded philosopher is only that the celestial bodies are unable (*adynaton*) to retain their composition forever by their own strength: and as Averroes would much later phrase the view, a lack (*sterêsis*) of something does not imply a potency for the contrary.⁶⁵ The very setting of the question in these terms reveals the depth of the Aristotelian influence and the extent to which Proclus acknowledges the temporal and 'naturalist' interpretation of plenitude. Should there be a genuine potentiality for nonexistence in the heavens, then this could not go unrealised for an infinite time. Such a potentiality must therefore not be postulated.

The medievals would not consider the problem quite so easily resolvable as to be brushed aside by the aid of a simple semantical distinction. Indeed, Proclus' idea of contingent, yet indestructible heavens may have helped spark a long-standing discussion on the metaphysical basis of modalities which would become enormously important in the Arabic tradition.⁶⁶ But in the light of what has gone before, we can see the roots of Proclus' dilemma in his twofold conception of the potencies (*dynameis*) that account for the world's various activities and actualities. On the one hand, Proclus understands, appreciates, and appropriates the Aristotelian *dynamis-energeia* scheme. Here, eternal actualities do not involve potentialities at all, since they are not actualisations of potencies. On the other hand, Proclus also wishes to incorporate the Plotinian notion of the *dynamis pantôn* giving everything life and power to the extent that it can receive. Hence, what really jars in Proclus at this point are two different notions of plenitude: the natural, and the divine.

63. "Athanasia episkeuastê": cf. e.g., *In Tim.* 1:260.15, 1:278.20–21, 3:311.15–16

64. Cf. e.g., *In Tim.* 1:135.25–26 and 139–40, 2:13.15–16.13 and 53.18–56.11, all referring to *Tim.* 41a6–b5. For more on the subject see R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion. Theories in Antiquity and their Sequel* (London: 1988) 249ff.

65. *In Tim.* 1:293.14–294.8; see Averroes, *De Substantia orbis*, ch. 5: ed. and trans. A. Hyman (Cambridge, MA: 1986) 121–23, Hebrew text ll. 18ff.

66. See my "Infinite Power and Plenitude."

ABSTRACT

In *The Great Chain of Being* A.O. Lovejoy introduced his renowned “principle of plenitude” with the at once allusive and elusive formulation that “no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled.” A study of Proclus (d. 485 CE) can help point out the interpretations the principle can be given. While Lovejoy’s notion of a comprehensive Platonic *scala naturae* finds support in Proclus’ reading of the *Timaeus*, Proclus’ comments provide hints towards another interpretation as well, one which was especially popular in early medieval thought. According to this second interpretation, all particular possibilities are realised within the whole of (infinite) time. A look at Proclus’ views serves to explain why a fulness or ‘plenitude’ (*plêrôma*) of both creaturely and timely possibilities might be considered desirable from a systematical point of view; also, what the attendant problems are.