

My paper today will be concerned with an issue which is – I think – relevant to both, namely: education. As you all know, Πρόκλος ὁ διάδοχος, as he was known in several manuscripts, has been the head of the Platonic Academy for decades, and as such had a very intense teaching activity. Perhaps surprisingly, very little has been written on his philosophy of education, if there is any. Today I would like to present a specific aspect of this vast question, which is the usefulness of some traits for the learning process of the highest kind: philosophy. However, and this might explain the lack of literature on the subject, we do not have any treatise “On Education” or even “On Important Virtues to Have Before Engaging in Philosophy” by the hand of Proclus. What we do have is an important corpus of Commentaries, mainly dedicated to Plato's dialogues. Therefore, let us begin with those.

In the eschatological myth at the end of the *Republic*, Plato gives a very rich depiction of the fate of souls after their death. According to the life they had, some souls are punished, other rewarded with heavenly bliss, for a time. After this period of suffering or happiness, a new round begins and all souls are summoned to choose their next life. A lot of things happen at the point, as you all know, among which what is described in your text 1. A certain soul (let us call it Bill) was previously living in a well-ordered state, and thus had a good life (or a life as good as it can be without philosophy), and accordingly obtained the heavenly happiness as a reward. But since Bill was no philosopher, when it is time to choose again, Bill rushes to an alluring, attractive and in any case shiny life. Of course, it happens to be the life of a tyrant, and Bill is sore and regretful, for he is now doomed to be evil, eat his own children and certainly be punished in the heavens afterwards. Clearly, tyranny is a bad thing, one that no sane soul should choose. Or is it?

If we turn to the explanation Proclus gives of this text, what we find is a complex picture. On the one hand, he seems to agree with Plato's natural, commonsensical condemnation of the tyrannical life. In your text 2, for example, the young Aristotle of the *Parmenides* is said to be the least capable of Parmenides listeners, not only because he is the youngest of the group, but also because he is to later become one of the Thirty Tyrants of Athens.

When Proclus directly attempts to analyse the Myth of Er (that's your text 3), he is less judgmental, but explains that the choice of tyranny happens through a mistake, or rather a confusion. It is because souls had a stay in the heavens for a while, because they have been in the company of the gods, and have helped them to rule the universe, that they developed a desire for earthly power. Unfortunately they do not realise that power does not work the same way here and there, that in human societies, being in charge does not necessarily mean being wise enough for such a responsibility, hence the fact that most tyrants are evil.

For the fact that souls like Bill have been ruling the world with the gods, which is absent from the *Republic*, I think that Proclus borrows from the *Phaedrus*; I have selected a few relevant sentences in your text 4. More precisely, Plato says that some souls have had a clearer vision of the intelligible realities than others, because they have more recently been in the company of the gods. Of course, it is nowhere question of tyranny in Plato's text, the link between the two is (as far as I know) Proclus' initiative.

There is more. Such a memory is, on the other hand, explicitly linked by Proclus with the worthiness of Alcibiades, as you can see in text 5. Alcibiades belongs to those souls that have ruled the universe with the gods, and therefore want to keep ruling in this life. Here is the important point: it is *because* Alcibiades had such a desire that Socrates deemed him worthy of his love, that is: of his teaching. This is quite unsettling, especially since this is not an isolated case. In the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, the fact that Critias is also to become one of the Thirty Tyrants is said to be evidence of his natural gifts for the ascent to the intelligible truth, see text 6. And even in our previous example of text 2, if we keep reading for a few pages, Proclus adds that the tyrannical

element is, in general, evidence of a heavenly background, that's text 7.

Actually, if we look more closely at texts 2 and 6, we could notice some interesting details. The tyrannical life of Critias is evidence of the strength of his natural gifts, his εὐφύια. The same aspect of Aristotle's life indicates the weakness of his disposition or preparation, of his ἐπιτηδειότης. I think that both notions should be distinguished here. This would explain why in text 2, Proclus specifies that Aristotle is undeveloped, that he once was inspired enough to be worthy of the angelic company like that of Pythodorus (as Alcibiades was worthy of Socrates' attention) but later lost this possibility, this δύναμις. In other words, the tyrannical soul is characterised by his great innate potential, his εὐφύια, but the tyrannical life (which it is naturally inclined to choose) is the result of a bad preparation, a bad ἐπιτηδειότης. If I remember well, having by birth a high intellectual potential that may lead to a terrible disaster if it is not given a good preparation, a proper education, that is how Plato characterises the philosopher by nature in the *Republic*. This does not mean that every philosopher has a tyrannical soul, but at least that tyrannical souls display features very akin to the souls of philosophers, and are maybe even a subclass of them.

But what could be the grounds, in Proclus' thought, for such a claim? Let us come back to the *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*. Some forty pages before our text 5, we can find another reference to the episode narrated in text 1, that is text 8. Here, that part of Plato's myth is paraphrased or reformulated: the “souls descending from heaven” (so: Bill) make an “authoritative, lofty and high-minded” choice, which is I think quite a nice way to say that they became tyrants. This kind of life is characterised by their incapacity to be satisfied by an ordinary fate, by “what lies at hand” (τῶν παρόντων), and even by a contempt for such things and for the people who grant them value, like Alcibiades' lovers.

This is made clear in text 9, and in many other passages in the *Commentary*. Contempt for ordinary matters, for inferior preoccupations, that is what shows Alcibiades' worthiness to Socrates: here again, it is *because* Socrates observed this behaviour in Alcibiades that he deemed him worth his time. Indeed, such an attitude shows his great kinship with the beautiful and predisposition towards virtue (τὴν πρὸς τὸ καλὸν οἰκειότητα καὶ εἰς ἀρετὴν παρασκευήν). I believe O'Neill is right to translate παρασκευή as “predisposition” instead of the more common “preparation”, as Alcibiades certainly has εὐφύια (a good nature, as in text 6) but at this point lacks a good ἐπιτηδειότης (like the Aristotle of text 2). In any case, Alcibiades haughtiness justifies his choice by Socrates, just as before his heavenly background motivated Socrates interest in him. But is it the same thing to have ruled the universe with the gods, and to be haughty with uninteresting lovers? I think it is, or at least that Proclus considered it to be the case.

Let us look again at text 8. We read the confirmation that “this condition, when carefully trained, is the beginning of salvation for souls”, but more importantly, we find the beginning of a justification. The craving for power and the contempt for everything else is the consequence of an ἀπήχημα τῆς ἐκεῖ ζωῆς, an echo of the life up there. What is this “echo” about? We have to remember that, according to the *Phaedrus* (or at least to the way Proclus reads it), all souls are supposed to have seen to some extent the higher, intelligible realities, as you can read in text 10. Some of them however, like Bill, since they have ruled the universe with the gods, have had a closer, clearer perspective on those divine realities. For example beauty, nobility, or power, all of which are good and therefore desirable. It is reasonable to assume, for a Platonist, that the clearer was the experience of the object of desire, the stronger will be the desire itself.

But of course, our souls (at least for most of us) are fallen and forgetful. When you have not seen someone for a very long time, even if it is a close friend, you may fail to recognise him in a crowded street, and instead greet someone else with the same haircut he had. The same thing happens with Bill, or Alcibiades. They have been very close to the greatness of the gods, to their

power that they have shared, so now they run after the power whenever they see it, because it has the same haircut, the same superficial form that the heavenly state in which they were. Let us remember here that for neoplatonism, the hierarchy of divine powers is at the same time a hierarchy of cognitive levels: to rule in the company of higher gods is to enjoy a higher level of knowledge or intellection. This may help us to better understand the choice of Socrates: the energy with which Alcibiades tries to obtain more power is symptomatic of the intensity of his memory of a higher life. As this higher life is a higher level of knowledge – that is actually also the goal of philosophy – Socrates infers from his high aspirations that he is going to be a suitable and even promising pupil.

Allow me to be a little more specific here. I think we can distinguish, for the sake of clarity, three components in Proclus' analysis of Alcibiades attitude, three interesting quirks that he sees in the young man's personality. Those are 1. φρόνημα, or pride, 2. contempt, 3. φιλοτιμία, love of honours. Contempt is not a stable, technical term in Proclus' *Commentary*, he uses ὑπεροψία, but also various forms of verbs like καταφρονέω, ὑπερφρονέω or ὑπεροράω, it seems with the same positive sense in all the occurrences. The three said components (so pride, contempt and φιλοτιμία) are roughly suggested in texts 8 to 10, and it is possible to find many additional examples in the *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*.

As you can see, the first two, pride and contempt are closely intertwined: it is because Alcibiades bears an echo of the intelligible that he feels entitled to despise his lovers, and this is how Proclus interprets Plato's text, when Alcibiades is said to “overcame them by his pride”, τῷ φρονήματι. The young man confusedly feels that he is special, that he somehow deserves greatness, and this feeling is not a complete delusion, since it is caused by the celestial background of his soul. As a result, he is very difficult to please, wealth is never enough, and neither are base pleasures. He needs something greater to be satisfied, and shows nothing but contempt for all inferior temptations. One useful consequence of this mindset is that you can skip, so to say, most of the moral preparation to the philosophical education, because there is no need for such a preparation. You do not need to teach Bill or Alcibiades to despise all the wordly illusions and deceptions, for they are already doing so. At this point, we have two components, pride and contempt, the former being the cause of the latter: the vague memory of the intelligible life leads to despise everything that is not similar enough to it. Both these components are useful for the philosophical education, one as a cognitive legacy that is going to be easier to rekindle, the other as a shortcut for the moral education. However, one cannot directly see the φρόνημα, even when one is Socrates. It is through its consequence, contempt, that the φρόνημα is manifested to Socrates.

But why is that so important? I want you to look at text 11. As you probably know, το φρόνημα may mean several things, among which “pride”, but also “mind” or “thought”. It is this second meaning that translators (including O'Neil) of the *Commentary on the Alcibiades* usually find relevant for this passage. So: “Socrates, indicating as much by this first appellation, arouses the *mind* of the beloved towards attachment to true beauty”. However, if they are correct, it is the only place in which φρόνημα means “thought” among the twelve occurrences in the *Commentary*; in the other eleven, the word clearly means “pride”, and is translated as such. Now, text 11 is where Proclus defines what he takes to be the goal of the whose dialogue. I think it is unlikely that in this important passage, the keyword would have a different meaning than in the rest of the text. Therefore, either το φρόνημα simply means “pride” here as everywhere else, or Proclus is playing deliberately with the ambiguity of word. “Socrates, indicating as much by this first appellation, arouses the *pride* of the beloved towards attachment to true beauty” gives quite a different reading indeed.

Be it as it may, I want now to come back to the third component, φιλοτιμία. We have seen before that lust for power and glory is another consequence of pride, understood as the memory of the upper life. Honour and authority are chosen by souls already reminiscent of the Ideas and of godly

life because it is the closest substitute of the life up there, what best corresponds to the echo they bear. It happens to be only a substitute, an imitation that will ultimately fail to satisfy the honour-loving soul (as we have seen in text 10), but it does not know it yet, and will therefore pursue this substitute, and this alone is a sign of its latent greatness.

Proclus goes even further and provides a more general grounding of this situation, that is text 12. φιλοτιμία, the love of honour, is not just any love or passion, or an affection that happens to be common among tyrannical or promising souls. You remember that in the *Republic*, the timocratic form of government was supposed to be the second best a city can adopt after the rule of the Philosopher-King, and that it was in any case way better than the rule of the masses, allegedly led by their contradictory desires. The irascible soul was also intermediary between the rational and the appetitive faculties. The same reasoning applies, Proclus argues, to the kinds of life, concerning the progress and the ascent of the soul. Our souls are fallen, but the fall operates in a defined order: the soul accumulates, as it were, multiple layers, one on the top of the other. Conversely, when the time has come for the conversion towards the principles, the last cloth put on is the first to be removed, and vice-versa. Now, as honour is immaterial and relatively unlinked to bodily pleasures, it is the highest object of love except for knowledge. Thus, it is also the first step of the fall, and therefore the last garment to be removed.

Once again, this provides Socrates a tool for recognising worthy pupils. Indeed, completely fallen souls are torn apart by various different desires, they are unable to focus because there are so many forces active inside of them, leading them to so many different directions at the same time. A soul that would be possessed by only one passion, one love, is going to be much easier to handle and help progress. As the layers of desires are cumulative, this one passion can only be the closest to the core, namely, φιλοτιμία. Indeed, as Proclus puts it, “Disdain of wealth and contempt of pleasure are also qualities of the more moderate souls, but many even of those considered powerful characters succumb before honour, reputation and power.” and a little below, “if the first descent of souls is the life that loves honour, clearly this desire is not characteristic of those who have fallen to the depths, but of those who haunt the doorway of reason.” Everyone can like compliments, but to love nothing but honour is the privilege of a very specific kind of soul, one that is not a philosopher, but just one step lower. A timocratic person is someone whose fall has been very limited, or who has already done by itself part of the work needed to come back to the Ideas. So Proclus: “Precisely on this account Socrates has considered such a character to be worthy of love, as being superior to the world of process and more akin to reason; for our spirited appetite is nearer to reason than our sense appetite. For these reasons, then, Socrates considered the life that is eager for rule and honour to be worthy of loving care.”

Of course, being worthy of Socrates' care does not only mean that one is a promising soul: it also implies that one still needs to progress, and that the philosopher's teaching is going to be necessary in order to do so. How exactly the philosopher is going to get the attention of the proud lover of honour, and to lead him back to the Ideas is another fascinating story, which I can only sketch very briefly today.

In a nutshell, Socrates will need to be very careful in order to avoid a direct confrontation with the pride of Alcibiades, a situation that would only bring an early end to the teaching relationship. He will therefore begin with clever praise mixed with subtle and implicit criticism, leading Alcibiades to realise by himself alone (or to it would seem) how insufficient his qualities actually are, and how the power and honour he seeks make him vulnerable to the vagaries of the masses. The quest for worldly honour and glory is paradoxical, because it leads more often than not to situations of shame. And shame is the greatest fear of someone who has φιλοτιμία. The whole endeavour of Socratic argumentation here is, according to Proclus, to show Alcibiades that philosophy is the only possible path to stable and true object of pride and honour, and thus that in order to be truly proud, to really

despise inferior things and people, and to efficiently seek honour, one must prefer philosophy to worldly conquests. Such a promise is likely to fascinate an overly ambitious person like Alcibiades; such a bold statement is likely to surprise him, in the sense of provoking *thaumazein*, which is, as Proclus aptly reminds us, the beginning of philosophy.

This, and this only, will work with a tyrannical soul, one that is already partly reminiscent of the heavenly life and can only be interested by what is great enough to compare with it. Socrates does not fight Alcibiades' tyrannical character: on the contrary, it is at the same time the sign of his worthy disposition and the tool of his improvement. Even more, if pride (*φρόνημα*) is the echo in us – or in some of us – of the intelligible realities, it will not be renounced during the cognitive evolution, but, on a Platonic perspective, only by reinforced. Still, the attachment to honour is doomed to stay a weakness (because it makes one dependant on the opinion of the majority) and so the soul will need to be purified from it at some point. This is actually a late stage of the educational process, one that Alcibiades will not reach during his lifetime. But Proclus gives us the example of a soul who just reached this stage, it is again in the myth of Er, and it is the soul of Ulysses. I had no text short enough to fit it the handout, but if you happen to read Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic*, about book II page 320, you will find that Proclus' interpretation of *Republic* 620c insists on the renunciation to *φιλοτιμία* which seems to be closely linked, in Proclus' interpretation with getting beyond discursive reasoning, *dianoia*. *Φιλοτιμία*, says Proclus, like *dianoia*, is a quest, a process going from one thing to another, which needs to find its achievement in a rest. In other words, it is a transitory, albeit necessary, stage, that will need to be eventually left behind.

I think it is all the more necessary to draw a clear distinction between *φρόνημα* and *φιλοτιμία*, and probably also with contempt. *Φρόνημα* is the echo of the intelligible, it should not be forgotten, and certainly not removed from the learning soul, because it is the principle of any learning, of any recollection. We learn through this echo, which is also what we are (genuinely) proud of. *Φιλοτιμία* on the other hand is a lesser evil compared to all other passions, but it is a passion and an attachment nonetheless. It is what leads tyrannical souls away from most temptations, looking in the right general direction, but is not *per se* directly aimed at knowledge, it needs a redirection which will eventually lead to leave it behind, as it is only a useful tool but not a necessary condition for knowledge. Contempt and despising attitudes common in tyrannical souls, at last, are only the external manifestation of *φρόνημα* and *φιλοτιμία*, they can serve as hint of those two dispositions, but are not in themselves virtues, whether always necessary (like *φρόνημα*) or of transitory use (as *φιλοτιμία*).

These distinctions allow us to better understand not only the tricky interpretation of Platonic passages by Proclus, but also, I think more interestingly, to shed light on some aspects of his theory of learning. Psychology, both in the ancient and modern sense of the word, is useful to better understand cognitive processes. Affective states, like *φιλοτιμία*, do have a role to play, at least in the complex phenomenon of motivation which is obviously paramount to learning.

His unorthodox and maybe a little provocative interpretation of the choice of life by tyrannical souls allows Proclus to defend a stimulating thesis, namely that pride (and certainly not humility, as most of our tradition would assume) is an important, maybe necessary, epistemic virtue. Contempt, or more precisely: a certain kind of contempt, is therefore to be taken not as foolish arrogance to be disposed with as soon as possible, but as a hint of what could be a philosophical nature. *Φιλοτιμία* at last, although it *is* going to be disposed with in the end, is taken to be characteristic of a soul whose fall has been relatively limited, maybe what is closest to a philosopher by nature, and in any case of one who is worthy of Socrates' personal love and care. This might be where Proclus goes further than Plato, but even if this is the case, I think this is a path which is worth exploring.

Thank you for your attention.