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PROCLUS' ART OF REFERRING WITH A SCALE OF EPITHETS

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The purpose of the present contribution is to take a look at the way in which, in his references to his predecessors, Proclus used a peculiar practice which I would like to call "a system of scaled values of epithets". The thesis is that we are not dealing with a mere rhetorical device but rather systematic usage which served a definite purpose: its meaning was to express an appraisal of the grade of "orthodoxy" or concentration of authentic Platonism in the opinions of the philosophers referred to.

J. M. Dillon has touched on the current issue by detecting a shift from Proclus' exuberant use of references by name in the *Timaeus* Commentary to his very sparse use of the same in the *Parmenides* Commentary. "Proclus seems to have come to the conclusion that referring by name to previous commentators was something inartistic, and he reduces them to anonymity", Dillon says.¹ We can only guess why Proclus came to these stylistic decisions. Did it have something to do with the lofty subject of the theological dialogue as such, as Neoplatonists interpreted *Parmenides*? Or could it have been that the imperial legislation of 448 condemning Porphyry's works to be burned advised the Athenian school to lower its voice, at least temporarily? However, Proclus' procedure in the *Commentary on Parmenides* seems to be even more of a puzzle when we take into account his *magnum opus*, the *Platonic Theology*. In this work Proclus returns to the use of explicit references, although not so profusely as in his youthful years (with *In Tim.* we are talking about hundreds of cases, with the *Platonic Theology* dozens).

¹*Proclus' commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, tr. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, Princeton 1987, xxxvi.

A. Ph. Segonds has argued that Proclus' way of designating Aristotle as "demonic" in contrast to the "divine" Plato contains implicit criticism.² Saffrey and Westerink note that Proclus almost always called Porphyry "philosopher" and Amelius "valorous" (γενναῖος). The later Neoplatonists' manner of honoring Iamblichus with the epithet "divine" has often been noted.³ As far as I know, however, there has been no scholarly effort to go systematically through all the relevant cases in the whole Proclean corpus and to establish a connection between his use of an ordered series of referential epithets and his theological and psychological theories.

Before turning to statistics, some other points should be made clear. Firstly, I am interested in Proclus' assessment of the relative merits of his Neoplatonic predecessors. However, in order to clarify what the system of scaled values of epithets is, it is necessary to clear up to whom it is not applied, because this non-application is a means for Proclus to define his own spiritual family. He recognizes its members in a concise statement on the history of the Platonic movement in the introductory chapters of the Platonic Theology: "These interpreters of the Platonic vision, who have given us the explanations of things divine and who gained for themselves a similar godly nature as their master (i.e., Plato) had, are, as I do believe, Plotinus the Egyptian and those who have inherited the theory from him, Amelius, Porphyry, and in third place behind them, as I suppose, like statues in their perfection, Iamblichus and Theodorus and some others, who have followed them in this divine chorus as bacchants of their own intellect around Plato. Among them, he (i.e., Syrianus), who was for me after the gods the guide for all beauty and good and who had an incorruptible manner and in the depths of his soul the most authentic and pure

² Segonds' comment to *In Alc.* 237,2, Proclus, *Sur le premier Alcibiade de Platon*. Tome II, Texte établi et traduit par A. Ph. Segonds, Paris 1986 416 n. 1. Segonds translates δαίμόνιος with "génial". See also E. R. Dodds' introduction in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Oxford 1963 xxii.

³ L. G. Westerink mentions the usage of these kinds of "traditional phrases" "as belonging to the common fund of all the Neoplatonists from Iamblichus (and in some cases Proclus) onward", L. G. Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, Amsterdam 1962, xliii. In notes on their edition of Proclus' Platonic Theology H. D. Saffrey and L. E. Westerink also thought that Proclus' aim is to mark out a hierarchical difference between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. They draw attention to Olympiodorus' explanation of "demonic" in this context and to Damascius' opinion that in spite of his ingenuity Aristotle never reached summit of the divine wisdom. Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*. Livre 1. Texte établi et traduit par H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink, Paris 1968, 141, n. 5. D. J. O'Meara deals with the same distinction between "divine" philosophers and the "demonic" Aristotle in Syrianus, D. J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, Oxford 1989, 123.

light of the truth, both made me a participant in the rest of all of Plato's philosophy and shared with me the secret doctrine which he had received from the elder masters and added me to the choir which sings the hymn of mysterious truth regarding the gods." ⁴

The second question to be resolved is what to include and what to exclude as a relevant reference to these people. Proclus has at least four different types of references: an explicit plain reference by name; a reference by name connected to an epithet; an anonymous reference, and circumlocutory expressions such as, for example, "philosopher of Rhodes", "master", "father", "grandfather" or even some Homeric phrase. I have excluded all cases of the third type, even if we know with absolute certainty who this or that τίς is.⁵ For the periphrastic expressions I have taken into consideration only those cases where there is "master" meaning Syrianus.⁶

Now, that we have a workable idea of whom we are talking about and how, let us turn to the question of the amount of references. The overwhelming winner in Proclus' citation index is Iamblichus with 114 mentions. Porphyry gets a result of 95, Theodorus of Asine 65, Amelius 53 and Plotinus 52. Longinus receives 23 and Origen only 13 mentions.

The epithets, when they are used, are: "philosopher" (φιλόσοφος), "great" (μέγας), "valorous" or "excellent" (γενναῖος), "demonic" (δαιμόνιος) and "divine" (θεῖος).⁷

Plotinus appears without an epithet 46 times. Twice he is attributed as "divine" and once "most divine" (θειότατος), "great", "philosopher" and "the Egyptian". Porphyry is without any epithet 76 times, whereas he is "philosopher" 17 times and the "greatest philosopher" (φιλοσοφώτατος) twice. Iamblichus is "divine" almost throughout the index. He appears without an epithet 33 times, is "divine" 71 times, "most divine" once, "great" four times and "philosopher" 5 times. Theodorus is "admirable" (θαυμαστός) 4 times, "philosopher" twice, "valorous" once, great 11 times. Amelius is "valorous" ten

⁴ *Plat. Theol.* 1,6,16–7,8. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

⁵ For example *In Parm.* 1047,22 and 1080,11 refer to Plotinus' words on "intellect drunk on nectar", but Plotinus is explicitly mentioned in this context only in *Plat. Theol.* 1,67,2.

⁶ As Saffrey and Westerink (above n. 3) xiv, n. 2 show, Syrianus is "father" *In Tim.* 2,253,31, 3,35,26, *In Parm.* 1142,11, *In Remp.* 2,318,4, and Syrianus' and Proclus' teacher Plutarch "grandfather" *In Parm.* 1058,22. The Philosopher of Rhodes means Theodorus and the expression is due to a copying error as Saffrey has argued, H. D. Saffrey, *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris 2000, 121.

⁷ I am not absolutely sure that γενναῖος is superior to μέγας, but its dimension of "spirited" seems to connect it to "demonic" and so it is a more "inspired" term than μέγας.

times, "demonic" twice. Origen is always without an epithet. Longinus is called a "critic" and Proclus also reminds us of Plotinus' words that he was a philologist, not a philosopher.⁸

The cases in which a one philosopher is given an attribute and another not, or where several names are mentioned at the same time but with different epithets, are interesting.⁹ Theodorus of Asine is twice "great", also once when he appears with Plotinus who is left without an attribute.¹⁰ Porphyry is denied an epithet in two cases when he has the "divine" Iamblichus at his side. In these cases omitting an epithet certainly implies a doctrinal reproach.¹¹

The number of references surely indicates the "impact factor" of each predecessor for Proclus. However, references serve as much for praise as for criticism. It would be mistake to assume that Porphyry is so much more important to Proclus than Plotinus, which the figures alone would imply. Proclus' preferences are highlighted with more precision when the epithets are brought into the picture. So let us do some evaluation on the basis of them. First, we will turn the references into scores. We will use a scale from 1 to 6, giving one point to every mention without an epithet, two to "philosopher", three to "great" and so on, in the order mentioned above. For the sake of simplicity we will not take into account the superlatives, but count "most divine" as "divine" and so on. As local origin is irrelevant for doctrinal purity we will count Plotinus' case of "Egyptian" as a case without attribute (similarly for Theodorus' epithet of Asinaeus).¹²

Thus we get 70 points for Plotinus, 114 for Porphyry and 487 for Iamblichus. Porphyry's gain in comparison to Plotinus is now more modest, but Iamblichus' superiority to the others is demonstrated even more clearly. I equate "admirable" with "valorous", which gives Theodorus 104 points and Amelius 81. Thus, the ascending order of "orthodoxy" is Plotinus, Amelius, Theodorus Porphyry and Iamblichus.

⁸ *In Tim.* 1,86,24: οὗτος μὲν οὖν φιλόλογος, ὡσπερ Πλωτῖνος εἰπεῖν περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγεται, καὶ οὐ φιλόσοφος.

⁹ For example, *In Tim.* 1,336,19: "θεῖος Ἰάμβλιχος" vs. "γενναῖος Ἀμέλιος".

¹⁰ *In Tim.* 3,333,29.

¹¹ The second of these is particularly interesting, "divine" Iamblichus criticizes Porphyry who (erroneously) thinks that his concept is "Plotinian", *In Tim.* 1,307,15.

¹² I cannot explain why Proclus emphasizes Plotinus' ethnicity in the famous passages on the history of the Platonic movement. It surely conveys a solemn tone appropriate to the context (as is well known, Egyptians were seen as one of the sacred races). It is meaningful to clarify Theodorus' origin in order to separate him from his namesake, the mathematician of Cyzicus also mentioned by Proclus.

Plotinus and Porphyry are ambivalent characters in the history of Platonism as Proclus understands it. On the one hand, Proclus explicitly recognizes Plotinus as a founder of the newer "family" of authentic Platonists;¹³ on the other hand, authentic Platonism is often defined through a sharp critique of Plotinus' positions.¹⁴ This ambivalence is reflected in the epithets associated with the names of Plotinus and Porphyry. Plotinus sometimes attains the highest scores, but Porphyry, while never getting beyond "the greatest philosopher", beats the master in general "orthodoxy". As for Iamblichus, Proclus is sometimes irritated by his defective rigor in Platonic exegesis and his visionary style, but rarely finds fault with him regarding doctrinal issues.¹⁵

Proclus' procedure allows the borders of genuine fellowship to be defined. It is used only for the assessment of insiders. The Middle Platonists are, for Proclus, at best brave exegetes and "topmost Platonists" (τῶν Πλατωνικῶν οἱ κορυφαῖοι).¹⁶ As far as I know, they are never granted the higher terms of the Proclean scale.

¹³ The term "Neoplatonism" is sometimes criticized as being anachronistic (see for example, M. Baltes, *EPINOHMATA. Kleine Schriften zur antiken Philosophie und homerischen Dichtung*, München – Leipzig 2005, 179, M. Edwards, *Culture and Philosophy in the Age of Plotinus*, Oxford 2006, 2). This criticism is well founded as it points out that what the Neoplatonists thought they were doing, was to recuperate the "authentic" thought of Plato. It should also be remembered that being truthful in any traditions – be it philosophical, mythical, religious, or literary – was for them always a part of Platonism, because truth was indivisible and always the same. Thus Orpheus, Homer, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Parmenides and the mysterious Ammikartos were also predecessors. What was specifically Platonic was to express this common truth in the apodictic language of scientific, dialectical philosophy. This genuine task of philosophy was regained after the dark ages by thinkers who Proclus regarded as his immediate predecessors. The first of them was Plotinus as Proclus recognizes. This feeling of belonging to a defined spiritual current was divided by the successors of Proclus who were also conscious of the fundamental reorientation inside the family caused by Iamblichus. Thus Neoplatonism is more than a label coined by posterity. Thomas Whittaker has aptly remarked that Proclus even came very close to modern denomination in his expression "τῶν δὲ νεωτέρων οἱ ἀπὸ Πλωτίνου πάντες Πλατωνικοί", *In Tim.* 2,88,12. For Whittaker's views see T. Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists*, Cambridge 1961 (orig. 1918), 232.

¹⁴ For example, *In Tim.* 3,231, 333, 334; *In Parm.* 948; *ET* 211.

¹⁵ For example, *In Tim.* 1,209,1–12. Iamblichus' and Proclus' different attitude to Plato's word is very well pointed out by P. Athanassiadi, *JRS* 83 (1993) 115–130. The same point is expressed more strongly against Plotinus *In Alc.* 227,24–228,1: "... we are the exegetes of Plato and do not cope with what he says according to our own opinions".

¹⁶ *In Remp.* 2,96,11. In this same passage Proclus praises Porphyry above all others for being the perfect exegete of the truths hidden in the myth of Er (Πορφύριος, ὃν ἐγὼ πάντων μάλιστα τῶν ἐν τῷ μύθῳ κεκρυμμένων γενέσθαι φημι τέλεον ἐξηγητήν).

There is, however, a unique character who is at the same time within the "family" and outside of it. Defining Aristotle's proper place in the philosophical tradition was a problem for later Neoplatonism. When Aristotle appears with an epithet in Proclus he is almost always "demonic", although he is once "divine", and also "wonderful" ("admirable").¹⁷ Considering the huge impact of Aristotle on Proclus the fact that he is systematically denied the highest credit and located on the same level as, say, Amelius, is very significant. Proclus and Syrianus saw in Aristotle's logic a necessary tool for all philosophical study. His contributions to psychology, political theory, and physics were valued as useful preparation for Plato's respective theories. However, Aristotle deviated from the true tradition in his critique of the theory of forms, in his rejection of the Platonic theory of the first principles and in his theology, which did not ascend higher than to the demiurgic level – according to the Neoplatonist hierarchy of the divine orders.¹⁸ Thus Aristotle was accepted as a guide to the "lesser mysteries" of the authentic – Platonist – philosophy, but he was rejected inasmuch as he was seen as a founder of the rival metaphysical – Peripatetic – school.

If we try to seek a wider context for the Proclean manner of hierarchical evaluation, we can find it from two quarters. One is Christianity going through dogmatic development under the circumstances of the Trinitarian and Christological strife. The church leaders had the same need as Proclus to administer doctrinal praise and reproach. However, they exercised their ingeniousness on rather a lower scale. This is well shown, for example, by such an intelligent and cultivated leader as Severus of Antioch, who made life easier for his readers by systematically providing labels for the authors cited, but against the monotonous "saints" (Cyril, Theophile, Gregory and Athanasius etc.) he has Nestorius "the heretic", "miserable" Theodoretus, "impious" Andreas, and so on.¹⁹ In the Neoplatonic debate, disagreements are never expressed in this way. For example, Proclus introduces intense criticism with words: "... from these things we are urged to speak openly against Plotinus and

¹⁷ *Plat. Theol.* 3,55,20, *In Tim.* 2,9,8. We find at least twenty cases of "demonic" Aristotle.

¹⁸ Proclus generally follows his teacher's evaluation of Aristotle, even though his attitude is a little more critical; see for example *In Tim.* 1,6,21–4. An excellent account of Syrianus' view of Aristotle is H. D. Saffrey, "How did Syrianus regard Aristotle?", in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed*, London 1990, 173–180; see also D. J. O'Meara (above n. 3) 123.

¹⁹ R. Hespel (ed.), Sévère d'Antioche, *Le Philalèthe*. (CSCO 133+134), Louvain 1952.

the great Theodorus ...".²⁰ Merely these tones should advise us against effacing the difference between Christian orthodoxy and Neoplatonic "orthodoxy".²¹

Another context is provided by the sophisticated grades of the early Byzantine bureaucratic and social nomenclature with all its *viri clarissimi, spectabiles* etc. As the heads of one of the most prestigious higher education institutions of the age, Syrianus and Proclus were well acquainted with that world too.

However, there are more intriguing aspects to this than the general cultural background. The system of scaled values of epithets emerges from the deepest assumptions of Neoplatonic thought. Theology, the theory of the soul, and the Neoplatonic concept of philosophy are all relevant here. The attributes

²⁰ *In Tim.* 3,333,29: ἀπὸ δὴ τούτων ὀρμώμενοι παρρησιασόμεθα πρὸς Πλωτῖνον καὶ τὸν μέγαν Θεόδωρον . . . , Proclus was not ignorant of the current debates in the Christian camp as is shown, for example, by his remark that "a malicious person could not be in accord with himself" in one of the rare passages which contains mentions of contemporary conditions, *In Alc.* 264,7–265,3 (τὸν μοχθηρὸν ὁμολογεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀδύνατον ... πᾶς οὖν ὁ κακὸς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐστὶν ἀσύμφωνος· εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, πολλῶ μᾶλλον πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ἐστὶ τοιοῦτος. καὶ πῶς γὰρ τοῖς ἐκτὸς ἑαυτοῦ τις ὁμολογήσειεν αὐτὸς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν στασιαστικῶς διακείμενος; καὶ οἱ ἄθεοι δὴ οὖν πάντες καὶ οἱ ἀκόλαστοι καὶ οἱ ἄδικοι διαφέρονται πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἐναρμονίως ἔχοιεν ἀνεπιστήμονες ὄντες.), Saffrey's treatment of this passages, H. D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris 1990, 206. It is interesting to note that there is some common technical terminology in Christian and Neoplatonic controversies, Proclus criticizes Plotinus and others supposing consubstantiality (ὁμοούσιον) between human and divine souls, *In Parm.* 948,23; *In Tim.* 3,245,19–246,24.

²¹ Proclus has the term "orthodoxy" (*In Tim.* 2,309,10–13) and speaks about "life according to the most orthodox way" (βίον ... ὀρθοδοξαστικόν) (*In Alc.* 76,9). The usage of these terms is associated with traditional epistemological and cosmological questions, which have nothing to do with doctrinal purity. If we are not afraid of hair-splitting we could say that the Neoplatonists were not even interested in forming a body of "right opinions" as they tried to go further, beyond opinion, towards scientific knowledge and mystical union. The goal of Neoplatonist philosophy was to attain the philosophical truth and uncorrupted devotion towards the gods through the "correct" Platonist reading of the traditional myths and rites (Καὶ κατ' αὐτὸν ἄρα τὸν τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἔνθεον νοῦν τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα μεθαρμόζοντες εἰς τὴν περὶ τῶν ὄλων ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀποκρυπτομένην θεωρίαν ἀναπτύσσοντες τευξόμεθα τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον εἰλικρινοῦς θεραπείας, *Plat. Theol.* 4,132,4–8), but the Neoplatonic community was never an ideological organization of power like the Church. As Dillon rightly says: "Towards the end of antiquity, then, Platonism takes on some of the trappings of a religion, and a greater degree of organization ..., but the fact remains that the Platonic tradition attained self-definition without the aid of any regulating structure or hierarchy of accredited teachers, such as Christianity so quickly built up for itself.", J. M. Dillon "Self-definition in Later Platonism", in E. P. Sanders (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition. Vol. III: Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World*, Philadelphia 1983, 60–75.

used by Proclus correlate, no doubt intentionally, with his hierarchy of the higher beings. A philosopher is one who has realized to its full extent the faculty of the soul most appropriate to human beings, that of rational thinking. The higher scale of the attributes corresponds to the levels of the superhuman beings: heroes, demons, and gods. We need not be confused by the fact that elsewhere Proclus makes different subdivisions among these classes; the important thing is that he assumes that these divisions always keep a precise proportion.

In Platonic Theology Proclus says that certain human souls are called divine because of their similarity to the gods (contrasted to the three other divine modes of existence; the proper gods exist as gods as such, divine intellects are divine by unity, and demons are divine by participation).²² Now this similarity is to be understood in a stronger than metaphorical sense. To clarify this, it is necessary to deal with the Neoplatonic theory of the pre-existence and transmigration of souls. According to Proclus, human souls come to the temporal world from eternity, where they live in blessed contemplation of real being. This idea is, of course, part of classical Platonism. For Proclus all human souls are divine in the sense that their form of life depends, however dimly, on the god they have followed in their celestial condition. That is, they belong to a certain divine series.²³ But the most perfect souls do not only choose for their incarnated life a mode of living corresponding to the qualities of the series, but actually live according to the godlike demon in their soul, which connects them on an even higher level, to the actual leader god. Thus, those souls who lead a life that brings them back to their starting point, have, up there – in celestial place – as here – in the world of becoming –, the same demon, while for the imperfect souls, the demon in essence, is another than the one according to which they live. This is Proclus' explanation for the story in the biography of Plotinus in which Porphyry states how surprised an Egyptian magician was when he conjured up an appearance of the protective deity of Plotinus, and it was seen to be not an ordinary guardian demon, as usual in these kind of sessions, but a demon-god.²⁴ Plotinus' soul belonged to the very

²² Proclus' treatise on how to define the meaning of the word "divine", *Plat. Theol.* 1,114,5–116,3.

²³ Marinus states that Proclus himself belonged to the series of Hermes and he has the same soul as the mathematician and Pythagorean Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Vita Procli* 28.

²⁴ *In Alc.* 73,4–8: διὸ καὶ ὁ Αἰγύπτιος τὸν Πλωτῖνον ἐθαύμασεν ὡς θεῖον ἔχοντα τὸν δαίμονα. ταῖς μὲν οὖν ἀποκαταστατικῶς ζώσαις ψυχαῖς ὁ αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ἄνω κἀνταῦθα

special class of souls which have not come to the world of generation by the fall. On the contrary, these souls have been sent here in order to help their companions to liberate themselves from the chains of body and matter.²⁵

Foremost among these blessed souls is Proclus' master Syrianus. In the Parmenides Commentary he praises the beloved teacher in the same vein as in the passage of Platonic Theology cited above. Syrianus "came to men as the exact image of philosophy for the benefit of the souls here below, in recompense for the statues, the temples and the whole ritual of worship, and as the chief author of salvation for men who now live and for those to come hereafter".²⁶

With these eulogies we have come to the last aspect of Proclus' system of references which needs to be explained. Proclus usually refers to Syrianus with the word *καθηγεμών* (teacher, mentor, guide, leader or master). The term most often – 48 times – signifies Syrianus, and the rest of the cases refer to other teacher-pupil relationships. Syrianus is often referred to, but his name is mentioned only once – in the epigram which Proclus composed for their shared tomb.²⁷ How does this agree with the scalar reference theory and its supposed fundamentals in Neoplatonic metaphysics and psychology? It stands to reason that the "divine" Iamblichus in comparison with the humbler Porphyry, represents a higher philosophical truth, but when at the side of the "most divine" Iamblichus Syrianus appears in periphrastic mode and without an attribute²⁸, how can we explain that the case is just the opposite?

Actually, the lack of an epithet does not always imply a reproach and "divine" is not necessarily the highest credit. For Proclus the highest gods are secret and ineffable. Proclus recalls this theological truth by his gracious manner in dealing with his master. Here we can see a parallel with metaphysics,

δαίμων, ταῖς δὲ ἀτελεστέραις ἄλλος μὲν ὁ κατ' οὐσίαν δαίμων, ἄλλος δὲ ὁ κατὰ τὸν προβεβλημένον βίον. Proclus refers to Porph. *Vita Plotini* 10.

²⁵ For Syrianus' and Proclus' theory of the superior souls, see O'Meara (above n. 3) 150–151.

²⁶ *In Parm.* 618,9–13 (translation G. R. Morrow and J. M. Dillon). Incidentally, a lot of the praises which Proclus dedicates to Syrianus is used by Syrianus for the ancient representatives of wisdom; compare, for example, Proclus on Syrianus: τὸ γνησιώτατον καὶ καθαρώτατον τῆς ἀληθείας φῶς τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς κόλποις ἀχράντως ὑποδεξάμενος (*Plat. Theol.* 1,7,1–4) and Syrianus on the successors of the "divine" Pythagoras: πάντες οἱ γνησίως τὰ κείνου δόγματα τοῖς καθαρωτάτοις κόλποις τῆς ἑαυτῶν διανοίας ὑποδεξάμενοι (*In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria* 81,31).

²⁷ *AG* 7,341. H. Beckby, *Anthologia Graeca* (AG), Munich, 1965–1968.

²⁸ *In Tim.* 1,77,23–25.

where the highest hypostasis – the One – and its counterpart – matter – are both without determinations, the first by excellence and the second by privation.

Like so much in Proclus, the system of referring was probably a part of Syrianus' heritage. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Syrianus refers to the seventh book of "divine" Iamblichus' treatise on the doctrines of the Pythagoreans. In the same work he also mentions "divine" Plotinus (immediately after Iamblichus without an epithet).²⁹ His inheritance from Syrianus is also confirmed by Proclus' fellow student Hermias' use of the system. In his commentary on Phaedrus Hermias presents "divine" Iamblichus at the side of the "philosopher" Porphyry.³⁰ Damascius, Ammonius, Simplicius and the unknown writer of the *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* used the same system, usually referring to "divine" Iamblichus. Damascius also speaks about "great" Plotinus. For him Syrianus is a "philosopher", once at the side of "great" Iamblichus. He placed his friend Isidore, Proclus' second successor and his own predecessor as the head of the Athenian school, on the level of "great". Proclus' ranking in Damascius is "philosopher", but for the scholiast of his *Cratylus* commentary, the author of the *Prolegomena* and for Olympiodorus Proclus is "divine".³¹

"Let it be known that the philosopher Proclus, commenting on the *Enneads* of great Plotinus, says that he who wrote the answer to the letter of Porphyry was divine (θεσπέσιος)³² Iamblichus ...". With these words a scholiast presents two hundred years of Neoplatonist debate at the beginning of a treatise to which Renaissance scholars gave its current name, *De Mysteriis*. This comment has been a crucial evidence for establishing the authorship of the work; it also shows how the peculiar Neoplatonic system of referring survived.

²⁹ Syr. *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria*. 202,4; 114,8.

³⁰ Hermias *In Phaed.* 113,25.

³¹ Damasc. *In Parm.* 256,24: θεῖος Ἰάμβλιχος; Ammonius, *In Aristotelis librum de interpretatione commentarius*. 202,4; Simplicius, *In Aristotelis de caelo commentaria*, 7,1,24, Anon. *Prolegomena philosophiae Platonicae* 26,13; Damasc. *In Parm.* 112,16: ὁ φιλόσοφος Συριανός, ... ὁ μέγας Ἰάμβλιχος, Damasc. *Vita Isidori* (ap. Photium, *Bibl. codd.* 181, 242) Fragment 12,1: ὁ μέγας Ἰσίδωρος; θεῖος Πρόκλος, Procl. *In Crat.* 154,4, *Prolegomena* 26,5, Olympiodorus, *In Aristotelis meteora commentaria* 266,37.

³² Iambl. *De Myst.*, (preliminary scholion) 1,1–5: Ἰστέον ὅτι ὁ φιλόσοφος Πρόκλος, ὑπομνηματίζων τὰς τοῦ μεγάλου Πλωτίνου Ἐννεάδας, λέγει ὅτι ὁ ἀντιγράφων πρὸς τὴν προκειμένην τοῦ Πορφυρίου ἐπιστολὴν ὁ θεσπέσιός ἐστιν Ἰάμβλιχος.

To conclude, we have seen that the Neoplatonic mode of philosophizing in the form of a highly sophisticated commentary also produced an art of referring, of which an essential part is the system of epithets conveying an impression of a well-defined order of ranks. This procedure was probably launched by Syrianus and we see it in full bloom in Proclus. The method is far more precise than could be expected at first sight, as it turns out to be conducted within terms rooted in specific metaphysical and psychological theories. Later Neoplatonists continued the usage of it down to the time of Simplicius and Olympiodorus. It has an afterlife among the scholiasts of whom some at least were conscious of its significance.

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