
D. Gregory MacIsaac

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Proclus on Nature is an excellent addition to the relatively sparse collection of monographs on Proclus. It is based on the author’s doctoral thesis and is appropriate for an audience of specialists in Neoplatonism and late antique philosophy, and for those interested in the reception of Plato’s Timaeus. It consists of a close reading of sections of Proclus’ Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, which was taken to embody Plato’s complete philosophy of Nature. Martijn seeks to clarify what Proclus means in this commentary both by Nature and by the philosophy of Nature.

After an introductory chapter, she begins to look at Nature, especially through an analysis of the ‘treatise on Nature’ given at the end of Proclus’ introduction (1.9.25–12.25). Martijn argues that, for Proclus, Nature is a sort of ‘in-between’ hypothosis, lying below Soul and above Body. This distinguishes him from Plotinus, for whom Nature was the lowest part of the hypothesis of Soul. Martijn lays out the ways that Proclus speaks of Nature and natures in a very comprehensive manner, and her discussion of Nature’s irrational and divisible character, and its lack of reversion upon itself is valuable (especially 32). Particularly important is her specification of Nature as ‘a divine craft in the sense that it is a non-reverting emanation from the Demiurge, and an instrument of the gods that has an effective power of its own’ (56) working from inside bodies while remaining distinct from them (47).

In this chapter and in the rest of the book I agree substantially with most of what Martijn says, so I will bring up only a few minor differences. From a discursive perspective, emphasizing the discontinuity of Proclus’ system, she has shown well that Nature is distinct from Soul. But one could equally ask about the continuity of his system, especially through her suggestion that natures are ‘irrational souls’ that are not really souls but ‘images of souls’ (4). From this perspective, while Nature is not Soul, could it be thought of as an irradiation of Soul that imparts ‘a very low, physical kind of life, and thus motion, to that which does not have a soul’ (61), much in the way that the partial soul’s intellect is an irradiation of a higher intellect and not the actual possession of one of its own (see In Alc. 246.18–47.2)? Or is Nature perhaps the irradiation of Life from within the Order of Intellect, whose power descends further than does that of Soul (see El.Th. props. 56–57)? Does Nature hold the place for the World Soul that something like thumos does for partial souls (see In Remp. 1.226.15–23, 1.229.9–31.8)?

In her third chapter, Martijn looks at Proclus’ conception of the philosophy of Nature (phusiologia) and seeks to explain why he takes geometry rather than dialectic as its model. She argues that, although phusiologia is not assimilated to theology, the highest sort of phusiologia is a kind of theology because it studies divine things insofar as they order the visible cosmos. Its model is not dialectic because it mounts up only as high as the Demiurge, and so like geometry it does not reach an unhypothetical principle. Martijn shows this through her analysis of Proclus’ discussion (1.223.3–339.2) of the five ‘starting points’ and three demonstrations at the beginning of the Timaeus (27d6–29b1). A main point here is that Proclus takes ‘every definition to involve a hypothesis, namely about the existence of the definiendum’. Phusiologia is a hypothetical science, therefore, because it begins from these definitions (97).

In this chapter, Martijn also argues that Proclus’ theory of doxa, which she thinks should be called a ‘faculty of cognitive judgement’, allows him to give phusiologia a scientific status appropriate to its subject-matter (70–71). I think Martijn’s analysis of the role of doxa within phusiologia points correctly to its possession of the logoi of sensible things. She concludes that Proclus thinks the whole middle range of Being, consisting of such things as ‘Time, Soul, Nature, and immanent forms’ is known by an ‘actual new level of cognition’ produced by ‘coupling logos, the lower faculty involved in knowledge of Being, to doxa, the higher faculty concerned with Becoming’ (149).

While I think what Martijn says about Proclus’ use of doxa in this text is accurate, I would caution against speaking of distinct ‘faculties’ in quite this manner. For Proclus, the human soul’s knowledge is derived mostly from its own innate logoi. In very general terms, when it uses these to understand lower things this is doxa, when it uses them
to understand itself it is dianoia, and its understanding of higher things through its own logos approaches noēsis. Martijn is correct to point out some of the many nuances that need to supplement this basic picture, but speaking of distinct faculties in too hard-edged a manner, in my opinion, tends to obscure the fact that for Proclus it is equally true to say that these are modalities of the one unified activity of self-knowledge that lies between the true noēsis possessed by the gods and the passive affection of our sense-organs.

Moreover, speaking of distinct faculties can sometimes obscure Proclus’ variation of language to suit his hermeneutic context. Here he is taking his cue from the distinction at Timaeus 28a1-3 between noēsis and logos, on the one hand, and doxa and aisthēsis, on the other. In his other works he will vary his language again, sometimes pairing noēsis with doxa within the logikê psuchê (In Remp. 1.235.1-21) or sometimes speaking simply of dianoia rather than logos as knowing the middle range of things through its own logos, de-emphasizing completely doxa and not mentioning that it too possesses the logos of things (In Eucl. 3.1-5.10). My disagreement with Martijn is not really on a substantive issue, but rather on how to bring out the continuity of Proclus’ system and deal with the way in which he varies his language to suit his exegetical context.

Martijn’s fourth chapter looks at lower forms of phusiologia, primarily the mathematical sort, but also those which concern the perceptible and the biological, which she says are implicit in Proclus’ discussion. She does a very good job of explaining how it is Proclus’ doctrine of analogy that enables him to say that mathematics shows forth the nature of things (In Eucl. 28a1-3, here his use of alêtheia and pistis is due to their occurrence at Timaeus 29c2-3. At root I do not think I disagree with Martijn on her characterization of how, for Proclus, human beings come to know things. But I do think that we need a complete and accurate account of Proclus’ ‘core’ epistemology that stands behind the sort of textual variation that we find in all of his texts, and I do not think that has yet been supplied in the literature. Of course, this can only be done by beginning with the sort of detailed and accurate discussion of the peculiarities of his language in particular contexts of the sort that Martijn gives, and for that reason her study is invaluable.

Martijn concludes with a very useful and accurate discussion of the manner in which, for Proclus, the Timaeus and his own commentary on that dialogue are structured according to the principles of remaining, procession and return, so that the commentary as a whole serves to lead its readers to a reversion on the Demiurge, just as the Parmenides and his commentary on it leads up to the One (291).

My disagreements with Martijn are minor and are mostly a matter of emphasis. Her work contains very many original and insightful points. Proclus on Nature is a model of good scholarship and philosophical clarity, and is essential reading for anyone interested in late antique philosophy.

D. Gregory MacIsaac
Carleton University
gregory_macisaac@carleton.ca

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Potamo is not a name familiar even to many classicists, but this volume’s importance extends beyond the figure being investigated. As Potamo was the only self-described Eclectic philosopher in antiquity, Hatzimichali’s study concerns the nature of philosophy in the first century BC. The volume first contextualizes Potamo’s work (chapter 1,