

Three Texts in One? An Examination of the Title *Procli Diadochi Tria opuscula*

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In February of 1280, William of Moerbeke (1215–1286), then Bishop of Corinth, translated into Latin from their original Greek three short works by Proclus (410–485), which he entitled the *De decem dubitatioes circa providentia*, the *De providentia et Fato eo quad in nobis ad Theodorum Mechanicum* and the *De malorum subsistentia*.¹ Each of these three works differed radically from one another in terms of both style and content, yet these differences did not stop the bishop from both translating them together and referring to them collectively as the *Procli Diadochi Tria opuscula*. When Victor Cousin (1792–1867) published the first modern edition of these works in 1863, he chose to retain both Moerbeke’s translation and title, referring to the works as the *Tria opuscula de providentia, libertate et malo* and placing them together in his edition of the collected works of Proclus under the aegis of a single general introduction.² Even Helmut Boese’s landmark publication,³ which contains the remaining Greek fragments of the texts along with Moerbeke’s translation, bears nothing more than the bishop’s original title on its cover. Nearly all of the modern translators of these works have followed Boese’s lead and either published the three works under a collective title (such as Daniel Isaac’s French translation entitled *Trois études sur la providence*⁴ and F.D. Paparella’s Italian translation entitled *Provvidenza, libertà, male*⁵) or set out as their project the translation of all three works, to which they have offered a general introduction (such as Carlos Steel’s recent series of English translations).⁶

1. Throughout this paper, all the works of Proclus will, for the sake of clarity, be referred to by their Latin titles. Furthermore, the titles of the Platonic commentaries will be abbreviated so that the *In Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria* will be referred to simply as the *In Parmenidem*.

2. See V. Cousin, *Procli philosophi Platonici Opera inedita* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1962).

3. See H. Boese, *Procli Diadochi Tria Opuscula* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1960). All the Latin and Greek text of the *Tria opuscula* will be cited from this edition, unless otherwise stated.

4. See D. Isaac, *Proclus: Trois études sur la providence* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977–1982).

5. See F. D. Paparella, *Proclo: Provvidenza, libertà, male* (Milano: Bompiani, 2004).

6. See J. Opsomer and C. Steel, *Proclus: On the Existence of Evils* (London: Duckworth, 2003); C. Steel, *Proclus: On Providence* (London: Duckworth, 2007); C. Steel, *Proclus: Ten Doubts Concerning Providence* (London: Duckworth, Forthcoming).

We therefore owe to Moerbeke not only the preservation of these three works, but also the paradigm according to which they have been classified, translated and studied for over six hundred years, that is, according to a supposed unity represented by the collective title *Tria opuscula*. Whether or not the unity implicit in such a title is in accord with Proclus' original intentions, however, is another question entirely. With the prospect of the completion of an authoritative English translation, it is perhaps time to finally examine our justification for using the title *Tria opuscula* to refer to these three works. Do these works indeed represent the same type of unity as the six books of the *Theologia Platonica* or the essays of the *In Rempublicam*, and therefore merit such a collective title, or does such a title simply impose a false unity upon them, thereby distorting our view of the Proclan corpus? It is to this question which we shall seek an answer in what follows.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE I: THE TRANSMISSION OF THE *TRIA OPUSCULA* PRIOR TO MOERBEKE

The first step in discovering validity of the title *Tria opuscula* is naturally to investigate the history of their reception before such a Latin title was coined, for through this we might discover some sort of precedent for Moerbeke's designation. The first person we know to have made use of one of the *Tria opuscula* is the enigmatic Pseudo-Dionysius (circa 500), who quotes liberally from the *De malorum* in the fourth chapter of his *De divinis nominibus*. Although we have yet to discover Dionysius making use of the other two members of the *Tria opuscula*, such borrowings would not be surprising, as the Areopagite's extensive familiarity with and reliance upon the Proclan corpus is becoming ever more evident with the advance of scholarship.⁷ The first person whom we know to have been familiar with more than one of these three works is John Philoponus (490–570), who quotes liberally from the *De decem dubitationibus* in his *De aeternitate mundi* and from the *De providentia* in his *De officio mundi*, in which he also cites Dionysius. C. Steel and J. Opsomer purpose as well that Philoponus may be the author of a certain *scholion* on the *De divinis nominibus* which claims that Proclus likely borrowed many of his own teachings from Dionysius, and not the inverse. Although Steel and Opsomer postulate that “the many parallels between Dionysius’

7. Such scholarship dates back to the landmark paper of J. Stiglmayr (See “Der Neoplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogen. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Uebel,” in *Historisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 16 [1895]: 253–73) and has developed through the work of those such as H.D. Saffrey (See “Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus,” in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 9.3: 98–105), thereby laying the ground for the recent work of those such as Eric Perl (See *Theophany: the neoplatonic philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* [Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2007]).

and Proclus' discussions of evil may have struck him [Philoponus],”⁸ there still exists no tangible evidence of Philoponus' use or knowledge of the *De malorum*. Philoponus' contemporary and namesake, John of Lydia (490–565), however, does quote from the *De malorum* in his own *De mensibus*, but here again, it is a case of using only a single treatise.

For the next citation of the *Tria opuscula*, we must move from the sixth century to eleventh century Byzantium. At this time we find two authors who make extensive and systematic use of the all three of the *Tria opuscula*. The Byzantine theologian Michael Psellus (1017–1078) quotes from all three works in his *De omnifaria doctrina*, using them to fill out his discussions of providence and evil. Even Psellus' liberal use, however, is dwarfed by that of his fellow Byzantine, Isaak Sebastokrator, who copied wholesale large passages of the *Tria opuscula* and attempted pass them off as his own three works.⁹ We may assume, therefore, based on Psellus' and Sebastokrator's systematic use of all three works, that by the eleventh century, the *Tria opuscula* were likely circulating in a collective form. It is therefore in this format that they were likely obtained by Moerbeke when he arrived in Corinth two centuries later.

With such a sparse textual history, it is difficult to discern in exactly what form these texts were transmitted in antiquity, when their author's original intentions might still have been known. Boese, as the *stemma codicum* he constructs for the texts indicates,¹⁰ believes that they were transmitted from the hands of Proclus as a group of three, one known set being that possessed by Philoponus and the another being that which served as the basis for the Byzantine edition which was eventually read by Psellus, Isaak and Moerbeke. Nevertheless, without evidence beyond an ambiguous *scholion* which might be attributed to Philoponus, it is still unknown whether the commentator was even aware of the *De malorum*, let alone whether he took it to be a member of a collection of three works. As for the medieval tradition of grouping the three together, this could very well have been the result of an act as trivial as a certain copyist deciding to combine the three works into a single volume

8. J. Opsomer and C. Steel, *Proclus: On the Existence of Evils*, 6. See also *Scholia De divinis nominibus in the Patrologia Graeca*, 4, 21D for the *scholion*.

9. Isaak was, of course, faced with the same problem as Dionysius five centuries earlier, namely, that nearly everything within these works is compatible with Christian dogma save for Proclus' denial of the possibility of malevolent demons. All passages containing such references were accordingly altered, making for some confusion in Isaak's position. For a treatment of this see W. Rordorf's paper “Sind Dämonen gut oder böse? Beobachtungen zur Proklos rezeption bei Isaak Sebastokrator,” in *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Dorrie* (Münster: Westfalen, Aschendorff, 1983), at 239–44.

10. Boese, Introduction to *Procli Diadochi: Tria Opuscula*, xix.

for no reason other than their size and shared authorship. Thus, from the basis of the textual history alone, we cannot safely make any judgements concerning Proclus' original intentions.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE II: THE *TRIA OPUSCULA* AS A PAGAN THEODICY?

The idea of theodicy as a vindication of divine justice by showing the interrelation of providence, human freedom and evil is a common theme in pagan thought, but rarely did authors set out so clear and coherent an argument as Proclus does in the *Tria opuscula*. Most of the doctrines contained in the *Tria opuscula* are not unique to them, but can also be found in other Proclan works. Nevertheless, if taken collectively, no other work presents so comprehensive an account of pagan theodicy as the *Tria opuscula*, save perhaps the Plotinian treatises 47–52.¹¹ Why then was Proclus impelled to expound so clearly doctrines which could, for the most part, be gleaned from elsewhere in his writings? One possible hypothesis is that perhaps, during Proclus' life, the presence of Christianity, with its deep engagement in the problem of theodicy, necessitated a very clear pagan position on the subject. As chair of the Neoplatonic academy, it could very well have fallen to Proclus to expound that position. If Proclus could thus be shown to harbour ill feelings towards Christianity or at least to expound a theodicy with significant doctrinal differences from those espoused by fifth century Greek Christianity, we might then conjecture that the *Tria opuscula* were written to form a single and comprehensively pagan answer to the question of theodicy, meant to stand in opposition to that of the Christians.

Our knowledge of Proclus' relationship to Christianity is exceptionally obscure, for although we know from both biographical and historical evidence that he must have been at least passingly familiar with this young religion, he does not once mention it by name in his surviving corpus. Even his famed *De aeternitate mundi* cannot be said to be unequivocally *contra Christianos*, as many scholars have assumed,¹² for the preserved fragments give no hint of an overtly anti-Christian message.¹³ In spite of the lack of overt evidence concerning Proclus' relationship to Christianity, some scholars claim to have

11. Although crucial portions of such a theodicy can certainly be found in the surviving Iamblichan corpus, most clearly in his letter to his friend Macedonius on fate, there has survived a meditation on the subject neither as sustained nor as substantial as the *Tria opuscula* or the Plotinian treatises, 47–52.

12. See, for example, L.J. Rosán's description of the work in *The Philosophy of Proclus* (New York: Cosmos, 1949), 42.

13. For an analysis of any possible overtly anti-Christian themes amongst surviving fragments of that work, see the introduction to Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World*, ed. and trans. Helen S. Lang and A.D. Macro (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2001).

found “dark hints”¹⁴ and “allusions”¹⁵ to Christianity hidden in Proclus’ works. H.D. Saffrey’s work on the subject, which is based on the “la théorie des « Code phrases »,”¹⁶ purposes that we should read certain recurrent phrases in the works of ancient Platonists as clandestine references to the Christians or Christianity in general. The reason for using such ‘code phrases’ would presumably be not only to avoid angering the local bishop but also to prevent one’s works from suffering the same fate as those of Porphyry.

Although the state of the Greek text of the *Tria opuscula* makes it extremely difficult to search for such ‘code phrases’ within them, Père Saffrey manages to find one in the *De providentia*. He argues that Proclus’ reference to souls that allow themselves to be ruled by fate and chose to live with the things below “as with some drunken neighbours”¹⁷ is in fact a concealed reference to the Christians. Saffrey bases this argument on the fact that, only two chapters later, Proclus mentions the event¹⁸ which could be construed as the destruction of the temple of Asclepius at the hands of the Christians.¹⁹ The archaeological evidence, however, does not support this conjecture. As archaeologist Alison Frantz notes, the date of 450 conflicts with recent findings and the temple was more likely “deconsecrated, but not destroyed, shortly before Proclus’ death in 485, and its destruction, whether at the hands of Christians, by earthquake, or from natural decay, occurred towards the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth.”²⁰ It is therefore unlikely that the loss to which Proclus is referring is the destruction of the temple or some sort of anti-pagan attack in Athens,²¹ thus undermining the one piece

14. L.G. Westerink, Introduction to the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1962), xviii.

15. H.D. Saffrey, “Allusions antichrétiennes chez Proclus: le diadoque platonicien,” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 59 (1975): 553–63.

16. *Ibid.*, 554.

17. “ὡσπερ τινῶν μὴ νηφόντων γειτόνων.” Proclus, *De providentia*, 20, 7.

18. “For also the accidents that, as you mentioned, recently came over us from outside, have [only] deprived us of walls and stones, my friend, and have reduced wooden beams to ashes, all of which are mortal and inflammable things, and have ruined our wealth: these are external things and for this reason may fall sometimes under the power of others.” *Ibid.*, 22, 8–12 (Steel’s translation).

19. Saffrey assumes, based on the evidence of given by Marinus in the *Vita Procli*, that we can date “l’événement de la transformation du temple d’Asclépius en église chrétienne peu après 450.” H.D. Saffrey, “Allusions antichrétiennes chez Proclus,” 556–57.

20. A. Frantz, “From Paganism to Christianity in the Temples of Athens,” in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 19 (1965), 185–205, at 194.

21. It is clear from the position of power and influence which Proclus would have occupied during his lifetime and the limited Christian influence within the pagan core of Athens (the area immediately surrounding the Acropolis) that an attack on Proclus’ property or the school would have been extremely unlikely. See A. Franz, “Pagan Philosophers in Christian Athens,” in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 119, no. 1 (1975): 29–38.

of evidence which might lead us to interpret the phrase ‘drunken neighbours’ as a concealed reference to the Christians. This argument is indeed further undermined by Steel’s proposal of an equally plausible referent for the phrase, in the form of Plato’s discussion of drunken and sober souls in the *Laws*.²² The weakness of the ‘code phrases’ hypothesis demonstrated here is, unfortunately, common to many of the nineteen examples which Saffrey cites. Nearly every one of them, from the reference to certain “atheists” in the *In Alcibiadem*,²³ to the mention of certain “impious people” in the *In Timaeum*,²⁴ could plausibly refer to some group other than the Christians.

However, even if we are to suppose, in spite of the recurring weakness of the ‘code phrases’ hypothesis, that Proclus secretly held anti-Christian opinions, did there exist such glaring doctrinal differences between the Proclan theodicy and Christian theodicies of the fifth century so as to necessitate a response as forceful as the *Tria opuscula*? There were undoubtedly certain interpretations of Christian theodicy which Proclus would have found particularly distasteful, such as Chrysostom’s denunciation of those who investigate the workings of divine providence²⁵ or the condemnation of the Origenic doctrine of freedom by those such as Epiphanius of Salamis,²⁶ which so closely resembles his own.²⁷ There were also, however, at Proclus’ time, highly Platonic Christian theodicies, such as that of Gregory of Nyssa, which in fact differs little from Proclus’ own save for its reliance on demonology to explain evil (which, as we shall see, would not have been wholly foreign to Proclus).²⁸ The ultimate proof of the compatibility of not only

22. See Plato, *Laws*, 640d4ff. See also C. Steel, *Proclus: On providence*, 79, note 92.

23. See Proclus, *In Alcibiadem*, 264, 13.

24. See Proclus, *In Timaeum*, I.122, 12.

25. See John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God*, 2.1.

26. For Epiphanius’ bitter attack on the “Origenic heresy,” see Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, Heresy, n. 64.

27. To see this striking resemblance, one need only compare the highly Origenic doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa, who states that “a freely willing being is equal to God (ἰσόθεον γὰρ ἔστι τὸ οὐτεξούσιον)” (Gregory of Nyssa, *De mortuis*, in the *Patrologiae Graeca* at 46, 524a) to Proclus’ statement that “a willed life is in accordance with the good and it makes what depends on us extremely powerful and it is really godlike” (*nam volita vita est secundum bonum, que et le in nobis facit potentissimum et deiformis enter existit*) (Proclus, *De providentia*, 60, 10–11 [Steel’s trans.]).

28. We are, of course, overlooking the crucially important aspects of Christian monotheism and the figure of Christ, which play a role in the construction of their theodicy. Though this paper in no way intends to offer a comprehensive analysis of the supposed fundamental differences between Proclus’ henadic religion and Neoplatonic Christianity, it is willing to go so far as to say that these differences are not as clear as they are often made out to be. Not until a comprehensive comparison of Proclan henadic theory and Greek Trinitarian theology, as well as an investigation into pagan conceptions of soteriology (see, for example, Simplicius’ reference to a certain “Saviour” who cannot be easily identified with traditional ‘saviours’ such as

Proclan theodicy, but Proclan Neoplatonism in general, with certain strains of Christian theology is, of course, the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius. His near seamless integration of enormous portions of Proclus' philosophy into his own, with the notable exception of Proclus' doctrine of evil, is strong evidence in favour of an underlying harmony amongst late antique Platonists of diverse religious persuasions.

The end result of this investigation is that not only Proclus' own opinions concerning Christianity, but also the differences he would have seen between Christian and pagan theodicies, are still unclear. Thus, we must conclude that there is little concrete evidence for viewing the *Tria opuscula* as unified through a necessary opposition to Christian theodicy.

PHILOLOGICAL EVIDENCE: THE *TRIA OPUSCULA* ON THEMSELVES

The *Tria opuscula*, like all of the surviving Proclan corpus, contain very few possible references to either Proclus himself or his other works. What little does exist, however, has been made ample use of by scholars in an attempt to establish that these three works were written both at the same time and in the order in which they are commonly presented (i.e., the *De decem dubitationes* followed by the *De providentia*, followed itself by the *De malorum*). If either of these two hypotheses is correct, it would lend considerable weight to the argument in support of the designation *Tria opuscula*. In a brief essay in the introductory volume of their new French translation of Proclus' *In Parmenidem*,²⁹ however, A.-Ph. Segonds and C. Luna offer a series of rigorous philological arguments that serve to effectively quash both of these hypotheses. In the following section we will thus attempt to give a brief overview of each of these hypotheses, followed by Luna and Segonds' refutations.

The first hypothesis concerning the composition of the *Tria opuscula* is that purposed by Boese, who holds that based on textual evidence, we can assume that Proclus was an old man when he composed these three texts.³⁰ Boese's claim rests on two brief passages, the first from the *De malorum* and the second from the *De providentia*. The passage from the *De malorum*, of which nothing but Moerbeke's translation remains, reads as follows: "*et totaliter quecumque de ipso querere in commentis consuevimus.*"³¹ This line, which is translated by Opsomer and Steel as "in short, we have to consider

Asclepius [Simplicius, *In Epicteti Enchiridion commentaria*, 138, 31]) are undertaken, will we be able to make such judgements.

29. See Proclus, *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, vol. I, part 1, ed. and trans. C. Luna and A.-Ph. Segonds (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007).

30. "*Pro certo ergo hadendum est opuscula illa Proclum propecta aetate scripsisse.*" Boese, Introduction to *Procli Diadochi: Tria Opuscula*, x.

31. Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 1, 17–18.

all the questions we usually raise in our commentaries,”³² seems to indicate that Proclus is referring the reader back to his own discussions of evil in his previously written Platonic commentaries. Such discussions occur in the *In Timaeum*, the *In Rempublicam* and the *In Parmenidem*, and would likely have occurred also in the *In Theaetatum* and his Plotinian commentary, the *In Enneados*.³³ The reference would thus seem to place the composition of the *De malorum* near the end of Proclus’ career, after he had composed nearly all of his major works.

Boese’s interpretation of this line, however, as Luna and Segonds point out, relies on an interpretation of the phrase ‘*in commentis*’ as ‘in our commentaries,’ when, in actual fact, its meaning is quite unclear, as it is the only occurrence of the word *commentis* in all of Moerbeke’s Greek translations.³⁴ Through a careful attempt at constructing a Greek retroversion, Luna and Segonds conclude that the phrase, whether it is translation of “ἐν τοῖς ἐξηγηήσεσιν” or “ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασιν,” clearly does not refer to Proclus’ own commentaries specifically, but rather to the very act of commenting on texts as it was practiced in the Neoplatonic schools.³⁵ On this basis, we must therefore take the subject of ‘*consuevimus*’ to be truly plural and not simply a use of the ‘royal we,’ for which it might be so easily mistaken. The whole sentence might therefore be translated into English as “in short, we [the author and his readers] have to consider all the questions we [the Neoplatonists in general] usually raise in the exegesis of a text.” Such an interpretation renders the line chronologically innocuous and thus overturns the first possible self-reference within the *Tria opuscula*.

In the second passage which is cited as proof of the *Tria opuscula*’s later date of composition, drawn from *De providentia*, we find Proclus rebuking his friend Theodore for presenting him with an argument in favour of pure hedonism. Boese finds two statements in this passage in which Proclus seems to refer to his advanced age. The first statement reads “*et electioni mee indignum sit, ut estimo, opinio de hiis et etati quam habens existo*,”³⁶ while the second reads “*intellectum autem senilem presidem statuenti intellectuales prudentis iudicii conceptus convenire existimo*.”³⁷ The first statement, although grammatically incoherent,³⁸ contains, as Luna and Segonds rightly point out, no indication of Proclus’ age aside from that fact that he is “dans son âge mûr.”³⁹

32. J. Opsomer and C. Steel, *Proclus: On the Existence of Evils*, 1, 17–18.

33. Proclus treats of evil in his surviving commentaries at *In Timaeum*, I.373, 22–381, 21; *In Rempublicam*, I.37, 4–8 and 37, 23–39; and *In Parmenidem*, III.829, 23–831, 24.

34. *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, vol. I, part 1, lxx.

35. *Ibid.*, lxxi–lxxiv.

36. Proclus, *De providentia*, 45, 5–6.

37. *Ibid.*, 45, 8–10.

38. See *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, vol. I, part 1, lxxxvi, note 2.

39. *Ibid.*, lxxxvii.

By means of a careful retroversion, Luna and Segonds also find that Proclus is not, in the second statement, referring to the age of his intellect (Boese seems to take the adjective *senilem* to agree with *intellectum*), but to his prioritizing of the intellect over sensation (if we take *senilem* to instead agree with *presidem*).⁴⁰ Thus this phrase should be interpreted, as Steel rightly translates it, as “but for someone who has made the older intellect leader, intellectual thoughts of a prudent judgement are fitting, I believe.”⁴¹ With this reading it is clear that this is once again not an example of Proclus referring to his old age. Both pieces of proposed evidence having been dismissed,⁴² we are therefore left to conclude that there is in fact no evidence upon which we might establish a date of composition for any of the works and are thus obliged to agree with Luna and Segonds that “la datation tardive des *Tria opuscula* doit être définitivement rejetée.”⁴³

As we mentioned above, the second philological argument for the grouping of the *Tria opuscula* is that they were written in the order in which Moerbeke translated them. This hypothesis seems to have originated in an early study of Proclus by J. Freudenthal⁴⁴ and was subsequently widely disseminated by its incorporation into the comprehensive survey of the attested Proclan corpus published by R. Beutler, where the author makes the claim that both the *De decem dubitationes* and the *De providentia* are quoted in the *De malorum*.⁴⁵ Although Boese was hesitant to adopt it,⁴⁶ this hypothesis has been taken up by many scholars, with even Opsomer and Steel stating that “Proclus

40. *Ibid.*, lxxxvii–lxxxviii.

41. Proclus, *De providentia*, 45, 5–6 (Steel’s trans.).

42. In spite of their refutation of these chronological references, Luna and Segonds, however, point out that the *De providentia* does in fact contain a reference which was passed over by Boese. This is the cryptic reference to an event through which Proclus describes himself as having been deprived of wood and stone by flame, an event which, as we have seen, both Westerink and Saffrey take to be the destruction of the temple of Asclepius near Proclus’ house and the subsequent erection of a Christian church in its place. Basing their argument off Saffrey’s proposed date for the destruction of the temple (450), they argue against a late dating of letter by extrapolating from the approximate date of the event and Proclus’ statement that it was a recent event, in order to conclude that Proclus (born in 412) was around forty years old at the time of the composition of the letter to Theodore. As we have also seen, however, the archaeological evidence does not support Saffrey and Westerink’s hypothesis and thus Luna and Segonds’ conclusion is untenable. See *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, vol. I, part 1, xci–xcii.

43. *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, vol. I, part 1, xcvi.

44. See J. Freudenthal’s “Zu Proklos und dem jüngeren Olympiodor,” in *Hermes*, vol. 16 (1881): 214–15.

45. R. Beutler, “Proklos” in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft: neue Bearbeitung unter Mitwirkung zahlreicher Fachgenossen*, ed. Georg Wissowa (Stuttgart: A. Druckmüller, 1893–1980), vol. 23, 1: 200.

46. As Boese writes “*in incerto denique reliinquitur, quo ordine singular opuscula confecta sint.*” Boese, Introduction to *Procli Diadochi: Tria Opuscula*, x.

probably composed the three treatises in the same order as they have been transmitted in the manuscripts.⁴⁷

This hypothesis, however, is once again proven false by Luna and Segonds' careful philological analysis. Of the two phrases which J. Freudenthal takes to be references from the *De malourm* to the *De decem dub.* (*De malourm*, 34, 13–14)⁴⁸ and to the *De providentia* (*De malorum*, 25, 8–12),⁴⁹ and which probably serve as the basis for Beutler's unspecified references, the first is shown by Luna and Segonds to be too vague to yield an actual reference, while the second can only be construed as such due to a corruption in the Latin.⁵⁰ Even after an extensive analysis of multiple passages from each of the *Tria opuscula* which could possibly be construed as references from one work to another, Luna and Segonds are forced to conclude that “en effet, aucun des trios opuscules ne renvoie à l'autre, même pas là ou l'identité du sujet traité rendrait un renvoi tout à fait naturel.”⁵¹

We must therefore conclude, based on Luna and Segonds' exhaustive analysis of the texts, that neither the first nor the second hypothesis concerning internal references within the *Tria opuscula* is correct. We know neither during what period of Proclus' life each was composed nor in what order they were composed, and therefore, there is no philological basis for grouping these texts together.

PHILOSOPHICAL EVIDENCE: PROVIDENCE AS A UNIFYING THEME

With no viable historical or philological evidence to justify the grouping of these three texts into the *Tria opuscula*, the only possible justification for such an unification could be a philosophical one. Thus, we must ask whether, when we read these three texts together, there emerges a single philosophical theme? Many of the scholars who have studied them would agree with the eminent J. Trouillard that “la théorie de la *pronoia* ... est la meilleure part de leur contenu”⁵² and perhaps even with their French translator D. Isaac that “ces trois études ... traitent, en réalité, d'un même problème abordé sous trois angles différents, celui de la providence.”⁵³ No matter how they

47. J. Opsomer and C. Steel, Introduction to *Proclus: On the Existence of Evils*, 1.

48. The phrase “*malorum alias quasdam ait oportere querere causam et nullam, ut in allis dictum est*” from the *De malorum* is taken to be a reference to *De decem dub.*, 26–27.

49. The phrase “*neque hanc [scil. malitiam] semper permanentem sed quod aliquando dictum est a me*” from the *De malorum* is taken to be a reference to *De providentia*, 17.

50. *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, vol. I, part 1, xcii, note 3.

51. *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, vol. I, part 1, xciii.

52. J. Trouillard, Introduction to *Proclus: Éléments de Théologie* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1965), 43.

53. D. Isaac, Introduction to *Proclus: Trois études sur la providence*, Tome I (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1977), 7.

are examined, all three members of the *Tria opuscula* appear to be engaged in a meditation on the subject of divine providence. What is found in every question of the *De decem dub.* also serves as the culmination of the arguments of both the *De providentia* and the *De malorum*, whose respective conclusions are in fact elaborations of Proclus' responses to the second and fifth questions of the *De decem dub.*

Let us suppose for the moment that these three treatises are somehow intrinsically connected because of their common focus on the subject of divine providence. What then might the nature of this connection be and how does it aid us in explaining the obvious differences, in both structure and content, between these three treatises? Beginning with an examination of the *De decem dub.*, we can already begin to see a potential explanation for the treatise's structure emerging from this supposition. The ten question structure of the *De decem dub.* is unlike anything else in the remaining Proclan corpus, although, if we are to take the word of Elias,⁵⁴ it does follow the pattern of the formal introduction to the Aristotelian philosophy invented by Proclus and demonstrated by Ammonius in the preface to his commentary on the *Categories*. If Proclus thought a ten question introduction to the study of Aristotle to be a necessary prerequisite, why then not a ten question introduction to the study of divine providence? The answers provided in the *De decem dub.* easily conform to requirements of an introduction, as they are relatively short for the subject matter treated and rarely contain the types of learned digressions for which the Lycian's commentaries are justly known.

With these types of short answers, however, it is inevitable that some questions of enormous importance will not receive the type of thorough exposition they require. The two questions which clearly stand out in this regard are the second and the fifth. The first question, which attempts to define providence as a divine mode of knowing, does not require such a treatment, as it is in reality little more than an elaboration of the 120th proposition of the *Institutio theologica*.⁵⁵ The answer to the third and fourth questions, which concern providence's causal power and the structure of our participation in it, are also intimately linked to the *Institutio theologica*, and cannot truly be understood without a thorough reading of at least propositions 25 through to 40. The final five questions, questions six to ten, are concerned with the operations of providence on the level of individual beings and classes of beings, asking such things as why irrational creatures are seemingly treated in the same manner as rational creatures by providence and why the chastise-

54. Elias (*olim* David), *In Porphyrii isagogen et Aristotelis categorias commentaria*, 107, 24–26.

55. See Proclus, *Institutio theologica*, ed. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: OUP, 1963), 104, 31–106, 9.

ments of providence sometimes strike the descendants of the offender rather than the offender himself. In his answers to these questions, Proclus simply applies the principles he has laid down in the first five questions and even draws liberally on Middle Platonists, such as Plutarch of Charonea,⁵⁶ who have previously dealt with such subjects. The answers to the second and fifth questions, however, are not fully developed in any other Proclan texts save the *De providentia* and the *De malourm*.

In the second question of the *De decem dub.*, Proclus asks whether a universe under the guidance of divine providence, which has a determinate knowledge of all things, can admit of indeterminacy and contingency. Although much hinges on the answer to this question, perhaps that which is of most importance to us is the status of human freedom in the face of such divine knowledge. It is exactly on this facet of the larger question which the concluding chapters of the *De providentia* focus, after having defended human freedom against various other objections.

The debate concerning the coexistence of divine providence and human freedom was already ancient by Proclus' time and has endured to this day.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, its endurance as a central question for philosophical debate cannot be solely attributed to its obvious complexity, for other questions which have never shared its popularity, such as that of the one and the many, are equally as fraught with difficulties. The true reason for its endurance is likely that the question of whether we can enjoy true freedom in the face of all-knowing divinity is not simply an empty abstraction of interest to philosophers alone, but one which is of interest to, as Leibniz writes, "presque tout le Genre-humain."⁵⁸ Its constant recurrence in religion, art and literature is testament to this question's universal appeal.

With this in mind, it is easy to imagine why Proclus might have considered the brief, technical treatment which he accords the question in *De decem dub.* to be inadequate. To answer a question of universal appeal, a universally accessible answer is required, and it is exactly this which Proclus provides

56. For example, his answer to the eighth question, why the chastisements of *pronoia* sometimes strike the descendants of the offender rather than the offender himself, is largely drawn from Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta*.

57. Although it must be admitted that this debate now exists in a much less vigorous form. For examples of this, see *God, Foreknowledge and Freedom*, ed. John Martin Fischer (Palo Alto: Stanford U Press, 1989).

58. "Il y a deux Labyrinthes fameux, ou notre Raison s'égaré bien souvent: l'un regarde la grande Question du Libre et du Nécessaire, surtout dans la production et dans l'Origine du Mal; l'autre consiste dans la discussion de la Continuité, et les indivisibles, qui en paroissent les Élemens, et où doit entrer la considération de l'Infini. Le premier embrasse presque tout le Genre-humain, l'autre n'exerce que les Philosophes." Leibniz, *Essai de Théodicée* in *G. W. Leibniz: Opera Philosophica Omnia* (Meisenheim: Scientia Aalen, 1959), 470.

us in the letter to his friend Theodore now referred to as the *De providentia*. The *De providentia* gives a fundamentally human question a much needed human face in the form of Theodore the engineer, whose eclectic determinism and innate scepticism make him the ideal representative of the educated layman who just happens to be corresponding with an eminent philosopher. Its epistolary form and simple structure make it perhaps Proclus' most approachable work, one which seems more akin to a Platonic dialogue or the *Consolatio* of Boethius than any of Proclus' other surviving works. It presents difficult Neoplatonic doctrines in an accessible manner, such as his simple, yet elegant definition of providence (*pronoia*)⁵⁹ and his succinct formulation of his solution to the question of human freedom and divine providence. The difference between the way in which this latter doctrine is presented in a technical manual, like the *De decem dub.*, as opposed to the *De providentia*, is very illustrative of the difference in their respective styles. In the *De decem dub.*, Proclus formulates the doctrine as follows:

Knowledge is in the knower, and tends towards the known, it is obvious that, being the completion of the former, and tending towards the latter, it should rightly be defined in accordance with the nature of the knower, since it partakes of what is known only insofar as it can fully distinguish itself from the forms of knowledge of the other known objects; in fact knowledge must have something of what is known, as that is its goal. Once we have demonstrated that, we can say that the knowledge set in the knower is characterized, as far as its being is concerned, by the subsistence of the knower, and it is evident that the forms of knowledge of the unchangeable beings are in their turn unchangeable in every respect, and those of the changeable are the opposite.⁶⁰

In the concluding chapters of the *De providentia*, however, the answer is simply formulated as:

59. As Proclus writes in the *De providentia*, "*pronoia* is the cause of goods for those governed by it For the term *pronoia* plainly signifies the activity before the intellect, which must be attributed solely to the Good- for only the Good is more divine than the intellect, since even the much praised intellect desires the Good together with all things and before all things. (*providentiam quidem causam esse bonorum hiis quibus providetur Nam pronoia (id est providentia) quidem eam que ante intellectum palificat omnino operationem, quam soli bono attribuere necessarium: hoc enim solum intellectu divinius, quia et intellectus qui valde laudatus desiderat bonum et cum omnibus et ante omnia*)." Proclus, *De providentia*, 7. 2–14.

60. "Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐν τῷ γινώσκοντι οὐσα πρὸς τὸ γνωστὸν ἐπιείγεται, δηλοῦν ὅτι τοῦ μὲν οὐσα τελειότης, τοῦ δὲ ὀρεγομένη, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ γινώσκοντος ἂν εἰκότως ἀφορίζοιτο φύσιν, τοσοῦτον μόνον ἔχουσα τοῦ γνωστοῦ, ὅσον ἂν τελείως δίστησιν αὐτὴν τῶν γνώσεων τῶν ἄλλων γνωστῶν δεῖ γὰρ τὴν γνώσιν ἔχειν τί καὶ τοῦ γνωστοῦ, τέλους ὄντος. Τούτου δὲ δειχθέντος, <λέγω> δὴ ὅτι ἡ γνώσις ὑφ' ἑσῆκῆα ἐν τῷ γινώσκοντι χαρακτηρίζεται κατὰ τὸ ἑαυτῆς εἶναι ἀπὸ τῆς τούτου ὑπέρεως, φανερόν ἤδη, ὅτι τῶν μὲν ἀμεταβόλων καὶ αἱ γνώσεις κατὰ πάντα τοιαῦται, τῶν ἤδη, ὅτι τῶν μὲν ἀμεταβόλων καὶ αἱ γνώσεις κατὰ πάντα τοιαῦται, τῶν δὲ μεταβλητῶν ἐναντίαί." Proclus, *De decem dub.*, 7. 9–18 (the translation is from Luca Obertello in his article, "Proclus, Ammonius and Boethius on Divine Knowledge," in *Dionysius* 5 [1981]: 131, slightly modified).

the form of knowledge must not correspond to what the object of knowledge is, but to what the subject of knowledge is, and rightly so. For knowledge does not reside in the object but in the one who knows.⁶¹

The difference in formulation is quite clear. One of these answers is evidently meant only for a student of philosophy, while the other would be acceptable to a much wider audience. This difference is symbolic of the *De providentia* as a whole. It offers the answer to the second question of the *De decem dub.*, reworked so that it both directly addresses the problem of human freedom and is made accessible to nearly all enquiring minds.

When we turn from the second question of the *De decem dub.* to the fifth, concerning the coexistence of providence and evil, we find a question which, although lacking the universal appeal of its predecessor, nevertheless carries a special philosophical weight for Proclus. This is because, unlike the second question, which elicited a largely concordant answer from the Neoplatonic tradition,⁶² the question of the existence of evil, let alone its relation to divine providence, sharply divided the Platonists of antiquity. Amongst the Neoplatonists, the question was the cause of much internecine strife, with not only the emergence of a general opposition to Plotinus' solution,⁶³ but even division amongst the normally concordant Iamblichian tradition.⁶⁴ Such a loaded topic thus required more than simply the succinct answer given in the *De decem dub.* or the circumstantial treatments Proclus often provides in his commentaries. It required an Aristotelian-style general historical survey of the subject and all the positions previously held, presenting the inadequacies of each and finally offering the correct solution. This is exactly what the *De malorum* provides. In the course of its sixty one chapters, Proclus treats of essentially every position previously held concerning the existence of evil, from whether or not it exists, to where it is to be found in cosmos, and concludes by outlining his own doctrine of evil as a *parhypostasis*, thereby showing how

61. "οὐχ οἶον ἐστὶ τὸ γνωστόν, τοιοῦτον καὶ τὸ εἶδος τῆς γνώσεως, ἀλλ' οἶον τὸ γινώσκον εἰ κότες οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡ γνώσις ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ γινώσκοντι," Proclus, *De providentia*, 64, 1–3 (Steel's trans.).

62. For evidence of this general agreement, we need only look to the *De providentia*, where Proclus proudly mentions the contributions of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Theodore of Asine and Syrianus (under the title of 'our master') to the Neoplatonic theories of providence and human freedom.

63. The solution given by Plotinus in *Ennead*, 1.8[51] was vigorously opposed by Iamblichus and those who followed him and we find a discussion and refutation of a position very much like it in chapters 30–37 of the *De malorum*.

64. Although Proclus agrees with Iamblichus in his rejection of Plotinus' solution of a material evil, he differs with the great theurgist over the possible existence of maleficent demons, which Iamblichus supports (See *De mysteriis*, 2, 7; 3, 31; 4, 7; 9, 7) and he vehemently opposes (See *De malorum*, 16–17).

only this doctrine allows evil to exist in a providentially ordered universe. Every prior treatment of the question of evil, Neoplatonic or otherwise, has therefore been inadequate to Plato's original teaching and it is only the Proclan teaching that allows a real evil to exist alongside a benevolent divine providence. The structure of the *De malorum* can therefore be viewed as a product of its purpose, which is to succinctly provide a resolution to a long standing philosophical debate.

The supposition that these three works might form a connected meditation on the subject of divine providence, with the *De decem dub.* serving as an introduction to and general survey of the subject and its sister treatises serving to elaborate two particularly difficult aspects of this survey, thus seems offers us an explanation of their differences in both form and content. When read together, they in fact offer us what is essentially a fully developed Neoplatonic theodicy, in the broadest sense of the term, demonstrating the possibility of the coexistence of providence, human freedom and evil. Individually, each of these three treatises does offer the reader an important and self-contained meditation on a certain aspect of this theodicy, but as we have seen, it is only when they are read together that we finally behold Proclus' complete response. It is perhaps for this reason that of all the short works, or *monobiblia*,⁶⁵ which are attributed to Proclus, only these three works happened to have survived the passage from antiquity. Perhaps their collective value was recognized as superseding the individual value of other treatises.

CONCLUSION

Having reviewed the evidence for and against the designation *Tria opuscula*, it seems we must conclude that both historically and philologically, there is no convincing evidence that Proclus ever intended these three texts to constitute single whole, meant to be read as such. Philosophically, however, we find that these three texts are exceptionally complimentary when read together, such that they may be viewed as forming a single comprehensive reflection on the subject of divine providence. If we are to accept this view, we can also offer an interpretation of their structural differences as products of the specific angles from which they approach the common problem. Nevertheless, this philosophical reading hardly constitutes sufficient grounds, by modern scholarly standards, for amending our surveys of the Proclan corpus. It can at best convince us to leave the question open to further consideration and not to hand down too hastily a verdict against the generations of Neoplatonic scholars who have accepted the idea of the *Tria opuscula*.

65. These other attested *monobiblia* include such works as the *Peri topou*, the *Peri tōn triōn monadōn* and the *Pragmateia kathartikē tōn dogmatōn tou Platōnos*. See Beutler's above mentioned survey for a comprehensive list.

But what if we were in fact to conclude, based on the historical and philological evidence alone (or lack thereof), that the title *Tria opuscula* is simply an historical imposition on a set of three disparate texts by Moerbeke or some other figure? Could we simply disregard the obvious advantages afforded to us through a complimentary reading of these texts? It is difficult to imagine that we would, when the benefits of such a reading to our understanding of Proclus' difficult teachings concerning providence are so clear. Besides, for those who have chosen to immerse themselves in the intellectual milieu of late antiquity, false attributions, forgeries and massive editorial liberties are hardly unfamiliar. What was perhaps a later addition to the Platonic corpus, the *First Alcibiades*, was seen as the ideal introduction to Plato by no less a figure than Iamblichus, while Porphyry happily rearranged the order of his master's treatises in order to showcase the underlying unity of his thought, thereby creating the standard edition of Plotinus for nearly two thousand years.⁶⁶

Thus, for the Neoplatonists themselves, even texts which we would consider to be of a thoroughly dubious pedigree were often worthy of both reading and commentary, for their value was determined not by their historical authenticity, but by the accord of their content with the truth as it had been elsewhere revealed. Therefore, if we were to step out of the confines of modern scholarship for a moment and apply this ancient principle to the *Tria opuscula*, the question of whether or not in the February of 1280, William of Moerbeke made a gross historical imposition on a set of disparate texts is largely irrelevant. All we need concern ourselves with is the fact that the entity known as the *Tria opuscula* offers us a means by which we can better understand the teachings of its author, whether he intended it or not.

66. It is only now that editions of Plotinus are beginning to appear which are arranged chronologically and not according to Prophyry's scheme.