

SYRIANUS THE PLATONIST ON ETERNITY AND TIME

INTRODUCTION

In his commentaries on the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, Proclus credits his teacher, Syrianus, with formulating a position for eternity and time in the universe, including the circuits of time through which soul moves and the physical manifestations of time as day and night. It appears from the collected testimonia that Syrianus relies most heavily on Iamblichus' understanding of eternity and time, beginning first and foremost with the assumption that time and eternity are things in their own right, not simply measures of motion. From Proclus' *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* commentaries, it seems that Syrianus makes four major points about eternity and time which reflect back to Iamblichean theories. (1) The place of eternity: both Iamblichus and Syrianus make eternity the summit of the intelligible realm, with the effect that it functions as the realm of the forms. Proclus takes Syrianus a step further so that eternity functions in a causal way. (2) Primal time: Iamblichus creates an intellectual time which transcends the cosmos and governs the psychic world, but is placed in the noeric world. Syrianus likewise claims an intellectual time, but places it lower so that it is located in the psychic realm. (3) Day and night as physical measures of time: Syrianus adopts Iamblichus' notion whereby transcendent time is distinct from transcendent eternity in the soul. Moreover Syrianus adds that day and night act as physical manifestations of transcendent time. (4) How souls partake in time: Iamblichus says that souls move in different ways depending on the metaphysical level of their movement, possibly enabling Syrianus' argument (albeit indirectly) that souls move in time through circuits. In the passages of Syrianus on eternity and time described in the pages below, it seems clear that Syrianus relies on Iamblichus' theories, whereby eternity and time are *noëtoi*, although Syrianus continually modifies Iamblichean notions so that eternity and time exist at lower levels of the universe in a schema that is more spread out to begin with. The result appears to be that for Syrianus eternity and time have a noeric element not present for Iamblichus' eternity and time.

With his outline of Syrianus' plan of eternity and time, Proclus gives insight into the greater philosophical contribution of Syrianus, whose organization of the universe shaped the structuring tendencies of the Athenian School of Platonism. Namely, Syrianus offers a universe in which Eternity and Time represent connected entities, insofar as the latter participates in the higher stratum of the former. Soul, moreover, interacts with Time when the circuits of time allow for its procession; thus, it is time which allows soul to process into the realms lower than it. In this way, Syrianus creates a highly-schematic, inter-connected universe, where every phenomenon has its own metaphysical place in a hierarchical universe.

THE METAPHYSICAL PLACE OF ETERNITY

In *In Tim.* 3.15.11ff., Proclus gives the following account of Syrianus' understanding of Eternity:

If Eternity reveals a duality, even though we often strive to conceal this (for the ‘always’ is linked co-ordinately with ‘being’ and *aiōn* is that which ‘always’ is), so if that is the case, it would seem to have the monad of being prior to it and the One-Being, and that it is this ‘One’ in which it is remaining, as indeed our Master thought in reference to this One, in order that it itself should be a one prior to the dyad, inasmuch as it does not depart from the One. The duality which manifests its multiplicity in it in an anticipatory way is united to the One-Being in which Eternity remains, while the multiplicity of intelligibles are united to Eternity which holds together all of their summits transcendently and unitarily.¹ (trans. Wear)

Syrianus proposes the etymological explanation that Eternity is the duality of ‘always’ and ‘being’ (ἀεί + ὄν). Prior to *aiōn* are, more immediately, One-Being (the product of *peras* and *apeiria*) and, at a higher rank, One. *Aiōn* is better understood as one aspect of One-Being: hence, at the level of One-Being there is a triad of *to hen on*, *aei*, and *to aiōn on*, the first participant of Eternity (15.29–31). Lines 15.19–21 and 16.1 offer the puzzling description of Eternity as ‘Eternity which remains in the one’. For Iamblichus, the ‘one’ in which eternity remains is the Good (sc. the One). Syrianus, however, seems to argue that Eternity remains, rather, in One-Being as the summit of the intelligible realm. In this way, Syrianus makes use of the Iamblichean development that the lowest element of one cosmic level is the highest of the one following it; still, *aiōn* is distinct and secondary to One-Being.

It is perhaps helpful to compare Syrianus’ system here with that of Iamblichus, as the two are similar but deviate in slight ways.² For Iamblichus, the One presides over the dyad of Limit and Unlimitedness, followed by the product of Limit and Unlimitedness, the *henōmenon* or ‘Unified’. In the Syrianic cosmos, the One-Being is also the product of the Limit and Unlimitedness, as the summit of the noetic world. Syrianus’ one qualification is that the henads are the contents of the *henōmenon*. The following diagram demonstrates a comparison between the henadic realms of Iamblichus and Syrianus:

Henadic realm

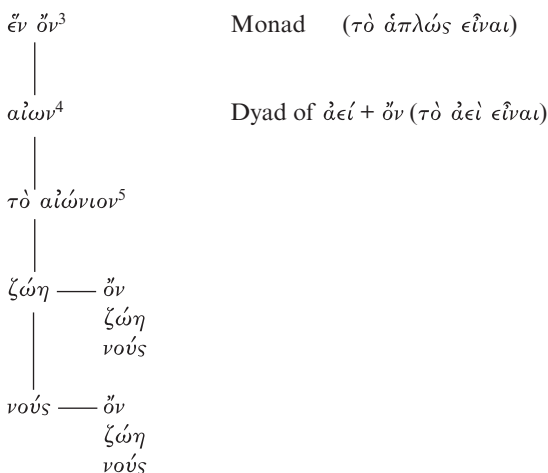


¹ In *Tim* 3.15.11–21 εἰ δὲ ὁ αἰὼν δυνάδα ἐμφαίνει, καὶ πολλάκις αὐτὸ κρύπτειν σπουδάζωμεν (τὸ γὰρ αἰεὶ τῷ ὄντι συνάπτεται κατὰ ταῦτόν καὶ ἔστιν αἰὼν ὁ αἰεὶ ὢν), εἰσικεν ἔχειν τὴν μονάδα τοῦ ὄντος πρὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ἐν ὄν καὶ μένειν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ ἐνί, ὥς ᾧετο περὶ τούτου τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ ὁ ἡμέτερος καθηγεμῶν, ἵνα καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡ πρὸ τῆς δυνάδος, ἅτε τοῦ ἐνὸς μὴ ἀφιστάμενος, καὶ ἡ μὲν ἐν αὐτῷ προεμφαίνουσα τὸ πλῆθος δυνὰς ἐνίξεται τῷ ἐνί ὄντι, ἐν ᾧ μένει ὁ αἰὼν, τὸ δὲ πλῆθος τῶν νοητῶν αὐτῷ τῷ αἰῶνι περιέχοντι αὐτῶν καὶ συνέχοντι πάσας ἐξηρημένως καὶ ἐνιαίως τὰς ἀκρότητας.

² The similarity between Iamblichus and Syrianus has been a source of confusion. A.J. Festugière, *Proclus Commentaire sur le Timée: tome III* (Paris, 1968), 32, attributes lines 14.19–29 to Syrianus, citing Diehl, app. crit. and the Addenda of E. Diehl, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* (Leipzig, 1906), 504. The phrase τῷ θεολογικωτάτῳ τῶν ἐξηγητῶν, however, seems to refer not to Syrianus, who is generally ‘our Teacher’ or ‘my Master’, but to Iamblichus. The content of the discussion, moreover, seems to concern a secondary One distinct from the first principle, which would certainly be an Iamblichean concept. The main point is that the first view is that Eternity rests in the *One*, whereas for Syrianus, it rests in the One-Being, summit of the noetic world.

τὸ ἡνωμένον
[ἐνάδες]

Syrianus' explanation



Proclus' doctrine of Eternity places eternity in the second triad of the intelligible realm, suitable to eternity's dyadic character, as it likewise is dyadic.⁶ As with Syrianus, Eternity remains in the 'One' of the first intelligible realm, *to hen*, and precedes Intellect – residing in the third intelligible triad—in a causal way.⁷ Thus, Proclus says that eternity is substantially Being through participation and Intellect, in a causal way.⁸

In lines 15.19–22, Proclus reports that Syrianus taught: τὸ δὲ πλῆθος τῶν νοητῶν αὐτῷ τῷ αἰῶνι περιέχοντι αὐτῶν καὶ συνέχοντι πάσας: the dyad in Eternity gives an anticipatory image of multiplicity. *Aiōn* contains the summit of forms – the monads of the forms, which are in beings and act as archetypes of beings – but is not mixed with them. In other words, it relates to them without them relating to it, and

³ The One-that-is is the cause of the existence of beings.

⁴ Cause of existence as a whole – it unites intelligibles. Eternity unites the intelligible henads. Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.15. 13–15. In *In Tim.* 3.12. 12–22, 12ff., Proclus says, 'What else would eternity be but the one embracing principle of the intelligible henads and of the summit of their multitude (by henads I mean the forms of the intelligible creatures and the classes of all these intelligible forms); also the one cause of the unchangeable duration of them, not existing on the levels of the many intelligibles, nor assembled therefrom, but present to them transcendentally, of itself arranging and as it were shaping them, and effecting this by their simultaneous totality.' Translation W. O'Neil, 'Time and Eternity in Proclus', *Phronesis* 7 (1962), 163.

⁵ Participates Being and everlastingness.

⁶ See O'Neil (n. 4), 162–4.

⁷ Lines 15.8–15 and 16.1ff. Directly preceding and following Syrianus' discussion, Proclus gives the opinion of the Peripatetic philosopher Strato of Lampsacus, who says that the eternal is joined to τὸ ἐν. This is of interest mainly because it is unusual that Proclus (or possibly Syrianus) was able to make a reference to Strato, the materialist leader of the Aristotelian school in the third century.

⁸ Proclus, *Elements of Theology* prop. 65. See also Proclus, *In Tim.* 2.14. 11–15; *Platonic Theology* 3, p. 57, n. 11 (p. 133).

thus preserves its own unity while embracing their multiplicity.⁹ Iamblichus, on the other hand, argues that forms are not in the One-Being, but monads of forms are in the One-Being.¹⁰ In this system, Iamblichus' henads are objects of intellect transferred as contents of the *hen on* – they are still *noêtoi*, but *noêtoi* in the intelligible realm.

Of the categories of existence and eternal existence, Syrianus says,

Any any rate, if something exists eternally, this thing also exists; but conversely, if something exists, it is not the case that it always exists. Existence is a more universal and generic concept than eternal existence and for this reason it is nearer to the cause of all, both of true beings and of henads in the realm of true being, and of generation and of matter. (trans. Wear)¹¹

Here, Being is a more general and more generic category than eternal being, insofar as it is nearer to the cause of all things. With this description of Eternity, Proclus describes Syrianus' system as containing three entities in the following order: the One-Being as the monad of beings; Eternity as a dyad, containing eternity along with being; and the eternal, which participates in being and the eternal and is not the primal eternal being as is Eternity. The One-Being, finally, is the cause of simple existence to all things which exist, real and unreal, with Eternity being the cause only of their remaining in existence.¹²

PRIMAL TIME

In *In Parm.* 1217.13–1219.9, Proclus 'calls attention' to the teachings of Syrianus on the place of time in the universe. In this discussion of the One's transcendence over Time, Syrianus relates Parmenides' lemma that the One is younger and older and the

⁹ See J. Opsomer, 'Deriving the three intelligible triads from the *Timaeus*', in A.-P. Segonds and C. Steel (edd.) *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne. Actes du colloque international de Louvain (13–16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H.D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink*, (Leuven–Paris, 2000), 365.

That Eternity holds an image of the forms is also evident insofar as the paradigmatic Model participates in Eternity: in terms of the three intelligible triads, the One and One-Being exist in the first triad, Eternity in the second, and the *αὐτοζῶον* (the paradigmatic Model) in the third.

¹⁰ Iamblichus, *In Philebum*, Dillon fr. 4 (=Damascius, *In Philebum* 105, p. 49–51 West): 'Not even in the second realm is there separation properly so called. For the creation of distinct forms is a function of Intelligence in the first place, and the first Intelligence is the Pure Intelligence; for which reason Iamblichus declares that on this level one may place the monads of the Forms, meaning by 'monads' the undifferentiated element in each. Wherefore it is the object of intellection for the intellectual realm, and the cause of Being for the Forms, even as the second element is the cause of Life in the intellectual realm, and the third the cause of their creation as Forms.' Translation J. Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis. In Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (Leiden, 1973).

'Ὅτι οὐδὲ ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ διακόσμῳ ἡ πάντα διάκρισις. ἡ γὰρ περιγεγραμμένη εἰδοποιία τοῦ πρώτου ἐστίν, νοῦς δὲ πρῶτος ὁ καθαρὸς νοῦς.

¹¹ *In Tim* 3.15.23–8: εἴ τι γοῦν αἰεῖ ἔστι, τοῦτο καὶ ἔστιν· οὐκ ἀνάπαυιν δὲ εἴ τι ἔστι, τοῦτο καὶ αἰεῖ ἔστιν· ὀλκώτερον ἄρα καὶ γενικώτερον τοῦ αἰεῖ εἶναι τὸ εἶναι καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ἐγγυτέρω τοῦ πάντων αἰτίου καὶ τῶν ὄντων καὶ τῶν ἐνάδων τῶν ἐν τοῖς οὐσι καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς γενέσεως καὶ τῆς ὕλης.

See a parallel passage in Proclus, *ET*, prop. 57: lines 25ff.: 'For if it is a cause, it is more perfect and more powerful than its consequent. And if so, it must cause a greater number of effects: for greater power produces more effects, equal power, equal effects, and less power, fewer.' Translation E.R. Dodds, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1963).

¹² *In Tim* 3.15.28–16.2: τρία οὖν ταῦτα ἐστὶν ἐξῆς· τὸ ἐν ὃν ὡς μονὰς τῶν ὄντων, ὁ αἰὼν ὡς διὰς μετὰ τοῦ εἶναι τὸ αἰεῖ ἔχουσα, τὸ αἰώνιον μετέχον καὶ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ τοῦ αἰεῖ καὶ οὐ τὸ πρώτως αἰεῖ ὃν ὡς αἰὼν. καὶ τὸ μὲν ἐν τῷ εἶναι μόνως αἴτιον πᾶσι τοῖς ὁπωσοῦν εἴτε ὄντως εἴτε οὐκ ὄντως, ὁ δὲ αἰὼν τῆς ἐν τῷ εἶναι διαμονῆς.

same age as everything to the divine soul which participates in primal Time. Syrianus' doctrine of primal Time here relates to his concept of what takes place in the second hypothesis – he offers a determined effort to identify each level of divine souls. The One, moreover, is denied. Regarding the lemma, Proclus wishes to prove that the One does not participate in Time by demonstrating that the One does not participate in being younger or older or of the same age. Proclus gives the views of five groups of commentators on this topic, beginning with the view of those who believed that all things, including God, were comprehended by time (1213.17ff.). This group of physical philosophers denies progress of time to the One, placing the intelligible world in a state of eternity and positing the Stoic position of the Soul as the supreme principle. There is, thus, no difference between higher and lower time. Anaxagoras reflects this idea with his concept of the soul, but more pointedly, this theory reflects Plotinus and the idea of holistic time – pure soul is not subject to our temporality, rather discursive thought is true of world soul. Proclus responds that the One is not in body (for it would have to be in another), not in Soul (for it does not partake in Time), and not in Intellect (for it does not experience motion or rest, the defining characteristic of Intellect).

Next, he discusses what Plato means by time in 1214.24ff., dividing the discussion into the views of five groups of commentators. The first group, '[m]ost of those who have concerned themselves with this', seems to include Plotinus (*Enn.* 6.9.3.2), and says that Plato refers to the 'obvious type of time', explaining that Plato says coming to being is peculiar to those which participate in time. This view is based on *Parmenides* 141A where Plato says that coming to be is proper to those things that participate in time. Proclus points out that the transcendence of ordinary time is not peculiar to the One because Intellect transcends ordinary time, as well (1215.29ff.). Because the One transcends Intellect, it must transcend Eternity, the realm of the Intellect.

The second group of commentators (1216.3ff.), who may possibly represent the opinion of Amelius,¹³ equates time with eternity. These commentators claim that in the second hypothesis (*Parm.* 152A), when the One participates in Time, it really refers to Eternity. Proclus protests that Plato cannot mean Eternity here, because he uses distinctive temporal expressions, 'older than oneself', 'younger than oneself', and so on.

The third commentator (1216.15) uses the Neopythagorean identification of the primal god with *kairos*.¹⁴ This position says that the One exists in the level of being superior to eternity, in a state of instantaneousness. John Dillon identifies this commentator with Porphyry,¹⁵ who describes the One as beyond Time and Eternity. Porphyry, moreover, fits the bill as this commentator with his description of the

¹³ John Dillon offers Porphyry, Iamblichus or Amelius as the author of this opinion. Because the third group of commentators represents the opinion of Porphyry, while the fourth, that of Iamblichus, I have taken the second group to be that of Amelius, given Proclus' trajectory in offering school opinions. Still, it is perhaps best to defer to Dillon's more cautious and educated identification. Cf. Dillon, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton, 1987), 558, n. 80.

¹⁴ According to John Dillon, this is a Neo-Pythagorean deduction from the *Philebus* 66A, *Politicus* 284E and *Laws* 4.709B. Cf. Dillon (n. 13), 559, n. 81. For a discussion on *kairos* as the supreme principle, see Proclus, *In Alc.* 121; Plotinus *Enn.* 6.9.18.44; Damascius, *In Phil.* 253–4 p. 119.

¹⁵ See Proclus, *PT* 1.11 p. 51.4. In *περὶ ἀρχῶν*, Porphyry declares the highest aspect of nous (the supreme principle) to be *προαιώνιος* while nous is *αἰώνιος*. See Dillon (n. 13), 559, n. 81.

primal god (*ho prôtos theos*) as Occasion, the second god, Eternity, and the third, Time. The One, meanwhile, exists beyond time and eternity. Proclus dismisses this opinion, remarking that it does not explain the ways that characteristics participate in one another – he denies the possibility of linking time with the One, since Eternity must be postulated as being between them.

The fourth opinion (1216.37) appears to be that of Iamblichus,¹⁶ who postulates an archetypal Time. He argues that the One is not Eternity, and is not established with Time.¹⁷ Time is, instead, the causal principle of the intellectual order – terms such as ‘older’, ‘younger’ and ‘the same age’ reflect relative levels of intellect.¹⁸ In Simplicius’ *Commentary on the Physics*, Iamblichus argues for an ungenerated Now and a time of a higher order than temporal things. The relationship between Time, the soul, and intellect is evident in the following passage:

Reasonably time is defined as the moving image of eternity inasmuch as it is modelled upon the intellect and its thoughts are made to resemble the intellections, as the indivisible Now which is in the soul is made to resemble the Now which rests in the One; as the time which encompasses all things in this world is made to resemble the time of the intellectual world which encompasses, simultaneously, and everlastingly, the things which really are <and do not become>; as the moving time of this world is modelled upon the static time of the intellectual world, and as the measure of becoming is made to represent the measure of the essences <that really are>.
(Iamblichus, *In Tim.*, fr. 63 Dillon.)

An intellectual Time exists which transcends the cosmos and measures activities in the world of becoming. This transcendent Time governs the principles of the psychic world, as well. Iamblichus’ notion of prehistoric time influences Syrianus’ reading of the *Parmenides* on time.

Syrianus starts from Iamblichus’ concept that there is a higher kind of Time which relates to the level of divine soul. Adapting the Iamblichean concept that a level of divine souls participates in primal Time, Syrianus says that Time takes its beginning from above and imitates eternity. Syrianus, thus, presents a doctrine on time which is similar to Iamblichus’, as both give a non-temporal explanation for the existence of a transcendent Time. While Iamblichus identifies the levels of reality with the noeric realm (time itself is the ordering principle), Syrianus refers it to levels of divine souls that participate in primal Time; primal time measures the circuits of these souls. He takes the concept of time unfolding eternity and extrapolates a lower level which unravels something contained in a concentrated form at a higher level:

¹⁶ Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.30, 30 ff.; see Iamblichus, *In Tim.*; fr. 63 Dillon.

¹⁷ Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1.793.23 CAG (Iamblichus, *In Tim.*, fr. 63 Dillon): ‘The notion of “before” and “after” in this order we do not understand in the sense of changes involving movements, not in any other such sense, but we define it as the sequence of causes and the continuous combination of generations and primary activity and power which brings motions to fulfilment and as all things of this sort. Further, we say that Time, and at the same time the Heavens, were not created along with the motion or life proceeding from the soul, but from the intellectual setting-in-order proceeding from the Demiurge; for it is in conjunction with this that Time and the Cosmos are established in him. And indeed the ancient account unequivocally reveals God as ordering and producing Time at the same time as he makes the Heaven. And one might declare Time to be a measure, not in the sense of measuring the progress (of the Universe), or of being measured by motion, or of revealing the revolution (of the Heavens), or of being revealed as such, but in the sense of being the cause and one thing uniting all these’

¹⁸ The ‘older’ is superior in essence, ‘younger’ is inferior, and those at the same level of being or those which have the same age, are at the same cosmic level.

It is after all better, then, in this case also to call attention to the teachings of our Master, to the effect that the text here concerns divine souls; for these are divinised by participating eternally in the gods, and it is to these that the most primal time properly refers, not that which has proceeded into the visible realm, but that which is absolute and not-relative, according to which are measured all the circuits of the souls, and their dances and encirclings around the intelligible. For it takes its beginnings from above, imitating that eternity which comprehends all things and holds together all motion, whether it be psychic or vital or however it may be said to arise, and it unfolds it and brings it to completion and it is itself in essence an intellect, while acting as cause for divine souls of their ‘dance’ and of their infinite motion around the intelligible, and by means of which there also arises in them that which is ‘older’ and ‘younger’ and ‘of the same age’. (trans. Dillon)¹⁹

In apparent concordance with Iamblichus’ concept of transcendent Time as the ‘causal principle of the intellectual order’ (τὸ τῆς τάξεως τῆς νοεράς αἴτιον), Syrianus argues that pure Time acts as the cause for the divine souls of their dance!²⁰ Syrianus’ proposal is thus equivalent to Iamblichus’, who suggests an intermediate entity which is superior to ordinary time, lower than *aîōn*, the causal principle of the intellectual world.

As regards the troublesome ‘temporal’ expressions in the lemma, we know that we are dealing with souls that change or ‘dance’, progressing in their circuits. He proposes the following solution: those which are termed ‘older’ in relation to themselves get more benefit from infinity of time, and those which are ‘younger’ in relation to themselves, participate less in time than those which are below them. Those which are younger than themselves are more youthful, while those which are older are in relation to intelligible entities and extend in infinity of time.²¹ Those equal in age with each other have uniform circuits.

	Older	Younger	The Same Age
Relation to Themselves	Partakes more of infinity	Participates less in time	All souls have the same method of participation and perfection
Relation to Others	The whole measurement of time, measured by a longer circuit	What has its circuit measured by a lesser circumference is younger than what has a larger one (if measured by the moon, with a small circuit, it is younger than what is measured by Saturn, which has a longer circuit)	At the same level – has the same method of participation

¹⁹ See Dillon (n. 11), 560. *In Parm.* 1217.13–29: *Μήποτε οὖν ἄμεινον κἀναυθα τῆς τοῦ καθηγεμόνος ἡμῶν μεμνήσθαι παραδόσεως, ὅτι δὴ περὶ τῶν θεῶν ψυχῶν ὁ λόγος· αὐταὶ γὰρ ἐκθεοῦνται τῷ μετέχειν αἰὲ τῶν θεῶν, ταύταις δὲ προσήκει χρόνος ὁ πρῶτιστος, οὐχ ὁ προελθὼν εἰς τὸ ἐμφανές, ἀλλ’ ὁ ἀπόλυτος καὶ ἄσχετος, καθ’ ὃν αἱ περίοδοι πάσαι μετροῦνται τῶν ψυχῶν, καὶ περὶ τὸ νοητὸν χορεῖαι καὶ ἀνακυκλήσεις. Ἄνωθεν γὰρ ἄρχεται μιμούμενος τὸν αἰῶνα τῶν πάντων περιεκτικὸν καὶ συνέχει πᾶσαν κίνησιν, εἴτε ψυχικὴν εἴτε ζωτικὴν εἴτε ὅπως οὖν ὑφίστασθαι λεγομένην, καὶ ἀνελίττει καὶ τελεῖοι, καὶ ἔστι νοῦς μὲν αὐτὸς κατ’ οὐσίαν, χορεῖαις δὲ ταῖς θεαῖς καὶ τῆς περὶ τὸ νοητὸν ἀπείρου κινήσεως αἴτιος, δι’ ὃν ὁ καὶ ἐν ταύταις ἔστι τὸ πρεσβύτερον καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίαν ἄγον.*

²⁰ Cf. Iamblichus, ap. Simplicius. *In Categ.* 351.32–352.20: Time is ‘a kind of dance of the soul around the Intellect’ (*χορεῖα τινὲς τῆς ψυχῆς περὶ τὸν νοῦν*). Iamblichus identifies this theory as a Pythagorean doctrine. Cf. Sambursky and Pines (n. 19), 26, n. 1; 105.

Syrianus gives a non-temporal meaning to temporal expressions, just as Iamblichus makes older and younger matters of seniority and precedence.²² Proclus, in his account of archetypal time, connects it to the noeric level,²³ just above soul²⁴ so that it is not quite time. Proclus adopts the concept of Time as an intellectual entity which is measured by the motion of soul.

Syrianus thus gives a non-temporal meaning of time and lays out three modes of time: eternity, *kairos*, and transcendent Time, which he makes the causal principle of the intellectual order. When Proclus discusses time, however, he does not make time the ordering principle but thinks time orders circuits of souls (which, in turn, order the universe). Syrianus' interpretation is another example of how Syrianus divinizes being in his metaphysics.

DAY AND NIGHT AS PHYSICAL MEASURES OF TIME

Proclus states Syrianus' opinion on *Timaeus* 37DE in *In Tim.* 3.35.25–36.33, a passage which concerns the question of what is meant by day and night and seasons and months and whether they are parts of time. As Iamblichus had argued before him,²⁵ time is here seen as a thing, not just a measure of motion; it is a mode of existence and its divisions are creative forces.²⁶ Day and Night are the operative parts of time and function as both archetypes and the creative forces of physical days and nights:

Let us then, in accordance with the theories of our Father,²⁷ not for the purpose of denying the phenomena of the heavens (let us accept that Timaeus used this terminology also in the way that the many are accustomed to do) but referring these terms to higher levels of being, declare as he was accustomed²⁸ to do, that 'day' and 'night' are creative measures of time, stirring up and rolling together both the manifest life and invisible life, and the movement and ordering of the sphere of the fixed stars.²⁹ For these (sc. night and day) are true parts of time and are present to all things (in the same way) and contain within themselves the primordial cause of the visible day and night, each of these being something different at the level of visible time, and it is with reference to this that Timaeus makes mention of how time came into being simultaneously with the heavens, for which reason he talked of days and nights in the plural, as also he did of months and years; for these are entities familiar to all.³⁰ (trans. Wear)

²¹ For Proclus, the phrases 'in relation to themselves' and 'in relation to others' direct his understanding of 'older' and 'younger' in his discussion here. See *In Parm.* 719.7f., where he says that the higher intelligible orders are older in respect to causes. For a discussion of tense and its relation to Eternity, see P. Plass, 'The metaphysical aspect of tenses in Proclus', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1993).

²² See O'Neil (n. 4), 162–4.

²³ Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p.49, 15ff.

²⁴ Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p.53, 30.

²⁵ Iamblichus condemns the Aristotelian definition of time as motion. Iamblichus, *In Tim.* fr. 62 Dillon (=Simpl., *In Phys.* 1.702.20 CAG): 'Iamblichus, in the eighth book of his *Commentaries on the Timaeus*, contributed the following arguments on the subject: "If every motion is in time, many motions arise simultaneously. But the parts of time are different at different times. Motion takes place in relation to something static, but Time has no need of Rest. To motion there is opposed either (another) Motion or Rest, to general Motion general Motion (or Rest), to particular particular, but to Time there is nothing opposed."'

²⁶ On the partlessness of Eternity, see R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum. Theories in Ancient and Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983), 111–14; Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.7.6.

²⁷ Proclus uses the imperfect tense, possibly showing that a commentary on this passage was delivered in the form of a lecture by Syrianus.

²⁸ Use of the imperfect occurs again.

²⁹ Usually τὸ ἀπλάνης refers to the sphere of the fixed stars.

³⁰ *In Tim.* 3.35.25–36.8: ἔστι τούτων, ὡς ὁ ἡμέτερος ἐφιλοσόφει πατήρ, οὐκ ἐπ' ἀναιρέσεις τῶν φαινομένων (λεγέτω γὰρ καὶ ταῦτα ὁ Τίμαιος, ἃ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς εἴωθε λέγεσθαι),

Lines 35.27–8 provide a nice observation on Syrianic exegetical method. Proclus says that Timaeus generally uses the terms ‘day’ and ‘night’ in the sense in which they are usually taken, i.e. as physical phenomena. Syrianus keeps this obvious literal meaning, but adds to it a higher meaning – this method is typical of Syrianus. Proclus, moreover, contrasts Syrianus with the men (οἱ πόλλοι) who are led astray towards the commoner, rather than more accurate meaning.

In lines 35.25–36.3 Syrianus postulates the forms of day and night as the transcendent paradigms of Day and Night in the soul. He differentiates these from physical day and night, which are its products, not parts of time. They are true parts of time, present to all things in the same way even if they are participated in partially.³¹ In this way, Day and Night are in the fabric of time. This appears to be a development of Iamblichus’ transcendent time as distinct from eternity in the soul.³² The innovation on Syrianus’ part is in making days and nights the contents of transcendent Time.

ἄμα τῷ οὐρανῷ γέγονε χρόνος (36.3–4) (*Tim.* 37 D): Syrianus posits that a transcendent Time was formed at the same time as the heaven and is thus a real hypostasis.³³ This phrase also concerned Iamblichus, who appears to give it a similar interpretation. Simplicius cites the following as coming from book 6 of Iamblichus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus*:

Its essence in activity we regard as the same as this setting in order which goes forth and is united with its creations and is unseparated from the things brought to completion by it. For the phrase ‘simultaneously with the construction of the Heaven he makes...’ signifies this, that the coming into existence of Time is conjoined with the setting in order which goes forth from the Demiurge...³⁴

As archetypes of physical day and night, Day and Night are the actual creative forces (δημιουργικά) and contain the primordial causes (πρωτουργοὶ αἰτίαι) which cause time to divide itself, creating physical day and night. This point is likewise made by

ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τὰς κυριωτέρας ὑποστάσεις καὶ ταῦτα ἀνάγων, ὥσπερ εἰώθει ποιεῖν, ἡμέρα μὲν καὶ νύξ μέτρα τοῦ χρόνου δημιουργικά, πάσαν διεγείροντα καὶ συνελίσσοντα τὴν τε ἐμφανῆ ζωὴν καὶ τὴν ἀφανῆ ζωὴν τε καὶ κίνησιν καὶ διακόσμησιν τῆς ἀπλανοῦς· ταῦτα γὰρ καὶ μόρια ἔστιν ἀληθινὰ τοῦ χρόνου καὶ πᾶσι κατὰ ταυτὸν πάρεστι, καὶ τῆς φαινομένης ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς τὴν πρωτουργὸν αἰτίαν προεἰληφέν ἄλλης οὕσης ἐν τῷ ἐμφανεῖ χρόνῳ τούτων ἑκατέρας εἰς τὴν καὶ ὁ Τίμαιος ὁρῶν ὑπομνήσκει, πῶς ἅμα τῷ οὐρανῷ γέγονε χρόνος, διὸ καὶ πληθυντικῶς εἶπεν ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας, ὡς καὶ μῆνας καὶ ἐνιαυτούς. ταῦτα δὲ τὰ πρόχειρα πάντων.

³¹ ‘Let these things, then, be the “parts of Time”, of which some are appropriate to the fixed stars, then to those rotating around the poles of the milky way, and others to other gods, or to the followers of gods, or to living things mortal or immortal, or to the parts of the universe, whether more elevated or more base.’ (trans. Wear). In *Tim* 3.36.29–37.1: ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἔστω μόρια χρόνου, ὧν τὰ μὲν ὀκείωνται τοῖς ἀπλανέσι, τὰ δὲ τοῖς περὶ τοὺς πόλους τοῦ λοξοῦ στρεφόμενοις, τὰ δὲ ἄλλοις θεοῖς ἢ θεῶν ὁπαδοῖς ἢ ζώοις θνητοῖς ἢ ἀθανάτοις ἢ μερίσι τοῦ παντός ὑψηλοτέρας ἢ χαμαιζηλοτέρας.

³² Iamblichus, In *Tim.* frs. 62–8 Dillon distinguish Time from Eternity. In fr. 68, Iamblichus places Eternity in the noetic sphere and time as the median between Eternity and Heaven. Time thus comes into being with the heavens and acts as an image of Eternity. Proclus states the distinction between Time and Eternity in terms of their participants in *ET* prop. 53: ‘Prior to all things eternal there exists Eternity; and prior to all things temporal, Time’. Thus things with soul participate in Time or true Day and Night, while living things participate in Time.

³³ John Dillon explains Iamblichus’ interpretation of this phrase: ‘[Iamblichus] lays stress on its creation *simultaneously* with the heavens ... Time proceeds not ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς κινήσεως ἢ ζωῆς but ἀπὸ τῆς προιούσης ἀπὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ νοεῖας διακοσμήσεως. It is not a subjective phenomenon, but a real hypostasis’ (n. 10), 40.

³⁴ Simpl., In *Phys.* 1.793.23 CAG; Iamblichus, In *Tim.* fr. 63 Dillon, translation Dillon (n. 10).

Iamblichus: 'We too agree that there is an order of Time, not however an order which is ordered, but one which orders...'.³⁵

That Day and Night are transcendent principles in time is further stressed by Syrianus discussing them in the singular (36.9–10). As unseen, singular entities they stand prior to and generate the endless cycle of day and night. Day and Night as forms (intellectual entities) pre-exist what is in motion. The analogues of Day and Night, furthermore, are Month and Year, both of which function as archetypes when they are used in the singular (36.10–17). Month is the summation of the cycle of the moon and brings to completion the circle of the Same. Year is connected to the sun, which measures all things together with Time. It brings to completion the median creation (*μέσος δημιουργία*). This median creation refers to the heavenly bodies as general. The highest creation is the generic forms and the lowest are the physical bodies.

The last section, 36.17–36.33, elaborates on this, making seasons and months divinities, and shows how the sun and fixed stars measure time through the rotations which are visible and apparent. Proclus discusses this visible division of time in 3.53.6–55.7 in light of the second creation of the Demiurge (marked by visibility and multiplicity). He says that the first creation formed Time in its essence – itself eternal and a monad – and the second created the time which participates in the first – it is visible and multiple. The time of the second creation divides the power of the supramundane time and grants cycles to the sun, moon and stars.³⁶

HOW SOULS PARTAKE IN TIME

Syrianus argues that souls move in Time through circuits and that divine souls (and their vehicles) move cyclically, which means that as they approach their end, they also approach their beginning. He applies this psychic circular motion to Plato's premise that something becoming younger than itself also becomes older than itself, and something older than itself becomes younger than itself:

We must therefore turn once again to our Master, and bring to bear upon the problem his discussion, which throws light upon the whole preceding argument. That which partakes in Time is of two sorts; the one which, as it were, proceeds in a straight line, beginning from one point and ending in another; the other which travels round in a circle and pursues its motion from the same point to the same point, so as to have a beginning and an end which are the same and a motion which is unceasing, since each point of its progress is both beginning and end, and is no less a beginning than an end. That, then, which enjoys cyclical activity partakes in Time by circuits, and since the same point is for it both an end a beginning of motion; in so far as it departs from a beginning, it becomes older, whereas in so far as it arrives at an end, it becomes younger; for as it comes to be nearer to its end, it comes to be nearer to its own beginning; and that which comes to be nearer to its own beginning becomes younger; so then, that which arrives cyclically at its end becomes younger, while at the same time and by the same process also becoming older.³⁷ (trans. Dillon)

³⁵ Iamblichus, *In Tim.* fr. 63 Dillon, translation Dillon (n.10).

³⁶ Iamblichus distinguishes between higher and lower time: he posits an unparticipated universal, the participated universal which it generates, and the particular which it participates. See Proclus, *ET* prop. 23–4, 100; *In Tim.* 2.105.15–28, 240.4ff., 313.19–24. See also R. Sorabji's discussion in (n.28), 32.

³⁷ *In Parm* 1226.26–1227.10: Πάλιν οὖν ἡμῖν ἐπὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον καθηγεμόνα τρεπτέον, καὶ τὴν ἐκείνου παράδοσιν εἰς μέσον ἀκτέον, φῶς ἀνάπτουσαν εἰς πάντα τὸν προκείμενον λόγον. Διττὸν δὲ τὸ χρόνου μετέχον ἐστὶ· τὸ μὲν οἷον κατ' εὐθείαν ὁδεύον, καὶ ἀρχόμενόν τε ἀπὸ πινος καὶ εἰς ἄλλο καταλήγον· τὸ δὲ κατὰ κύκλον περιπορευόμενον, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ τὴν κίνησιν ἔχον, ᾧ καὶ ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρασ ἐστὶ ταῦτόν καὶ ἡ κίνησις

Proclus gives the opinion of three sets of commentators before launching into Syrianus' teaching on the subject.

- (1) Some commentators (1226.2) dismiss the argument altogether, saying that Plato indulges in sophistry here.
- (2) Others (1226.6) say the same thing is at the same time younger and older – it is younger with respect to the future, and older with respect to the past. Proclus criticizes this argument for concentrating on how something is simultaneously older or younger than another, but not adequately explaining in what way something is simultaneously older and younger than itself.
- (3) The third group (1226.15) says that everything is both older and younger than itself; what is now existent is older, what used to be existent is younger. This argument addresses the relative aspects of a thing based on what that thing is at a certain time, so that what is older is older than what used to be younger. Proclus says that this misses the spirit of Plato's argument, which looks at a thing being simultaneously younger and older than itself at one point in time.

To Proclus, Syrianus' opinion is the most credible. He says that souls partake in time through circuits, which results in cyclical motion and time for souls and their vehicles. Souls, thus, moving in circles, are simultaneously younger and older than themselves. For, as soon as they depart from a point, they become older, but simultaneously younger, as they move still closer to their own beginning. As souls move nearer to their end, they move nearer to their beginning, which is spatially next to the end on a circle. Proclus adapts Syrianus' statement on souls in *Platonic Theology* 2.12, p.71, 13ff., where he notes that souls are peculiar insofar as they are both younger and, at the same time, older than themselves and other things. He then goes on to state that this phenomenon of being both older and younger occurs because they move according to cyclical time. Proclus, however, takes all this a step further by saying that the ages of souls themselves are responsible for preserving the measures of time.

Syrianus' discourse on circular motion and *Parmenides* 141AB is significant, not least for its teaching on the behaviour of souls within Syrianus' metaphysics:

For this reason the ancients were understandably disturbed lest this argument be in some way sophistical, since they were looking to things that moved in a straight line, whereas they should have made the distinction and considered what things have the characteristic of having their beginning and end the same, and what have them as different, and they should have considered that the subject of discussion now is divine souls, which partake in time in the respect that they have a periodic time of their proper motion, as indeed do the vehicles which are dependent upon them. This, then, is the argument of our Master.³⁸ (trans. Dillon)

ἀκατάληκτος, ἐκάστου τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ἀρχῆς καὶ πέρας ὄντος, καὶ οὐδὲν ἦπτον ἀρχῆς καὶ πέρας. Τὸ δὲ κυκλικῶς ἐνεργεῖν μετέχει τοῦ χρόνου περιοδικῶς, καὶ ἐπειδὴ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πέρας αὐτῷ τῆς κινήσεως ἐστὶ καὶ ἀρχή, καθόσον μὲν ἀφίσταται τῆς ἀρχῆς, πρεσβύτερον γίνεταί, καθόσον δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ πέρας ἀφικνεῖται, νεώτερον γίνεταί· γινόμενον γὰρ ἐγγιον τοῦ πέματος ἐγγύτερον γίνεταί τῆς οἰκείας ἀρχῆς· τὸ δὲ τῆς οἰκείας ἀρχῆς ἐγγυτέρω γινόμενον νεώτερον γίνεταί· τὸ ἄρα ἐπὶ τὸ πέρας ἀφικνούμενον κυκλικῶς νεώτερον γίνεταί τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πρεσβύτερον γινόμενον.

³⁸ In *Parm* 1227.22–31: 'Ὅθεν εἰκότως ἐθρομβοῦντο καὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι μή πη σοφισματώδης οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἐστίν, εἰς τὰ κατ' εὐθείαν κινούμενα βλέποντες, δεόν διελέσθαι καὶ θεωρῆσαι τίσι μὲν τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ ἀρχή καὶ πέρας, τίσι δὲ ἕτερον, καὶ ὅτι νῦν περὶ τῶν θείων ψυχῶν ὁ λόγος, αἱ καὶ χρόνον μετέχουσι περιοδικὸν ἔχουσαι τὸν χρόνον τῆς θείας κινήσεως, ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ ὀχήματα τὰ ἐξημμένα αὐτῶν. Ἄλλ' οὗτος μὲν ὁ λόγος τοῦ καθηγεμόνος ἡμῶν.

That circles and lines have a metaphysical importance beyond their geometrical aspects is evident in Chaldean thought,³⁹ and certainly reappears in Platonic thought. In his commentary on Euclid's *Elements*, Proclus says that a circle and straight line are two basic types of line based on the fundamental principles of Limit and Unlimitedness (*In Eucl.* 103.21).⁴⁰ The circle and circular line correspond to Limit, while the straight line corresponds to Unlimitedness. The spiral is a mixture of Limit and Unlimitedness (*In Eucl.* 104.7ff.). The behaviour of a line under the influence of Limit and Unlimitedness displays the most elaborate role for lines and circles in the cosmos; looking at the process in another light, the processive and reversion function is, in fact, in the causal process of remaining, procession and reversion. Stephen Gersh makes the case that the three geometrical shapes correspond to the three processes based on Proclus' assertions that the point⁴¹ is most akin to remaining, the line⁴² to procession, and the circle⁴³ to reversion.⁴⁴

This concept is reflected in Proclus' discussion of generation in *In Parm.* 1131:

One may also see on the level of generation these two qualities [line and circle]. One may view in the cycle of existence here (for generation returns to itself cyclically, as is written in the *Phaedo* [70C ff.]) the circular; while the straight one may see in the procession of each thing from its birth to its decline, and the middle here, which is in front of the extremes, as its peak of development.⁴⁵ (trans. Dillon)

Based on the *Phaedo*, Proclus argues that the process of generation is a cyclical one in which a being reverts upon itself for regeneration.

The concept of generation is particular to soul – souls are constructed out of straight lines and circles,⁴⁶ because circles are only one type of line.⁴⁷ In his *Commentary on Euclid*, Proclus says,

It is because of the circular revolutions of the heavens that generation returns in a circle upon itself and brings its unstable mutability into a definite cycle. If you divide bodiless things into soul and nous, you will say that the circle has the character of nous, the straight line that of soul. This is why the soul, as it reverts to nous, is said to move in a circle. (*In Eucl.* 147.12.)⁴⁸

That soul moves in a circle because of its reversion tendencies is a common thought in Iamblichus' *de Anima*. The soul, however, moves according to different shapes depending on in what action it is engaged:

The demiurgic nous has set up these two principles in himself, the straight and circular, and produced out of himself two monads, the one acting in a circular fashion to perfect all

³⁹ The Chaldeans held that forms emanate from divine mind to matter through a tireless whirlwind (ἀκοίμητος στροφάλιγξ). Cf. S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation into the Prehistory and Evolution of Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden, 1978), 75.

⁴⁰ Proclus, *In Eucl.* 103.2ff.: 'There is a line which is finite but does not have points as its limits. The circle is such a line, bending back upon itself and making no use of limits as does the straight line.' Translation G.R. Morrow, *Proclus. A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* (Princeton, 1970).

⁴¹ Proclus, *In Eucl.* 88.2ff., 91.11ff.

⁴² Iamblichus *In Tim.* fr. 49 Dillon; Proclus, *In Eucl.* 108.10–13, 164.8–11.

⁴³ Proclus, *In Eucl.* 147.3ff.

⁴⁴ Gersh (n. 40), 73.

⁴⁵ See n. 13, p. 471.

⁴⁶ Iamblichus says that souls are created out of spherical atoms. Cf. Iamblichus, *De Anima*, 363.13–17.

⁴⁷ Proclus, *In Eucl.* 92.4; *Tim.* 53C–55C.

⁴⁸ Translation Morrow (n. 41).

intelligible essences, the other moving in a straight line to bring all perceptible things to birth. Since the soul is intermediate between sensibles and intelligibles, she moves in a circular fashion in so far as she is allied to intelligible nature, but in so far as she presides over sensibles, exercises her providence in a straight line.' (*In Eucl.* 108.13ff.)⁴⁹

The soul moves in a straight line when it extends in generation, a circle when it returns during reversion. In this respect, the soul acts as an intermediary, binding together the intelligible and intellectual realms.

CONCLUSION

In his commentaries on the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, Proclus credits Syrianus with the teaching that Eternity is an aspect of One-Being, where it remains at the summit of the intelligible realm. Syrianus thus differs from his predecessor Iamblichus, who held that Eternity remains in the One. Proclus, like Syrianus, places Eternity in the second triad of the intelligible realm and states that Eternity remains in the one of the intelligible realm. With this structure, Proclus says that Eternity is substantially Being, but Intellect in a causal way.

With regards to transcendent Time, Syrianus follows Iamblichus in giving a non-temporal explanation for its existence. Time takes its beginning from above and imitates Eternity, unfolding Eternity, as a measure of motion, rather than a separate thing. While Iamblichus identifies the levels of reality with the noeric realm where time itself is the ordering principle, Syrianus refers to the levels of divine souls that participate in primal Time. Primal Time, moreover, measures the circuits of these souls. Syrianus, relating Time to the level of divine soul, agrees with Iamblichus that there is a higher time which relates to the level of divine soul and a level of divine souls participates in primal time. He thus takes the concept of Time unfolding Eternity and extrapolates a lower level which unravels something contained in a concentrated form at a higher level. Syrianus innovates from Iamblichus' concept of time by positing an intermediate entity which is superior to ordinary time, but lower than *aiôn*, which is the causal principle of the intellectual world. Syrianus further explains that Day and Night are creative forces causing physical time and dividing themselves into physical day and night; Day and Night are the transcendent paradigms of day and night in the soul, while day and night are the contents of transcendent time. Day and Night, as the operative parts of time, moreover, function as archetypes and creative forces of physical days and nights.

Syrianus' greatest achievement in the discussion of the individual soul comes with his description of the descent of the soul, particularly with how divine souls move cyclically, so that as they approach their end, they also produce a beginning. These souls partake in time through their circuits, which result in a cyclical motion – souls are simultaneously younger and older than themselves.

With his teachings of Syrianus on Eternity and Time, Proclus displays how his teacher created a unified, inter-locking cosmos, which was based on, but schematized further from Iamblichus' universe. It is this Syrianic hierarchy which shapes the Athenian School of Platonism's metaphysics.

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⁴⁹ Trans. Morrow (n. 41).