I INTRODUCTION

I at least would say that the interpreters of the Platonic initiation, who unfolded the most sacred introductions about the gods for us, and received a nature practically equal to that of their guide, are Plotinus the Egyptian and those who took over the office from him.

(Procl. Theol. Plat. 1.6.16–21)

The epigraph that opens this chapter quotes the statement with which Proclus, one of the last heads of the Platonic Academy in Athens, opens his Platonic Theology, a six-volume elaboration of the metaphysics of the divine as found in Plato’s dialogues. According to Proclus, the history of philosophy is a ‘golden chain’ of Platonic succession, which starts with the Gods, Pythagoras, and Plato, and then, after a period of retreat, finds in Plotinus a ‘coming back into the light’.\(^1\)

Of course, a chain has links and is not a monolithic whole. The family resemblance represented in Proclus’ chain also implies a diversity combined with the shared reliance on a number of fundamental tenets.\(^2\) In the following chapter I will discuss topics and views that emerged in the Platonic tradition between Plotinus and Proclus. The seeds of many of those new topics and views are already present in Plotinus and his predecessors (especially the Pythagoreans, Plato, Aristotle, and so-called Middle Platonists such as Numenius) and the innovations are often a matter of selection, emphasis, and elaboration. The result still bears a recognizable relation to Plotinus’ thought; we find a unique and fully transcendent first cause, the One, followed by Intellect and Soul, and the metaphysical processes of emanation and reversion, connecting the One with the many, and the human soul with its origin. But there are also important

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developments to be seen in ancient Platonism after Plotinus; we find a variety of ways to safeguard the transcendence of the One, the detailed elaboration of the hypostases into further metaphysical layers to close the gaps felt to exist between them, an increased focus on religion, the revision of the position and nature of the soul and of evil, a revival of Pythagoreanism [probably due to the work of Plotinus’ predecessor Numenius], and, at the bottom of the ladder, a different concept of matter. This chapter presents those developments until the end of the fifth century CE, in pagan Platonism. Other philosophical strands emerge in the third century as well, of course; Christian philosophy starts taking shape, with thinkers like Origen, who may have been Plotinus’ fellow student with Ammonius Saccas, and Peripatetic philosophy gains traction after resurfacing in the late second century, especially through the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias [late second to early third century] and Themistius [fourth century], an Aristotelian who was well acquainted with Plotinus’ thought. We will mostly ignore the cross-contamination and debate between these strands and the pagan Platonists, and instead focus on the implicit and explicit responses to Plotinus in Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus.

2 PORPHYRY

Born Malchos [in Tyre, modern-day Lebanon, 234 CE; died no later than 305, place unknown], Porphyry was of course Plotinus’ pupil, biographer, and publisher but also a prolific and influential philosopher in his own right. As a philosopher, he is somewhat elusive due to the situation of our sources. On the other hand, his traces are visible throughout the history of philosophy. Numerous smaller and more extensive departures from Plotinus’ thought are visible in the extant sources. We will discuss the ones that had the most lasting impact or changed the course of Platonism most clearly: his development of Aristotelian logic, which is part of a broader revaluation of Aristotle’s thought, the reintroduction of the principle of ‘all in all’, the relation between soul and body, and a possibly different notion of the One.
A major change to which Porphyry contributed is the Platonists’ revaluation of Aristotle, which is visible especially in the reception of his contributions to logic and philosophy of language: the commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* and the introduction to the *organon*, the *Isagoge*.\(^5\) Porphyry’s semantic theory is probably best known for the distinction between first and second imposition of names, and for what would become the ‘tree of Porphyry’, or an ordering of the levels of predication. The ascription of this ‘tree’ to Porphyry is, according to some, a bit of historiographical lore but it was to influence at least a millennium of philosophical thought about predication, and about Aristotle. In his commentary on the *Categories*, and possibly in response to Plotinus’ criticism of the *Categories*, Porphyry creatively applied the Aristotelian distinction between what is first in experience and what is first in nature;\(^6\) the *Categories*, he proposes, are a work of logic, about expressions concerning what is first in experience. They discuss the way we speak about the sensible. That does not make him a nominalist, however. Porphyry does accept an ontological commitment to the reality of immanent universals and allows for the categories to be related to transcendent universals.\(^7\) Scholars disagree about the conceptual distance between Porphyry and Plotinus in this respect,\(^8\) but it does seem that, more than Plotinus, Porphyry here tries to harmonize the Aristotelian immanent universals with Platonic transcendent Forms – thereby setting the stage for a further development in later antiquity.

Porphyry’s contributions to logic are perhaps the best example of his conviction that Plato and Aristotle agreed on the most fundamental matters of philosophy. It is with Porphyry that the harmonization of Plato and Aristotle starts. Underlying that harmonization may be a fundamental metaphysical starting point, and a key addition to the Platonic tradition: the principle of ‘all in all’. We find this principle in a second influential Porphyrian work: the *Sentences* or *Pathways to the Intelligible*,\(^9\) which were to determine the shape of Scholastic philosophy considerably. At first sight the
forty-four *Sentences* present a summary of Plotinus’ Platonism. As D’Ancona shows, however, although this work does rely heavily on Plotinus’ thought, it departs from it in important ways as well. The most important shift with respect to his teacher is probably the reintroduction of that Presocratic/Pythagorean principle of ‘all in all’:

> All things are in all, but in a mode proper to the essence of each: in the intellect, intellectually; in the soul, discursively; in plants, seminally; in bodies, imagistically; and in the Beyond, non-intellectually and supra-essentially. 

*(Porph. Sent. 10)*

This principle opens up numerous pathways both for harmonizing, to use anachronistic labels, Aristotle’s empiricism and immanentism with Plato’s rationalism and otherworldliness, and for solving philosophical issues in general, by adverbial modification; as long as we add the right adverb, we can find the same things everywhere. In Porphyry, the principle is formulated but not really implemented yet. For that, we have to wait for the thorough systematization of Platonism in later antiquity by Iamblichus and Proclus, in which this principle plays a key part.

One of the topics Porphyry himself mentions as a matter of discussion with Plotinus is the nature of the union of body and soul. The soul, according to Porphyry, is related to the body by an ‘unfused union’. That is, the two are intermingled in a way that allows each to maintain its own properties and ensures the possibility of separating the two. The union is also understood by Porphyry as a dressing up of the immortal soul in layers of mortality, using the Middle Platonic notion of ‘tunics’ (*khitones*) or pneumatic ‘vehicles’ (*okhēmata*), which are added on to the soul in its descent and need to be shed in its ascent. These vehicles will serve to explain the non-rational capacities as add-ons to the rational soul.

Another point of disagreement between Plotinus and Porphyry may have been the nature of the One as first principle. Porphyry and
others may have postulated a ‘pre-eternal’ intellect, as an intermediate stage between Plotinus’ One and Intellect.\textsuperscript{16} According to some sources, however, Porphyry identified the One itself with Being.\textsuperscript{17} The sources do not offer decisive information on this point but in any case, in the generation after Plotinus, not just in Porphyry but also in his contemporaries and pupils (such as Synesius and Marius Victorinus), we see a gradual development of a seed already present in Plotinus: that of a further differentiation of the relation between the One and Being.

Plotinus is in fact hardly criticized by Porphyry. The most emphatic criticism of Porphyry’s is instead leveled against the Christians, in an elaborate and sharp reflection on the Bible and Christian teachings in general (\textit{Against the Christians}), which is extant only in discussions by Christian apologists such as Macrobius and Augustine. Interestingly, in his metaphysical and religious views Porphyry is nonetheless seen as preparing the ground for the Christian adoption of Platonism.\textsuperscript{18}

We also find Porphyry entering into a debate with one of his own disciples, Iamblichus, on the nature of religious rituals, and especially the question of whether and how transcendent gods can be influenced by physical rituals (\textit{Letter to Anebo}).

3 IAMBlichus

Iamblichus (born in Chalcis in modern-day Syria, ca. 245 CE; died in the early 320s in Apamea) in many ways shaped the future of Platonism, primarily in two related yet, in modern eyes, very different senses: the revival of the mathematical philosophy of Pythagoreanism and the incorporation of a broad range of religious sources and of theurgy in the narrower sense of religious rituals invoking divine assistance. In addition to these major contributions, however, he elaborated Neoplatonic metaphysics in numerous details, which paved the way for Proclus’ system.\textsuperscript{19}

Among Iamblichus’ critical responses to and disagreements with Plotinus and Porphyry, here we may mention specifically his
emphatic elaboration of mathematics as an intermediate science and structure underlying both thought and world, the final separation of the human soul from the intelligible (due to which the need for a form of illumination from above arises, as required for human salvation), and the introduction of metaphysical layers above and below the One: the Ineffable as a truly transcendent principle, and the Henads as gods intermediate between the One and the Forms.

After what seems to have been a falling out with Porphyry, Iamblichus chose Apamea as the home for his own philosophical school. This is very fitting, or understandable, in light of the heavy Pythagorean veil Iamblichus would draw over Platonism; the Pythagoreanizing Platonist Numenius had made a name for himself in Apamea before him and had influenced Iamblichus’ thought on the nature and role of mathematics considerably. Mathematics was always part of the Platonic tradition, and with Plotinus’s mathematization of the intelligible even more so, but Iamblichus went much further. He wrote a nine- or ten-volume introduction to Pythagoreanism, of which unfortunately only four books remain. This work, as well as elements in his other works, and the weight Iamblichus gave to the *Timaeus*, Plato’s Pythagoreanizing dialogue, as the penultimate dialogue in his students’ curriculum, are witness to his deep conviction regarding the Pythagorean inspiration of Platonic philosophy. Like Proclus after him, Iamblichus assumed that Pythagoras was a divine soul who descended from the intelligible realm to the sensible to reveal his knowledge to humanity. From what is extant of the introduction to Pythagoreanism and can be reconstructed from other sources, we moreover know that the work was set up in a manner analogous to Porphyry’s edition of the *Enneads*: as an ascent from familiar mathematics to the divine, inspired by Plato’s views of mathematics as set out in, for example, the Divided Line. This is an expression of Iamblichus’ assumption that mathematics, as dealing with universal, immaterial, and unchanging entities, constitutes the bridge from the particular, material, changing sensibles to the
universal, transcendent, and eternal intelligibles. Moreover, it also displays his view of the ‘omniextension’ of mathematics; because mathematics is present at each level of reality, in a manner appropriate to that level, it can mediate between the immanent and the transcendent.  

Taking Pythagoreanism to its logical consequences, Iamblichus’ Platonism became thoroughly mathematized; he understood reality as based on analogical or proportional relations between different ontological levels and, apparently, remodelled the highest echelons using mathematical notions.  

Which determines which is a bit of a chicken-and-egg question but the first aspect of Iamblichus’ mathematization of the system went hand in hand with the more extensive application of the principle of ‘all in all’. This principle, which in its Presocratic application concerned the nature of the physical world and of perception, and in Porphyry’s Sentences the natural world and the hypostases, was applied by Iamblichus to all domains of reality and knowledge. It was to have extensive consequences for Neoplatonic metaphysics, epistemology, and exegesis. The principle basically expresses the assumption, as we saw in Porphyry, that at different levels and in different dimensions we find the same patterns, entities, and properties but adjusted to the level or dimension in question. Iamblichus’ innovation in his use of the principle is in the assumption that the adjustment is analogical in a rather literal sense; it is a matter of proportional relations between different levels. This application may well have been inspired by the realization that the arithmetical unit is present in every subsequent number, yet in a different way each time (as 1/2, or 1/3, etc.). Such analogical relations form the bedrock for what in medieval philosophy will become the analogia entis and the method of analogy as leading up to the knowledge of the first principles.

An example of the application of the principle is Iamblichus’ theory of the Aristotelian categories. Like Porphyry, Iamblichus gave
the Aristotelian categories more credit than Plotinus but, unlike Porphyry, he took them to apply to all levels of reality rather than just to the sensible realm. Their application to transcendent reality is analogous to that in the sensible realm, so we can speak, for example, of ‘quantity’ or ‘time’ in two senses, one for the sensible and one for the spiritual.

The second aspect of Iamblichus’ mathematization, reshaping the first principles using mathematical notions, is part of an engine he sets in motion but that will do its most extensive work in Proclus’ thought: a principle of plenitude that assumes that logical distinctions are evidence of real distinctions. This is clearly shown in the way Iamblichus splits up Plotinus’ One, to safeguard both transcendence and causal efficacy, into a fully transcendent first principle, the Ineffable, and a causally efficient One. For different reasons, namely to close the gap between the One and the many, Iamblichus postulates a triad above Intellect, headed by the One and completed by Limit and the Unlimited. This pair, which were first introduced by the Pythagorean Philolaus, in turn together form the ‘Unified’, which is the summit of Intellect, and contains the Henads, or divine ‘ones’.

At lower levels of emanation, we find Iamblichus’ criticism of Plotinus’ view of the undescended part of the soul, as he refused to distinguish between that which is aware and that which is happy; if the soul is in part undescended from Intellect, and in that part happy, and it is not possible for the soul to be happy in its undescended part without being aware of this, then either the soul is always happy, or it is not undescended. The latter is more in accordance with experience; hence, Iamblichus concludes, the soul’s descent has to be complete.

To guarantee the transcendence of the universal Soul, Iamblichus separates it off, as an unparticipated monad of a chain of souls, from the World-Soul and other individual souls. On the other hand, to prevent an ontological gap between the highest and lower souls, he also identifies, within individual souls, a participated One and a participated Intellect (‘all in all’). At the same time, the human
soul in its embodied state has a hybrid essence, as being both originally and, to use an Aristotelian notion, potentially transcendent, but actually generated. Like Porphyry, Iamblichus gives the soul a vehicle but he adjusts this theory to include an immortal vehicle. Moreover, he distinguishes between varieties of union of body and soul; the World-Soul incorporates its own body but individual souls append themselves to their bodies.

In light of the extra hurdle imposed on the reverting soul by its complete descent, Iamblichus establishes educational and ritual programmes. The educational programme consists in a school curriculum based on strong epistemological convictions rooted in Platonic metaphysics; he selected the philosophical texts to form that curriculum and determined the proper order in which to study them, assuming, as in his introduction to Pythagoreanism, that both content and order would gradually prepare the soul for conversion to the intelligible realm. The final stage of the Platonic curriculum consisted in studying the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, that is, theological philosophy of nature, followed by pure metaphysics and dialectic. That would bring souls to the intellectual verge of transcendence but no further.

This brings us to a final example of the application of ‘all in all’: the development of theurgy. According to Iamblichus, intellectual and moral development alone were not sufficient for complete salvation, that is, the conversion of the soul to union with the gods. Instead, in addition one had to enhance the divine presence in the world through ritual emphasis on the *sumpatheia* already inherent in that world. The divine is not limited to its transcendent realm but has an appropriate presence in the world as well, as the result of emanation. That presence, which also guarantees a natural analogical connection between gods and the world, may be enhanced by ritual practices. Theurgy had a bad reputation among philosophers for quite a while, and Porphyry already criticized Iamblichus for adhering to it, but, Iamblichus points out, it is in fact nothing other than
a variety of practices such as purification, aiming at our assimilation to the divine.\textsuperscript{34}

4 PROCLUS

With Proclus (born in Lycia, 411/2 CE; died in 485 in Athens), one of the last heads of the Academy in Athens, the history of Platonism again enters a new phase. Much of Proclus’ innovative philosophical doctrine actually goes back to his immediate predecessors as heads of the Academy, Plutarch of Athens (ca. 350–431/2) and Syrianus (fifth century), and to Iamblichus, but Proclus often takes their overtures to their logical conclusions and changes the style of the philosophical landscape; his systematic approach has a lasting influence in the history of philosophy, he expands on the religious side of Platonism and takes the neo-Pythagoreanism and metaphysical plenitude to new and lasting heights.\textsuperscript{35}

Proclus was a very prolific writer, who composed both systematic treatises and commentaries, and the latter on a broad range of texts – besides Platonic dialogues, also Aristotelian works, Euclid’s \textit{Elements}, Homer and Hesiod, the \textit{Chaldaean Oracles}, and a commentary on Plotinus’ \textit{Enneads}. Especially his commentary on the first book of the \textit{Elements}, and the most influential of his systematic treatises, the \textit{Elements of Theology}, demonstrate the methodological paradigm Proclus developed. He combined geometrical methods and late ancient logic, which has its roots in Peripatetic and Stoic logic, and Platonic and Parmenidean/Zenonian dialectic into systematic tools for the intellectual ascent of the soul through teaching and conceptual analysis.\textsuperscript{36} Through the \textit{Book on the Pure Good} and the \textit{Book of Causes}, the Arabic and Latin reworking of his \textit{Elements of Theology} respectively, his methodology and metaphysics influenced over a millennium of philosophical reflection.\textsuperscript{37}

Of his commentary on the \textit{Enneads} unfortunately only snippets remain, in the writings of the Byzantine philosopher Michael Psellus (1018–after 1078). Psellus, who considered Proclus second only to Plato, at times quotes the \textit{Enneads} and comments on them in
terminology that is decidedly Proclean. The passages in Psellus are all from (the commentary on) Ennead 1. We will discuss an example below. From this and Proclus’ extant works, we can harvest a picture of his views on Plotinus’ teachings, as well as, of course, the main difference between those and his own. Some of those differences are explicitly highlighted by Proclus himself in critical discussions of Plotinus’ thought, although without Plotinus being mentioned by name. The main innovations, besides the new methodological paradigm, are the revision of Plotinian thought concerning the principles of causation, the notions of the One and the Henads, the nature of Being [and its relation to the Paradigm and the Demiurge], the status of the soul, and the nature of evil.

Let us start from the fundamental principles of causation underlying Proclus’ system. Proclus, elaborating on Iamblichus, adopts what Olympiodorus will call ‘the Proclean rule’: a principle concerning the range of causal influence, which says that the higher the cause, the more extensive its causal range. More precisely, by definition, since a cause is stronger than its effect, the efficacy of a cause reaches beyond the efficacy of its causally active effects. The best illustration of this rule is no doubt that the One is not just the cause of the Intellect but instead of everything below it as well, including matter. This has two important consequences. First, we end up with overlapping causation. For example, universal Soul is the product of both the One and the Intellect. And in the sensible world, all human and other rational souls participate in Intellect, all organisms participate in Life; all things (which does not include matter) participate in Being, and everything participates in the One. So we find a very high density of causal factors and essential properties in, for example, human beings; as rational, they are a product of Intellect, as animal of Life, as being of Being, and as one of the One. And second, all the way at the bottom, where causal activity peters out, we end up with a layer that has only the One as its cause, because its power by definition reaches beyond that of anything else. That last layer is matter, which, because of the principle that all products are like their producers, has to be one and
good. What starts as a principle of causation, then, ends in a positive theory of matter. We will return to this in the discussion of Proclus’ criticism of Plotinus’ notion of matter as the cause or locus of evil.

A second adjustment is the elaboration of metaphysical levels and processes into triads. It generally comes in three forms: first – the most familiar – triads of motion consisting of a remaining cause, procession from the cause, and a reversion of the effect to the cause; second, a remaining cause, and procession, and a third level which is a mixture of the first two; and third, triads of sameness, consisting of a (superior) property or entity, its (inferior) opposite, and one or two intermediates combining both.42 An example of the first is the ‘hypostatizing’ of remaining, emanation, and reversion.43 These processes, which are already present in Plotinus of course (e.g., Enn. 5.1.7), are found throughout Proclus’ metaphysics but are also turned into levels of reality, as a first complete cycle in the realm of Being, Proclus lets this realm fall into three connected levels, Being, Life, and Intellect, corresponding to the three metaphysical processes. Being thereby becomes the paradigm for all lower occurrences of the triad. We will return to this specific triad below. The second type occurs first at the level of Limit, Unlimited, and Mixture, which we will also discuss in more detail below. An example of the third type is Proclus’ description of the transition between Being and Becoming as Being-and-Becoming (i.e., Soul) and Becoming-and-Being (i.e., Nature).44 All three triadic structures contribute to combining continuity and discontinuity in causation, the cycle of emanation, mixture, and overlapping properties all help to close the gaps between layers of reality.

The last general metaphysical adjustments that need our attention, before we move on to more specific issues, are double emanation and the nature of participation. Where Plotinus keeps the individuals in the universal, which is most clearly visible in his claim that individual or particular intellects are part of universal intellect,45 later Platonists don’t. As a consequence, they need to account for the fact that individuals are both separated from and connected to
the universal. They have two strategies for this. The first is a distinction between what is sometimes called horizontal and transverse causation. Reality consists of a myriad of things that are not just numerically different but also essentially varied; for example, from Intellect emanate intellects but also Soul. There must be two strands of emanation or causation underlying this: from the universal to the particular and from one universal to a lower universal.

The second strategy is that of distinguishing between the unparticipated cause, the participated cause, and the participant to avoid the problem of participation as it was first addressed in Plato’s *Parmenides* (130e–131e), that is, the problem of the transcendent being affected through it having to undergo participation by the immanent. Plotinus, to address the problem of participation and to avoid an Aristotelian substance, purposely limits the factors involved in participation to the transcendent Forms and the participants, keeping the Forms transcendent by having the participants mirror them (*Enn.* 4.4–5). Proclus instead separates off the presence of the Forms in the participants as an entity in itself, an immanent universal. He was not the first to do this; the distinction between unparticipated and participated cause has a number of predecessors. It is a generalization of the move Iamblichus makes when he distinguishes, for example, between a transcendent and an immanent soul, but even Middle Platonists already mention a distinction between primary and secondary intelligibles. Ultimately the distinction may have been inspired by a merger of Aristotelian immanent forms and Platonic transcendent Forms – or even by Plato’s own distinction of forms ‘in us’ and ‘in nature’ (in the *Phaedo*, e.g., at 103b5).

Underlying this development is another merger, namely between emanation and participation; where in Plato and Plotinus participation is a relation between the intelligible Forms and the participants in the sensible world, in Proclus any lower metaphysical level can be said to participate in the level from which it emanates, in a manner appropriate to its own nature – an application of the
principle of ‘all in all’. This also shows in the hierarchy of participated forms – for example, emanating from the transcendent Forms, there are forms in the soul, forms in nature, and finally enmattered forms \(\text{\textit{enhula ei}dē}\).\(^{48}\)

After this overview of Proclus’ revisions in the metaphysical principles of Platonism, let us turn to a number of innovations related to specific entities, starting from the metaphysical top and working our way down. Proclus was rather critical of Plotinus’ views of the One’s causation, both of the One as \textit{causa sui} \((\text{Enn. } 6.8.13.50–59)\), and of the One’s direct causation of Intellect \((\text{e.g., Enn. } 5.2.1)\). First of all, Proclus rejects the notion of the One’s self-causation, as that would result in an inherent duality in the One as both cause and effect.\(^{49}\)

[S]ome \([\text{i.e., probably Plotinus}]\) want to say that the first principle is self-constituted \([\ldots]\) This first principle, then, is self-constituted in the proper sense, as deriving its substance from nothing else, whereas as they say, everything must either be created by itself or, inevitably, by something else. \([\ldots]\) and what is self-constituted must necessarily be divisible into a superior and an inferior element; for it is superior in so far as it creates, and it is inferior in so far as it is created; the One, on the other hand, is entirely indivisible and non-multiple. \((\text{in Prm. } 1149.24–1150.9)\)^{50}

So the One cannot be self-constituted. Instead, self-constitution comes in only at the first level after the One.\(^{51}\) As Proclus puts it in the \textit{Elements of Theology}, the self-constituted is self-sufficient; it fills itself with goodness. But it would not fill itself with something inferior, so that which fills it has to be superior to it. The One/Good, therefore, has to be superior to the self-sufficient.\(^{52}\) The implicit necessary consequence is that the One/Good is itself uncaused.

Proclus does not posit an ineffable first principle but he does deny the One all activity \(\text{\textit{energei}a}\), as that would again imply a duality, between the One and its activity, as well as introduce potentiality \(\text{\textit{dunamis}}\) in an undesired way.\(^{53}\) Instead, Proclus
embraces the principle that the One produces ‘by its mere being’ (*to
tōi einaĩ monōi paragein, in Prm. 1167.30*).

Second, Proclus elaborates the relation between the One and
Intellect. Roughly speaking, Plotinus maintains that the One imme-
diately causes Intellect (*Enn. 5.3.15*). Proclus objects that the plurality
of Being, as consisting not only of thinker and thought but also of all
the Forms, cannot emanate straight away from the complete unity of
the One. Instead, Proclus interposes a causal layer consisting of what
he calls the ‘First One’, which falls into fourteen levels, the Henads. ⁵⁴
These Henads are together the first occurrence of the participated
One, which ensures both the unparticipatedness of the One itself
and its connection with plurality. Within this group of Henads, how-
ever, we find an important hierarchy. The first to emanate is a pair of
Henads expressing the basic characteristics of the One: that it is
a unity, and that it is everything. They are Limit (*peras*) and
Unlimited (*apeiron*), which we also encountered in Iamblichus. ⁵⁵
Their precise nature and relation to the One, to each another, to the
other Henads, and to Being are intricate and not always clear, among
other reasons because Proclus’ descriptions are sometimes deter-
mined by exegetical contexts (especially of Plato’s *Philebus* and
*Parmenides*). This much can be said, however: limit represents
being one rather than not-one, that is, determinateness and definite-
ness, while Unlimited represents being one as not being limited by
another, that is, productive power and being indefinite. Together,
they take on the role of efficient cause that the One itself cannot
take on. Each subsequent Henad also combines limit and unlimited-
ness, but with an extra property, to form the head (also called ‘monad’)
of a chain of Beings. ⁵⁶ Although the Henads seem to be a multiplicity,
they are in fact one, because the unity they share is one and the same,
the ‘First One’ after the One itself.

The metaphysical level after the Henads, that is, that of Being,
itsel itself is established as a Mixture (*mikton*) of Limit and Unlimited but
in three different levels, corresponding to the main metaphysical
processes of remaining, emanation, and reversion: Being, Life, and
Intellect. Each is a mixture but in the first Limit is dominant; in the second, Unlimited; and in the third, the Mixture itself. These three levels are hierarchically ordered according to the Proclean rule; since in the physical world being has a larger extension than life, and life than intellect, this must mean that Being is the first of the triad, Life the second, and Intellect the last. In another of his ‘fractal’ moves, Proclus moreover distinguishes, within each of these levels, the very same triad but with an appropriate emphasis; in Being all three are present but in an intelligible manner, in Life we again find all three, in a vital manner (or Intelligible-and-Intellective), and in Intellect in an intellective manner.57

A related and similar development is Proclus’ criticism-cum-incorporation of Plotinus’ views of the Paradigm and the Demiurge; as opposed to Plotinus’ assumption that intellect and its object are identical [Enn. 5.5], Proclus pulls them apart. On the one hand, he takes the Forms as the Paradigm to metaphysically precede the Demiurge – the Paradigm as the Intelligible Living Being (autozōion) emanating from Being and Life, and the Demiurge as an intellective Intellect. On the other hand, he does maintain the unity of Being and Intellect in the intelligible Intellect, and indirectly also of Demiurge and Paradigm, as they unite in the Demiurge’s reversion upon himself; in contemplating his inner Paradigm, and recognizing himself as emanated from a higher Paradigm, he knows his cause through himself.58

Descending the ontological ladder to the level of Soul, Proclus establishes an even more differentiated hierarchy of souls, from different transcendent universal Souls to the participated yet universal World-Soul, to individual intermediate souls, to human and finally animal souls.59 Associated with this differentiation, we also find a differentiation concerning the nature of time. Plato’s Timaeus (especially 37c–e) fed the debate on time by presenting an intricate relation between time and soul but leaving open the question of the ontological underpinnings of their relation. Plotinus saw time as a product of soul but Proclus rejects this view, putting forward as
the main argument that psychic activity is measured in time. A measure must be prior to the measured, and hence time has to precede soul’s activities. But that is only possible if time is transcendent. Proclus thus postulates a transcendent intellect which is Time as the ‘eternal order that coordinates all change’\textsuperscript{60} next to immanent time, which partakes in it and is the flowing kind of time from everyday experience. Transcendent Time does not replace Eternity, which is an even higher entity.\textsuperscript{61}

More importantly, the separation of universal from individual souls has considerable consequences for human life. Whereas for Plotinus the soul is always active at the level of Intellect, and hence reversion is a matter of individual focus and exercise, Proclus follows Iamblichus in a more pessimistic view of the nature of human beings; the soul’s descent is complete,\textsuperscript{62} and no part of it transcends the spatiotemporal world. The argumentation for this stance relies on the nature of the activity of the soul and its distinction from the activity of the intellect. The intellect itself has a non-intermittent and non-discursive activity, that is, it always knows the whole, without ‘transition’ from one object to the next. The human soul, instead, has an intermittent and discursive activity: cognition moving from object to object, as well as lower capacities. Non-intermittent, non-discursive intellect is incompatible with discursive, intermittent, and even lower types of activity. Hence, the human soul, which while in its corporeal habitat clearly displays the latter, cannot also have the former at the same time and is instead fully descended. At the same time, of course, we can be intellectually active. To illustrate this, let us turn to a passage from Psellus’ Proclean commentary on Plotinus.

We have the forms in two ways, in the soul as unrolled and as it were separated, and in the intellect all at once \textit{(Enn. 1.1.8.6–8)}. And one intellect is the one by participation, which one would rightly call an intellective irradiation \textit{(ellampsis noera)}, and the essential intellect is another. And the essential \textit{(ousiōdeis)} intellect is
double, one is unparticipated (amethektos), and the other is participated, which they also tend to call particular.

(Psell. OD 32.2–7, my translation)

In a short chapter of no more than ten lines on intellect and soul, Psellus starts with a quotation from Enn. 1.1.8 and then explains it using terms and concepts that are typically Proclean. Where Plotinus’ point in 1.1.8 is that all humans possess the same transcendent intellect, Proclus instead separates the transcendent, unparticipated intellect off from the participated one, and that from an ‘irradiation’ of intellect. Some humans – philosophers, for example – have a participated, individual intellect, whereas most only have such an irradiation of intellect, that is, an intermittent intellective activity of the soul. No human possesses the universal Intellect itself.

This has both epistemological and ethical consequences. An epistemological principle ascribed to Iamblichus but elaborated in further detail by Proclus is the principle of the knower, whereas Plato in Republic 6 emphasized that types of cognition are distinguished by their objects – opinion for the sensible world, and knowledge for the Forms – Proclus adds the crucial role of the knower. The manner in which something is known depends not only on what it is but also on who knows it. This distinction is added especially to safeguard the contact between the human and divine realms, in response to an epistemological problem addressed by Parmenides in Plato’s Parmenides (134b–e); if the transcendent is truly different and separate from the immanent, humans as immanent cannot know the transcendent, and the transcendent gods cannot know our world. This problem, which Plotinus solved by denying the complete immanence of human beings, resurfaces in later Platonists in the wake of the theory of complete descent. They solve it, or soften it, by making explicit certain modalities; humans do know the transcendent, albeit in a human manner, whereas Gods are capable of knowing even the particular, contingent, and material in an absolute and universal manner. This is, of course, yet
another application of ‘all in all’. Because the transcendent is present in the immanent, in the appropriate manner, and vice versa, both can be approached by the ‘inhabitants’ of each of these realms but always in the appropriate manner.

In the *Commentary on the Alcibiades*, Proclus goes even further in his criticism of Plotinus.

Nor will we admit the views of those [that is, such as Plotinus] who assert that the soul is a part of the divine being, and that the part is like to the whole and always perfect, and that the disturbance of the emotions is concerned with the living organism, since those who hold these views make the soul ever perfect, ever wise and never in need of recollection, ever free from emotions and never corrupted. Yet Timaeus (*Tim. 41d*) asserts that our being does not in any way derive its substance from the primary orders, like the souls superior to us.

In other words, besides the undescended, Proclus also criticizes the unaffected soul of Plotinus and emphasizes the intermediate status of the essence of the human soul; he takes seriously its transition from one state to the other, from good to evil, from imperfect to perfect, from oblivious to recollecting,<sup>66</sup> apparently without ascribing to the soul an eternally immortal essence.<sup>67</sup> Instead, the individual soul is in an eternal cycle between being and becoming.<sup>68</sup> In this case, the transformations a soul undergoes during this earthly life are real, and a lot is at stake in living the good life. Moreover, a human being’s road to unification is cumbersome, likely not to succeed, and not an individual project. Proclus, as any Platonist, assumes that cognitive development needs to be paired off with moral development and, with Iamblichus, is convinced that, after a key preparation using mathematics and dialectic, we can only complete our development with divine help. In Proclus, the theurgic rituals for this purpose seem most of all aimed at purifying the soul and thereby enhancing its similarity to the divine both in providential activities

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This receptivity is also at the heart of another development in later Platonism: the theory of evil. This theory is considered an innovation of Proclus’ own and goes hand in hand with another innovation concerning the nature of matter. Whereas for Plotinus matter is the main locus of evil, Proclus finds that view to be metaphysically incoherent and emphatically criticizes it in his De malorum subsistentia. This work’s opening lines are as follows.

What is the nature of evil? And where does it originate? These questions have already been examined by some of our predecessors, who have pursued the theory of evil neither incidentally nor for the sake of other things, but have considered evil in itself, [examining] whether it exists or does not exist, and if it exists, how it exists and from where it has come into being and existence.

{Procl. De mal. subs. 1.1–4}^70

The questions asked here, which are almost literally the title Porphyry gave to Plotinus’ Enn. 1.8 on evil and summarize the main questions Plotinus addresses in that treatise, tell us that the predecessor Proclus has in mind is indeed Plotinus. Proclus’ main point of criticism is that Plotinus’ view goes against the Proclean rule of causation. The assumption of an absolute evil, caused only by matter, requires the promotion of matter to the status of a primary cause next to the One, and so leads to dualism negating the very position of the One as unique first principle. Moreover, if matter ultimately emanates from the One, which is also the Good, evils emanate from the Good, which makes the Good evil and evil good.71 The solution Proclus proposes is that matter is good, or at worst neutral; there is no absolute or universal evil but instead only particular evils, which have a kind of parasitic existence (parhupostasis).

As we saw above, the One is the only producer whose causal range extends all the way down to the lowest realities, and therefore matter is not caused by Soul but only by the One/Good. As
a consequence, the only property that has seeped through to matter is unity, that is, goodness. Even matter is inherently one/good – although it is more precise to say that matter itself is neutral, and good only in a completely passive sense of being there for the sake of receiving good things. Where the One is complete activity, matter is complete and passive potentiality. More precisely, Proclus differentiates between kinds and causes of matter. The lowest kind, the ultimate substrate, is produced by the first principle in the guise of the Unlimited. As this [conceptual] level of matter does not partake in Limit at all, it has no properties of its own.72 Above that, we find the first unqualified body, a three-dimensional extension which is a product of Limit and Unlimited, and next up the first qualified body, which is extension with the ‘traces of the forms’.73

In any case, no matter can be the locus of evil. And since there can be no other fundamental principle besides the One, there is no point in the metaphysical hierarchy at which substantial evil can enter the picture. Besides, Proclus points out, substantial evil is itself an inconsistent notion, as evil, a privation, is a form of non-being, and non-being is not substantial.74 Proclus does maintain the Platonic notion of evil as privation of goodness, and the Plotinian notion of evil as the cause of weakness of the soul,75 but adapts them in a very specific way; there are only particular evils, which are accidental privations, specifically cases of absence of goodness where it could have been present. These cases occur only in particular material bodies or in particular human souls, due to a weakness that occasionally prevents them from receiving goodness. This weakness is not essential, so evil is not a necessity, although it does result from their respective natures; bodies are not always receptive to form; rather, they are prone to decay, and souls are inherently at risk of being distracted from rationality.76

5 IN CONCLUSION
After the fifth century, Aristotle and Plato are harmonized even more fully, and metaphysical complexities are added, in the writings of Damascius, who reintroduces an ineffable first principle, as
well as in the Peripatetic Platonists Simplicius and Philoponus, and Olympiodorus. A new strand of Platonism emerges with Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, whose Christianizing readings of Proclus will greatly influence medieval philosophy. The changes made by Iamblichus and Proclus, however, no doubt belong to the most thorough adjustments of Platonism in its post-Plotinian history.

Regarding the use of the term ‘Neoplatonism’ or ‘Platonism’ as a label for the Platonic genre of late antiquity, the two main justifying factors are the thinkers’ own perception of their philosophical identity and our (or our predecessors’) desire to isolate the core of Platonism. Besides that core, of course, our sources contain a wealth of philosophical detail and variety. This chapter presented some of that variety in relation to the core, and especially to Plotinus’ Platonism. By way of conclusion, let us ever so briefly address the matter of philosophical identity. To return to the beginning of this chapter, it is highly indicative of the self-identification of Platonic philosophers in late antiquity that Proclus does not mention Plotinus by name when he criticizes him. Instead, when he does explicitly refer to Plotinus, he does so in an affirmative and often reverent manner; we find Proclus introducing him as ‘the great’ and ‘the divine’ (*ho megas*, in *Tim.* 1.251.19, and *ho theios*, in *Alc.* 133.6, both adjectives often used of Iamblichus), even ‘the most divine’ (*ho theiotatos*, an adjective also used of Plato [and Homer], in *Tim.* 1.427.14), and as speaking ‘in a most inspired way’ (*enthеastikотata*, *Theol. Plat.* 3.60.18). Whether Proclus uses these epithets to do justice to Plotinus’ major role in the history of Platonism or to fortify his own theories by appealing to an authority argument, it is clear that he does want to present him as an authority.

NOTES

1 *Theol. Plat.* 1.15.12–16.
2 On this topic of shared tenets, see Gerson’s Ur-Platonism in Gerson 2013a, 9–19.
4 For a good overview of sources and thought, see Smith 2010.
5 On this work, see Lloyd 1990, 36–75; Barnes 2003.
6 E.g., Arist. Top. 6.4.141b15–142a13.
7 Emilsson 2021.
8 E.g., de Haas 2001 thinks they fundamentally agree, while Chiaradonna 2002 thinks they do not.
9 For edition, French and English translation, commentary, and extensive introductions, see Brisson et al. 2005.
10 D’Ancona 2005, 189.
11 Translation from Dillon in Brisson et al. 2005.
12 For this term, see Siorvanes 1996.
17 Dam. Princ. 1.86.6–9; Procl. in Prm. 1070.13–16.
19 For an overview, see Dillon 2010.
20 On this topic, see Slaveva-Griffin 2009.
21 For a good overview of Iamblichus’ Pythagoreanism, see O’Meara 2014.
22 O’Meara 1989.
24 Maggi 2012, 81.
25 O’Meara 1989, 91. In Proclus, a methodological mathematization would be added to this.
26 Dillon 2010, 371.
27 Simpl. in Cat. 135.8–27. Maggi 2012, 83.
28 The elaboration of the details of the metaphysical role of Limit and the Unlimited, and the Henads, will be discussed in the section on Proclus.
29 Iamb. in Tim. fr. 87 Dillon.
30 For Iamblichus’ theory of soul in general, see his De anima in the edition and translation of Dillon and Finamore 2002.
34 Iamb. Myst. 1, esp. 11.
35 For overviews of Proclus’ philosophical views, see Chlup 2012 and D’Hoine and Martijn 2016.
36 On Proclus’ geometrical method, see Martijn 2014.
37 On the reception of Proclus’ thought, see Gersh 2014; Layne and Butorac 2017; and Calma 2019, 2020, and 2021.
38 Westerink 1959, 7–9.
39 There are of course plenty of more minor differences that will not be discussed here, such as those concerning nature (Martijn 2010), demonology (Timotin 2018), and the incorporation of theological sources.
41 El. Theol. 58, 59.
42 On these two triads in Proclus, see Martijn and Gerson 2016.
43 On this triad, see Edwards 1997; d’Hoine 2016.
44 Procl. in Tim. 1.257.5–6.
45 On this topic, see Chiaradonna 2004, 9–10. Note that this relation only holds at the intelligible level. At the sensible level, instead, we find only the activity of the Forms in matter.
46 El. Theol. 21, 23.
47 E.g., Alc. Did. 4.7.
48 On the Forms in Proclus, see Helmig 2012 and d’Hoine 2016.
49 Greig 2017.
50 Translation from Morrow and Dillon 1987, 505.
51 El. Theol. 40.
52 El. Theol. 10.
54 For the introduction of ‘ones’ in Proclus, see El. Theol. 1–6; for details on the Henads, see El. Theol. 113–65 and Theol. Plat. 3.4.
55 On the relation between the Henads and this pair, see Greig 2020.
56 The fourteen properties besides unity (being, wholeness, plurality, many, whole–parts, shape, in itself–in other, at rest, same–other, like and unlike, touching and separate, equal and unequal, partaking in time, partaking in the division of time) are derived from the fourteen deductions in the second hypothesis of Plato’s Parmenides. See Van Riel 2016.
60 Vargas 2016, 87, and now also Vargas 2021.
61 Vargas 2016.
62 El. Theol. 211.
This principle is probably best known from its appearance in the last book of Boethius’ *Consolatio*, where he uses it to explain how determinism combines with freedom; God can completely oversee the roads we can take, and where they will lead us, but we still have to take one.

This is presented as Plato’s view, however, and possibly not Proclus’ own (in *Alc.* 227.21–228.1).

For Proclus’ view on theurgy, see van den Berg 2001 and 2016.

Translation from Opsomer and Steel 2003, 57.

*De mal. subs.* 31.16–18. See also Opsomer 2001; Nikulin 2019, 184ff.; O’Meara 2019b.

For Proclus’ notion of matter, see Opsomer 2016; Van Riel 2001 and 2009.


Steel 1999.


Steel 2016.

Porphyry tends to be introduced by Proclus as ‘the philosopher’.