

Eagerness and Tautness as Conditions for Learning Philosophy in Proclus

Text 1 : προθυμία as one of the three conditions for study

Καὶ τρίτον, προθυμίαν καὶ τάσιν περὶ τὴν θεωρίαν οὕτως ὥστε, καὶ ἐνδεικνυμένου μόνον τοῦ ἡγουμένου, δύνασθαι παρέπεσθαι ταῖς ἐνδείξεσι διὰ τὴν προθυμίαν ἐπιτείνουσιν τὴν προσοχήν. Τρία δ' οὖν ἔστιν ἃ δὴ φησι χρῆναι τῷ θεωρήσαντι ταύτην τὴν φύσιν, εὐφυΐα, ἐμπειρία, **προθυμία**. (*In Parm.* IV.927.14-22)

And, thirdly, he must have such intense enthusiasm towards this study that, when his instructor gives only a hint, he may be capable of following such hints by virtue of an enthusiasm which concentrates his attention. There are three things, then, which he says are required by anyone embarking on the study of the intelligible nature — natural ability, experience, and **enthusiasm**. (transl. Dillon)

Text 2 : ἐπιμελεία is linked (or equivalent) to ἐμπειρία, not to προθυμία

Τὸ οὖν τοῖς ὄμμασι σκοτῶδες καὶ φιλοσοφία αἰρετὸν οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ληπτὸν ταῖς ἀτελέσι τῶν ψυχῶν, ἀλλ' ἐκείναις μόναις αἷ καὶ διὰ φύσεως ἀρετὴν καὶ δι' ἐπιμελείας ὑπεροχὴν καὶ διὰ **προθυμίαν** δύναμιν ἑαυταῖς προσάγουσιν ἐπαξίως τῇ τούτων θεωρίᾳ. (*In Parm.* IV.975.23-29)

So then, what is dark to our eyes and appreciable only by philosophy is not going to become comprehensible to those who are inadequate of soul, but only to those souls who through natural virtue and outstanding care and power of **enthusiasm** have applied themselves worthily to the study of this subject; (transl. Dillon)

→ What is left for προθυμία?

Text 3 : If the student has a good nature, difficulty will increase his προθυμία

Ὁ μέντοι τῆς θεωρίας γνήσιος ἐραστής οὐκ ἀναδύεται τὸν πόνον, ἀλλ' ὅσῳ χαλεπωτέρα ἢ ἀντίληψις, τοσοῦτῳ **προθυμότερον** πρόσσειν οὐκ ἀποδειλιῶν πρὸς τοὺς ἄθλους· ὁ δ' ἀτελής καὶ ἀγεν νῆς, ἀκούσας τὸ ἔργον ὡς χαλεπὸν, οἷχεται φυγὰς τοῦ πράγματος ὃ μὴ προσῆκον αὐτῷ προσεῖη. Ἐνταῦθα δ' οὖν ὄντως ὁ τε δειλὸς ἀνὴρ ὁ τ' ἄλκιμος ἐξεφάνθη, καὶ τοῦτο γίγνεται κριτήριον τῶν εὖ πεφυκότων καὶ μὴ. (*In Parm.* I.681.15-32 ; see also *In Alc.* 129.7-11)

The man who genuinely loves knowledge does not shrink from the labour involved; the more difficult a matter is to learn, so much **the more eagerly** does he pursue it, not trying to evade hardships. But an inferior and unqualified student, when he hears that a task is difficult, takes his leave of an inquiry that is not for him. And there in truth “both the coward cometh to light and the man of valour” (*Iliad* 13.278), and this becomes a criterion for distinguishing the well-endowed person from his opposite. (transl. Dillon)

Text 4 : προθυμία is necessary, after the purification of obstacles, to trigger self-reversion

ένυπάρχει μὲν γὰρ ἡ γνῶσις τῆς ἀληθείας ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐμποδιζόμεθα δὲ πρὸς τὴν κατάληψιν αὐτῆς διὰ τὰ ἐπιπροσθοῦντα παθήματα τὰ γενεσιουργά, λέγω δὲ λήθην καὶ οἴησιν καὶ φαντασίας ψευδεῖς καὶ ὀρέξεις ἀμέτρους· τούτων δὲ ἀφαιρεθέντων εἰς ἑαυτοὺς λοιπὸν ἐπιστρέφειν δεῖ. μετὰ τὴν κάθαρσιν τοίνυν τῆς περιττῆς οἰήσεως παρακελεύεται τῷ νεανίσκῳ σκοπεῖν καὶ ἀνεγείρειν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὴν τοῦ [ζητουμένου κατάληψιν μετ'ἐπιστά]σεως προσεκτικωτέρας καὶ **προθυμίας** τελεωτέρας. (In Alc. 212.8-16.)

The knowledge of the truth is inherent within us, but we are prevented from grasping it on account of the obstacles raised by the conditions incident to generation, I mean forgetfulness and conceit and false imaginings and immoderate desires; but when these have been taken away, it remains for us to revert to ourselves. So after the purification from vain conceit, Socrates exhorts the young man to consider and bestir himself to grasp the object of enquiry with more assiduous attention and a greater **readiness**. (transl. O'Neil)

Text 5a : Heroes' behaviour is often προθυμότερον

τὸ δὲ δὴ τῶν ἡμιθέων τέταρτον ὄν ἐπιστρέφει τὸν λόγον εἰς τὴν πρακτικὴν ὅλον ζωὴν καὶ τινα καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πάθους προσλαμβάνει κίνησιν τῶν ἀλόγων καὶ ὀρμὴν ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν, **προθυμότερον** αὐτῶν ἐφαπτόμενον. (In Remp. II.76.23-26)

The fourth race, that of demigods, turns the whole reason towards practical life and, because of passion, adds some irrational movement and impulse in its actions, for they are **too eager** as they grow attached (my transl.).

→ How is it possible to be “too” eager and how does it lead to irrationality?

Text 5b : The tautness (συντονία) of their way of life is unsuited to philosophy

Λέγωμεν τοίνυν καὶ πρὸς ταύτας τὰς ἐπιτιμήσεις, ὅτι τοὺς μὲν ἥρωας ἐν πράξεσιν ὄντας καὶ τὸν ταύταις προσήκοντα βίον ἡρημένους ὁ ποιητὴς παραδιδούς εἰκότως καὶ παθαινομένους περὶ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον καὶ ζῶντας ὡσαύτως εἰσήγαγεν. τοῖς μὲν γὰρ φιλοσόφοις καὶ καθαρτικῶς ἐνεργοῦσιν ἡδοναὶ καὶ λῦπαι καὶ αἱ τούτων μίξεις οὐδαμῆ προσήκουσιν. χωρίζονται γὰρ ἐκ τούτων καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν θνητὴν φλυαρίαν ἀποσκευάζονται καὶ γυμνοὶ τῶν περιεστοιχημένων αὐτοὺς εἰδῶν τῆς ζωῆς γενέσθαι σπεύδουσιν, ἑαυτοὺς ἀναρπάζοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἐνύλων καὶ γενεσιουργῶν παθημάτων. τοῖς δὲ ἐν πολέμῳ στρεφομένοις καὶ κατὰ τὸ παθητικὸν ἐνεργοῦσιν ἡδοναὶ τέ εἰσιν σύστοιχοι καὶ λῦπαι, καὶ συμπάθειαι καὶ ἀντιπάθειαι, καὶ σκηνη παντοίων παθῶν. καὶ πῶς ἂν ἡ περὶ τὰς πράξεις **συντονία** χώραν ἔχοι, μὴ καὶ τῶν ὀρέξεων ἐπιτεταμένων. (In Remp. I.124.1-16)

Let us say in response to these censures that the poet appropriately depicts the heroes as men who are absorbed in practical actions and have chosen the life appropriate to these actions, and has brought them into his poem suffering emotion about each of the things that happens to them and living in this way. For philosophers and for those who are engaged in purifying themselves, pleasures and griefs and the combinations of these are not at all appropriate. This is because they are separating themselves from these things and are doing away with all mortal foolishness and they are striving to strip themselves of those forms of life which entangle them like nets, snatching themselves away from all affects depending on matter and that bring about generation. But for those engaged in warfare and acting in accordance with the emotive faculty, both pleasures and griefs are appropriate, as are sympathies and antipathies, and the tragic drama of all such passions. And how

could there be any place for **intensity** in action, if the appetites were not experienced intensely?
(transl. Baltzly et al.)

→ Are **προθυμία** and **συντονία** the same thing ?

Text 6a : Still, some tautness can be useful to fortify reason against the passions

δυναμοῖ γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸ γνωστικὸν ἢ τοιαύτη γνῶσις καὶ παρασκευάζει **συντονώτερον** ἀντέχειν πρὸς τὸ πάθος τῷ μειζόνως ὄραν τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μᾶλλον ἔχειν κατὰ φύσιν. (*In Remp.* I.22.18-21)

This sort of understanding empowers reason's cognitive part and prepares it to hold out **more strongly** against passion by virtue of the fact that it has a greater vision of the good and is more in accordance with its nature. (transl. Baltzly et al.)

Text 6b : Indeed (maybe), « philosophical love is a taut desire »
(**σύντονος** γὰρ ἐστὶν ἔφεσις ὁ ἔρωσ, *In Alc.* 336.27-28)

Text 6c : Now, every subject collaborates with its causes through its desire.

πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ πᾶν τὸ ποιῶν εἰς τὸ παθεῖν πεφυκὸς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ποιεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ καταδέξασθαι τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ὥστε καὶ ὁ δημιουργὸς τι τοιοῦτον ποιήσει, τὸ δὲ ἐπιτήδειον εἰς ὃ τίποτε διὰ τῆς ἐπιτηδειότητος αὐτῆς ἑαυτὸ προσάγει τῷ ποιῆσαι δυναμένῳ, τοῦτο δὲ δι' ἐφέσεως· ἢ γὰρ προσέλευσις ὄρεξιν ἔχει τοῦ ᾧ πρόεισιν αἰτίαν· (*In Parm.* IV.842.36-843.6)

First of all, every creative agent works upon what is by nature susceptible to its action, that is, upon what is capable of receiving its action, so that when the Demiurge will create something of a given character, the subject that is fitted to receive it, whatever the character may be, by its very aptitude presents itself as a collaborator with the agent that can create; and it does so through its desire, for its approach is caused by desire for what it is moving towards. (transl. Dillon)

Text 7 : Solution 1 - Tautness is the ability to keep one's chosen way of life

ᾧ δὲ ἐλομένῳ σὺν νῷ ζωὴ προστεθεῖσα **σύντονος** ποιεῖ τὸν βίον ἀγαπητόν, οὐ κακόν· [... = corrupted] τὸ γὰρ ἀσθενικῶς ἀντιλαβέσθαι τοῦ ἀμείνονος ἀναιρεῖ τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀγαθόν· προστίθησι δὲ ἢ συντονία καὶ τῷ μὴ ἄκρῳ πάμπλου πρὸς τὴν εἰς ἀρετὴν ὁδόν. Καὶ ἔοικεν καὶ τούτων τὸ μὲν εἰς τὴν κρίσιν ἀναφέρεσθαι τῆς ψυχῆς, ἢ ἐκλογὴ τοῦ τῶν προτεινομένων ἀμείνονος βίου, τὸ δὲ εἰς τὴν τῆς ζωῆς ῥώμην, ἢ **σύντονος** ἀντίληψις τοῦ ἐκλεγέντος. Ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων δὲ ἐπιτήδειοι γινόμεθα πρὸς τὸ τυχεῖν μείζονος ἐκ τοῦ παντὸς εὐμοιρίας· (*In Remp.* II.289.7-9 and 12-19)

When it is **taut**, the life given to him who chose by making use of his intellect makes the existence lovable rather than wicked. [...] For being shy in taking the best removes the good which is contained in it, but tautness contributes highly to the progress towards virtue. And it seems that among these requisites, one is brought by the judgment of the soul (i.e. the choice of the best life among those available), the other by the perseverance throughout life (i.e. the **taut** grasping of the chosen life). It is on the basis of those two requisites that we become capable of obtaining from the universe a better share. (my transl.)

Text 8 : Solution 2 – Some balance between tautness and looseness is required to learn
(but the same argument is cautiously attributed to Porphyry in *In Tim.* I.117.10-18)

Οὔτε γὰρ γυμναστικὴ μόνον εἰς παιδείαν ἐξαρκεῖ (μόνη γὰρ αὕτη τῆς μουσικῆς ἀποδιαληφθεῖσα πέρα τοῦ δέοντος ἄγρια καὶ φιλόνηκα καὶ σύντονα τὰ ἦθη τῶν μειόντων ἀποτελεῖ) οὔτε μουσικὴ μόνον ἄνευ γυμναστικῆς (καὶ γὰρ οἱ μουσικῇ μόνῃ χρώμενοι τὴν ζωὴν ἐκθηλύνονται καὶ μαλακώτεροι γίνονται)· δεῖ δὲ ὡσπερ ἐν λύρᾳ μήτε τὴν **συντονίαν** εἶναι μόνην μήτε τὴν ἄνεσιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ὅλην αὐτὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἡρμόσθαι ψυχὴν ἔκ τε ἐπιτάσεως παιδευτικῆς καὶ ἀνέσεως.
(*In Alc.* 194.11-20)

Neither physical training alone suffices for education (since this by itself, separated from music, renders the dispositions of those who take part unduly fierce, contentious and intense) nor music alone without physical training (since those who cultivate music alone make their way of life effeminate and become rather soft); but, as in a lyre, there must be neither **tension** alone nor relaxation, but the whole soul must be attuned to itself by a combination of intensity and relaxation in education. (transl. O'Neil)