Introduction to Book 4

THE STRUCTURE OF BOOK 4

Book 4 of Proclus' *Timaeus Commentary* continues the structure introduced at the opening of Book 3. Proclus takes Plato's dialogue to provide an account of ten gifts bestowed on the visible cosmos by its creator, the Demiurge.[1] Each of these gifts makes a progressively greater contribution to the goodness of the Demiurge's creation, rendering it ever more perfect and its life ever more divine and blessed. Book 2 (Volumes III and IV in this series) deals with the first seven gifts of the Demiurge:

1. Being perceptible due to the presence of the elements (*Tim.* 31b).
2. Having its elements bound together through proportion or *analogia* (31c).
3. Being a whole constituted of wholes (32c).
4. Being spherical in shape so that it is most similar to itself and similar to the paradigm upon which it is modelled (33b).
5. Being self-sufficient or autarchês (33c).
6. Rotating upon its axis makes it similar to the motion of Intellect (*Tim.* 34a, cf. *Laws* 10. 898a).
7. Being animated by a divine World Soul (*Tim.* 34b).

Book 4 (the present volume) provides the last three Demiurgic gifts to the cosmos:

8. Time, in virtue of which it is a moving image of eternity had by its intelligible paradigm, the Living Being Itself (*Tim.* 36e–37a).
9. The heavenly bodies in it, which Plato describes as the 'instruments of time' and Proclus as 'sanctuaries of the gods' (*Tim.* 39d; *in Tim.* II 5.28).

[1] Kutash (2011) argues that this notion of the ten gifts structures the entirety of Proclus' dialogue – not merely the commentary subsequent to the introduction of the gifts at *in Tim.* II 5.17–31. I agree that the notion of the ten gifts structures Proclus' commentary in the present volume and the previous two in this series (Book 3). I have some hesitation about the manner in which Kutash thinks that it organises the material in volumes I and II. Moreover, I think that the influence of the ten gifts as an organising principle peters out in Book 5 (the sixth and final volume in this series).

10. All the living things within the visible cosmos make it an even more perfect or complete imitation of its paradigm since the Living Being Itself contains four genera of living things: celestial, aerial, aquatic and terrestrial living things (39e–40a).

Proclus' commentary in Book 4 does not exhaust the tenth and final gift of the Demiurge. The present volume contains his account of the celestial genus of living things. The final section of the present work begins his discussion of the sub-lunary gods, a topic that continues in Book 5. The nature of the breaks between the books, however, finds some rationale in Plato's text. At 40d4–5 Timaeus says that he is finished discussing the visible and created gods. He next turns to a genealogy of the 'traditional gods' such as Ouranos, Okeanys and Tethys, referring to them initially as 'daemons'. In fact, Proclus' discussion in Book 4 is a sort of preface to the discussion of the traditional gods taken up in Book 5, for at the end of Book 4 he raises the question of why Plato called these gods '*daemons*'. So Book 5 actually starts with the first substantial discussion of these traditional gods – beings whom Proclus now denominates 'sub-lunary' or 'generation-producing *gods*'. Allowing for ten pages that form this transition to Book 5, the sections of Book 4 dedicated to each of the Demiurgic gifts are roughly equal – about fifty pages each.

The subject matter of these sections, however, is not as sharply separated as the architectonic implied by the notion of the ten gifts might suggest. The planets involved in the ninth gift come about for the sake of 'distinguishing and preserving the numbers of time' (*Tim.* 38c6–7). Proclus in fact treats this gift as tantamount to granting the cosmos a second kind of time, which he calls 'visible time'. Thus there is a strong connection between the seventh and eighth gifts. Moreover, the Sun, Moon and planets – which are the principal means through which the numbers of visible time are manifested – are themselves members of the class of celestial living beings. Since celestial living beings are the first among the four kinds of living thing granted to the cosmos in the tenth gift, there are strong connections here too. In this introduction, I'll take up three issues that arise in Book 4.

First, Proclus' insistence that the ten gifts bestow *progressively greater* blessings upon the cosmos might seem initially puzzling. After all, Plato himself says that the visible cosmos could not be made eternal in the same manner in which its intelligible paradigm is. So the gift of time looks a bit like a prize for being runner-up. How can the world's temporality be a greater benefit to it than the fact that it is animated with a divine World Soul (the sixth gift)? Doesn't time simply measure the activities of the World Soul and the things that transpire in the cosmos that it enlivens? As we shall see, however, this objection treats time all too passively – as

if it were nothing more than a metric of events that take place in the world. Proclus' view of time makes it much more elevated and much more active.

Next, there is a series of puzzles about Proclus' treatment of Plato's account of the motions of the stars and planets. Proclus' commentary was written several centuries after the composition of Plato's text. The study of astronomy did not stand still in the intervening years. Proclus and the other Neoplatonists regard Plato's text as revealing a divine truth intimated to its author by the gods themselves. Yet Plato's dialogue contains an account of the movements of the stars and planets – and perhaps even the Earth itself (40b8)! – that is not quite that of the astronomical theories of Proclus' own day. How should a Platonist weigh the apparently competing accounts of the 'modern' models, which include epicycles and eccentrics, against the authority of Plato?

Finally, the place of the tenth gift as the final one in the order of exposition – and thus the most important – also raises a puzzle. How can it be that adding kinds of living creatures to a cosmos that is itself a living creature, endowed with soul and intellect (*Tim.* 30b8), should make it ever so much better? Given the correlation between unity, simplicity and divinity on the one hand, and multiplicity on the other, it seems strange to think that adding multiplicity to the cosmos should be the best present that the Demiurge can give. Proclus' solution to this puzzle will come back again to the various notions of whole and wholeness that run through the entire *Timaeus Commentary*.

In the following sections I shall provide a brief overview of these three issues.

THE EIGHTH GIFT OF TIME: ETERNITY AND THE HIGHER TIME

The Neoplatonists' views on time have been the subject of a significant body of secondary literature.[2] Indeed, this is one of the most closely scrutinised aspects of Neoplatonic metaphysics. This is perhaps for two reasons. First, one of the earliest investigations of the subject proposed parallels with twentieth-century discussions on the distinction between static and flowing time or McTaggart's A and B series.[3] Thus it was initially thought that the Neoplatonic view of *time*, at least, might have more connection with contemporary metaphysics than other features

[2] For the period 1949–92 see Scotti Muth (1993). For 1990 to the present, the De Wulf–Mansion Centre maintains an online bibliography at http://hiw.kuleuven.be/dwmc/ancientphilosophy.

[3] Sambursky (1962), 17–20.

of their philosophy. The second reason for this scrutiny has to do with our sources. The scholarly discussion of the individual Neoplatonists' views on time has been encouraged by the existence of Simplicius' *Corollary on Time*.[4] This is an extensive digression in which Simplicius breaks the flow of his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* (773.8–800.25) to discuss competing views on the nature of time among his predecessors. This discussion includes valuable information about subsequent Neoplatonists' critical reception of Plotinus' views about time and eternity (*Ennead* III.7), as well as Iamblichus' alternative to the Plotinian view. Proclus is discussed only briefly and Simplicius believes that he holds 'pretty much' the same view as Iamblichus (795.4–6).

The fact that Simplicius' discussion appears in the context of a commentary on *Aristotle's* treatment of time is, I think, significant in explaining the attention given to the views of the Neoplatonists on time. To be blunt: Aristotle's discussion of time is much closer to the problems and presuppositions that animate contemporary work on the subject than Plato's *Timaeus* is. What Simplicius relates about his predecessors is tantalising for us moderns because the *context* in which he presents it dictates that he emphasise those aspects of the Neoplatonists' views that are relevant to the Aristotelian puzzles about time. These puzzles, in turn, are puzzles that we moderns can readily understand. But in fact we don't get very far trying to understand the views of Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus on time by approaching them via Aristotle's puzzles about time. This fact was brought home to me by reading Steel's magisterial essay on the Neoplatonic doctrine of time.[5]

Steel begins by noting Albert the Great's complaint that Aristotle's account of time doesn't get at what is *really* important: the relation of time to eternity. If you ask a modern philosopher what the relation is between these two, then – assuming that he or she is willing to grant that there is such a thing as eternity – the answer will simply be that they are opposite and incompatible *ways* in which *objects* exist. Abstract objects like numbers or sets exist timelessly, while concrete particulars all exist in time. Except for discussions of God's relation to time in philosophy of religion, contemporary work on the philosophy of time does not have much to say about eternity. Likewise, Aristotle himself did not give much attention to the nature of eternity. Perhaps the closest we get to an account of it on Aristotle's part is that it is 'the fulfilment (*telos*) of the whole heaven, the fulfilment which includes all time and infinity' (*Cael.* I.11, 279a26). Taking this seriously, we would say that the relation between eternity and time, then, is that the former includes the totality of the latter: eternity is simply everlastingness. But this seems

[4] Translation in Urmson and Siorvanes (1992). [5] Steel (2001).

slightly at odds with Aristotle's remarks in the previous lines (279a11–23), which suggest an atemporal notion of eternity.[6] So Albert the Great's complaint about the absence of a discussion of the really important issue about time – its relation to eternity – points to a strong similarity between Aristotle's approach to the philosophy of time and that of contemporary philosophers.

Although there was a tradition of commenting on Aristotle's *Physics*, the Neoplatonists did not begin by theorising about time from Aristotle's puzzles in *Physics* 4.10. Rather, they started from Plato's *Timaeus*. The key fact about time that needs to be explained, by their lights, is how it can be true that time is – as the divine Plato tells us – an *image* of eternity, one that is *mobile* according to number, while eternity *remains in one* (*Tim*. 37d1–7). None of these three ideas in Plato's text is perfectly clear. The Neoplatonists started their elucidation of Plato's view of time with the first clause. Since the paradigms of which images are images were regarded as causes by Platonists, eternity is thus prominent among the *causes* of time. While Aristotle asks about what time *consists in* – motion? the numerable aspect of motion? – he does not inquire after its *causes*. This latter question, however, is utterly central to the Neoplatonists' accounts of time. The reason for this difference lies in the different methodologies of Aristotle and the Neoplatonists. Aristotle's discussion of the nature of time is *aporetic*: it begins from a set of puzzles that emerge when we push to their logical conclusions common-sense beliefs about time (*Phys*. IV.10). Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus, however, take as their point of departure reflections on Plato's *Timaeus*. This *inspired text* itself tells us that the ways that we commonly speak about eternity (and presumably thus about eternity's image – time – too) involve fundamental confusions (*Tim*. 37e5). So the Neoplatonists would think that *of course* we should investigate time by interpreting Plato's works rather than by means of Aristotle's aporetic method. We can't rely too much on common sense and our ordinary ways of talking. We know that our everyday platitudes about time are not a good starting point because Plato tells us that our ordinary usage is riddled with confusions and Plato's text is inspired. Plato's dialogues thus have a primacy for the Neoplatonists that they do not have for modern philosophers of time, who tend to pursue a methodology much closer to Aristotle's. When we seek to understand the nature of time, we take truisms about time, as well as our best theories in physics, as starting points for theorising.[7] If we

[6] For discussion, see Sorabji (1983), 125–7.

[7] Four-dimensionalism and presentism are competing views of time, but recent books by proponents of each seek to show how their preferred view derives support from platitudes about time as well as showing that their theory is consistent with the theory of relativity. Cf. Sider (2001) and Bourne (2006).

want to understand the views of Proclus and the other Neoplatonists on time we must first consider some of the key comments in Plato's *Timaeus*. To the extent that Plato's text is alien to contemporary philosophical theorising about time, so too are the views of the Neoplatonists.

Some aspects of Plato's discussion of time in *Timaeus* 37c6–38b5 seem familiar enough. He remarks that time came into being with the heavens (38b6) and that prior (*prin*) to their existence there were no divisions of time, such as days, months or years (37e1–2). Reading this, we might short-circuit the problem about how one could speak coherently about what occurs *prior* to time by imagining that Plato is only expressing a kind of mutual dependence between things that undergo change and the time in which changes take place. It is not that there was some sort of quasi-time *before* the Demiurge created the heavens and thus inaugurated real time.[8] Rather, if the story of the cosmos' creation is read non-literally, this aspect of Plato's discussion of time simply points to the fact that there is some sort of intimate connection between time and change. So this thread in Plato's text looks much like the considerations upon which Aristotle constructs his definition of time as 'the measure of motion with respect to before and after'.

The less familiar aspects of Plato's discussion involve the relation of time to eternity and the relation of the visible cosmos to the Living Being Itself upon which it is modelled. As noted above, Plato calls time a movable image of eternity. Temporal existence is the best that the Demiurge can do to make the visible cosmos resemble its eternal paradigm. The former 'goes along according to number' while the latter 'remains in one' (37d5–8). This passage suggests that time itself has one or more non-temporal explanations or causes: the eternity that characterises the Living Being Itself and the Demiurge's activity in creating something that can resemble in some ways that eternity. This aspect of Plato's discussion looks far stranger from a modern perspective. Yet it was this aspect that primarily motivated Neoplatonic theorising about time from Plotinus onward.

It was clearly part of Plato's view that the visible cosmos is itself a living being, which has its life in virtue of a World Soul. Plotinus understood Plato's realm of Forms as having a kind of life as well.[9] Plotinus' innovation with respect to time and eternity was to connect these two things with the *life* of the soul and that of intellect respectively (III.7) So when Plato says that time is an image of eternity, Plotinus

[8] Or at least Proclus and the other Neoplatonists did not think so. This reading was defended in antiquity by Plutarch and Atticus (cf. Proclus, *in Tim.* I 276.31–277.7 and III 37.7–38.12) and again in the modern era by Vlastos (1968).

[9] Cf. III.8.8; V.1.7; VI.6.8.

understands this to mean that the life of the soul is an image of the sort of life had by the intelligible Forms. This is one way to explicate the cryptic claim that time is an image of eternity. But it is not an explanation that was accepted by the subsequent Platonic tradition.

Proclus gives a variety of reasons for rejecting Plotinus' view, but the very first one in his list is that it fails to be consistent with Plato's *Timaeus*.[10] (The priority of this objection illustrates my claim that the Neoplatonists take this dialogue to be the primary evidence which any adequate theory of time must account for.) If time were identified with the discursive life of the World Soul, then the Demiurge would have conferred time upon the cosmos at the point at which he made it ensouled. But in the progressive addition of Demiurgic gifts that Proclus supposes to structure Plato's dialogue, time comes *after* the visible cosmos' ensoulment and it is granted by the *Demiurge*, not by the World Soul. Thus time cannot be the life of the World Soul or any consequence of psychic activity. Proclus' objection thus rests not only upon the idea that the *Timaeus* is the ultimate arbiter for views about the nature of time, but also upon his view about the structure of that work – specifically that each of the ten gifts of the Demiurge is a greater and greater contribution to the sensible cosmos' divinity.

Neither would the subsequent Platonic tradition rest content with the idea that eternity is the life of intellect. While Plotinus supposed that the realm of Forms was also in some sense a realm of intellects with its own life and the realm of being, there is no rigorous treatment in Plotinus of the relations between Being, Life and Mind (or Intellect) as these things pertain to the intelligibles. It was left to subsequent Platonists – perhaps beginning with Porphyry, but certainly and especially Iamblichus – to systematise the intelligible stratum of Plotinus' ontology that lies between the One and soul. Part of that systematisation resulted from thinking carefully about the relative priority of different predicates. Plato said that the intelligible Living Being Itself was eternal. But if it is eternal, then Eternity[11] is something distinct from it and prior to it. Proclus puts the point this way:

[10] *in Tim.* III 21.14–24.31. This textual criticism probably derives from Iamblichus' *Timaeus Commentary*; cf. fr. 63 (Dillon) = Simplicius *in Phys.* 793.23, ff. Cf. Joly (2003).

[11] In what follows, I'll write 'Eternity' with a capital letter where the context suggests we are talking about some specific intelligible principle, like a Form. While this convention works well enough for Plato, with someone like Proclus the matter is more complicated because there are different orders of intelligible things. In fact, it turns out that for Proclus Eternity is not a Form – it is higher than the intelligibles and among their causes. Even so, the use of the capital letter indicates that we are in a context where we are looking for a specific intelligible, belonging to some order or other, rather than just talking about eternity in the abstract.

> If the Living Being is, and is said to be, eternal as a result of participation, but Eternity has not been said to participate in the Living Being, nor been found to be derived from it eponymously, then it is obvious that the former is secondary and the latter is simpler and more fundamental, since Eternity does not participate in the Living Being due to the fact that [Eternity] is not a living thing, for neither is visible time something living . . . For this reason, Eternity is something greater than [the eternal Living Being], for that which is eternal is neither identical to Eternity nor something greater than Eternity. Just as everyone says that what is ensouled or is endowed with intellect comes after soul or intellect, so too surely that which is eternal is secondary to Eternity. (*in Tim.* III 10.11–21)

Thus Plotinus must be wrong: Eternity cannot be the life of the Living Being Itself nor of any other eternal intelligible object. If these things *are eternal*, then they are *not Eternity itself*, nor is their activity the source of Eternity. Eternity is something higher in which they participate. Iamblichus located Eternity perhaps in the Good or perhaps in the One-Being. In any event, it is among the 'hidden' things that are 'beyond Being' – that is, above intelligibles like the Living Being Itself. Proclus follows Iamblichus (and Syrianus) in this respect and identifies Eternity with 'the single comprehension (*mia periochê*) of the intelligible henads' (III 12.14–15). As such, Eternity is not merely responsible for 'the changeless continuation (*anexallaktos diamonê*, 12.18)' of the things subsequent to it. It '*arranges* them, forming them, as it were, and by this very fact at the same time *makes them* to be wholes'. This active role for Eternity foreshadows a similarly active role for its image – time. As we shall see, on Proclus' view time does not merely provide a metric for the changes that take place in time: it actively orders what takes place.

Let us now turn away from eternity to the question of time. Temporal things participate in time. This is what makes them temporal. Proclus accepts Iamblichus' general account of the metaphysics of participation. This involves a distinction between, on the one hand, an unparticipated monad (or paradigmatic cause), and on the other hand, the participated Form which results from the former and which in turn accounts for the character of the things that participate in it. Proclus states this principle in the following terms:

> For in every order there is an unparticipated unit at the head, prior to the things that are participated. There is also an appropriate and connate number corresponding to the unparticipated things, and from the unit the dyad results, just as is the case with the gods themselves. (*in Tim.* II 240.6–10 = fr. 54 (Dillon); cf. *ET* prop. 53)

This principle applies to time as well. In his *Corollary on Time*, Simplicius explains how Iamblichus applied this line of reasoning to the case of time:

he seems to postulate a single ungenerated 'now' that is prior to those that are participated, and from this [results] the things that are transmitted to the participants. As in the case of the now, so too in the case of time. There is one time prior to temporal things, and there are several times that come into being in what participates – cases in which doubtless one [time or event?] is past, another is present, and another is future. (*in Phys.* 793.3–7)

This distinction between the unparticipated monad of time and participated time in Iamblichus has been characterised as a difference between static and flowing time. Sambursky argued that it approximated McTaggart's A and B series.[12] Sorabji, however, correctly pointed out that Iamblichus' higher-order time was posited on the basis of very different philosophical considerations and served a very different purpose within Iamblichus' Neoplatonism.[13]

Proclus accepts a similar distinction between the unparticipated monad of time and the time whose passage gets enumerated when we say that another day has gone by.

We seek the cause of the existence of numerable time. This, therefore, is something that itself remains immobile, unfolding what gets counted in accordance with itself. If, generally speaking, visible time (*emphanes chronos*) is mobile [or such as to flow (*kinêtos*)] . . . it is necessary for there to be time that is immobile in itself, in order that there should be the kind of time that is mobile [i.e. that which can flow]. That time which exists in the former respect is time as it truly is in itself, and that through which [there is another time] in the things that participate. The latter is mobile along with these participants, extending itself into them. (III 26.21–30)

Just as the unparticipated monad of Eternity belongs above the intelligibles, so too the unparticipated monad of time is an *intellectual* nature that is *prior* to soul (III 27.19–25). Hence Plotinus was wrong here too:

[12] Sambursky (1971).

[13] Sorabji (1983), 12. Sorabji concedes that there is some resemblance between Iamblichus' notion of flowing time and McTaggart's A-series, but thinks that we ought not credit Iamblichus with anticipating the modern distinction unless there is clear evidence that he has anticipated McTaggart's notion of the B-series as well. Sorabji argues that he did not. I am inclined to go further than Sorabji: because Iamblichus' distinction seems to be a consequence of applying more general principles about participation to the case of time, it does not seem quite right to say that he anticipates even McTaggart's A-series. McTaggart's distinction arises from reflections on tense. If we suppose that a philosophical distinction consists not merely in the drawing of a boundary that isolates a class, but in the reasons for isolating it, it seems to me that it is a mistake to credit Iamblichus with even half of McTaggart's distinction. What Iamblichus was doing was part of a very different philosophical project, with only tenuous connections to that of McTaggart.

time is not the life of the soul or any other result of psychic activity. Time – at least the unparticipated monad of time – is prior to the soul and provides the participated time in virtue of which the soul's activities are measured. Proclus does appeal to a parallel argument to the one above concerning the eternal character of the intelligibles: since soul's activities take place in time, it is not the source of time (III 22.1–8). But this is not the first consideration that he advances against Plotinus' view. The principal objection to making soul the source of time is that this does not fit Plato's text:

> In the first place, Plato – the person with whom we all wish to agree on matters pertaining to the divine – said that time was established by the Demiurge when the cosmos *already* had an arrangement both in terms of its soul and its body. He did not say that time was established *within* the very soul, as he did when he said that the harmonic ratios were set up within the soul by the Demiurge. (III 21.13–18)

The evidential priority given to consistency with the Platonic text again illustrates the way in which the Neoplatonic view of time is grounded in the authority of the *Timaeus* rather than in reflections on our common-sense views about time, as Aristotle's account is.

This is not to say that Proclus' view of time is a simple explication of Plato's obvious intention in the *Timaeus*. It is a consequence of unparticipated time's intellectual status – prior to all soul and to the visible cosmos – that it is a *cause* of changes in the lower psychic and visible realms. Perhaps this is an idea that is consistent with Plato's *Timaeus*, but it is surely far from obvious that it is one that his spokesman, Timaeus, expressly intends. It is also a view that finds only dubious support among our common-sense remarks about time. When we say things like 'Time has not been kind to this battered copy of *Proclus Diadochus in Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*' we do not literally mean that it is *time* that has caused its pages to become brittle. It is the exposure of the acid in the paper to humidity or UV light that has caused the pages to become brittle. While this exposure takes place *in time*, it seems implausible to think that *time itself* is a cause, distinct from the presence of the acid and the exposure to humidity or UV light. Proclus, however, argues that time is shown to be a substance, not a mere accident, by its status as an important cause of change.

> Furthermore, if time was not a substance (*ousia*), but was instead an accident (*symbebêkos*), it would not have exhibited the creative power that it actually does, whereby it makes some things come to be eternally, while others have a limited temporal duration. (III 23.22–4)