

TRUE LIES:
HOMERIC ΣΥΜΒΟΛΑ AS THE POSSIBILITY AND COMPLETION OF THE
RATIONAL SOUL'S SELF-CONSTITUTION
IN THE *SIXTH ESSAY* OF PROCLUS' *COMMENTARY ON THE REPUBLIC*

by

Daniel James Watson

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For my Father and Mother who, though of humble estate, and beset by ill
fortune, have lived ever towards the noblest ends.

Thenketh hou noble, as seith Valerius,
Was thilke Tullius Hostillius,
That out of poverte roos to heigh noblesse.
Redeth Senek, and redeth eek Boëce;
Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is;
That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis

Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, 1165-1170

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ABSTRACT

Proclus is part of a long exegetical tradition that understands Plato and Homer to be in agreement. The *Sixth Essay* of his *Commentary on Plato's Republic* particularly significant because it is the only extant ancient text that attempts to prove the concord of Plato and Homer philosophically. Yet, despite his uniquely reasoned approach, this endeavour suffers from charges of irrationalism. The necessity that drives him to seek this conciliation is thought to come from the pious attachment he has to Homer as an authority rather than the properly philosophical demands of his rational system. The aim of this thesis is to show that Proclus' need to show Plato and Homer's agreement is not an irrational adjunct to an otherwise rational outlook, but that it follows from the central doctrines of his philosophy. This will be accomplished through a detailed consideration of Proclus' doctrine of the poetic σύμβολον. In looking at how Proclus' reading of Plato in the *Sixth Essay* is informed by his understanding of σύμβολον, we will see how Homer becomes the means, both of taking the traditional criticisms of Plato's apparent self-contradiction seriously and also of defending him against them. In looking in turn at how the soul actually experiences the σύμβολα of Homer's inspired poetry, it shall become apparent that Homer does not just save the coherence of rational thought in this exterior way, but that his poetry operates as both the possibility and perfection of the rational soul's various powers.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

- Com. Tim.* Proclus. *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Translated by Harold Tarrant, David T. Runia, Michael Share and Dirk Baltzly, 4 Vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007-2012.
- De Sac.* Proclus. *De Sacrificiis*
- El.Th.* Proclus. *The Elements of Theology*. Translated and edited by E.R. Dodds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004 (reprint of the 1963 edition).
- Ex.Chald.* Proclus. "Extraits du commentaire de Proclus sur la philosophie chaldaïque" in *Oracles chaldaïques*." Texte établi et traduit par Édouard des Places S.J. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971: 206-212.
- In Alc.* Proclus. *In Alcibiadem*
- In Crat.* Proclus. *In Platonis Cratylum Commentaria*
- In Parm.* Proclus. *In Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria*
- In Remp.* Proclus. *In Platonis Rem Publicam Commentarii*.
- In Tim.* Proclus. *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*.
- Republic* Plato. *Res Publica*
- Symp.* Plato. *Symposium*
- Th.Pl.* Proclus. *Theologia Platonica*
- Tim.* Plato. *Timaeus*

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Plato has taught us to begin no endeavour without first invoking the powers by which it is to be performed. Let these acknowledgements then stand at once as an act of thanksgiving for the accomplished work and as the invocation of the powers by which it is accomplished.

Above all, thanks is due to thee O Holy, Blessed and All-Glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who in every secondary cause is even more the cause of the good it produces than it is itself. In this and in all things may you be praised, worshipped, honoured and adored.

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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

Since the later half of the 20th century Proclus' interpretation of Homer has been the subject of significant scholarly attention. Most of this work has focused on the *Sixth Essay* of Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Republic*. This is of no surprise. Not only is the *Sixth Essay* the most complete articulation remaining of the Athenian academy's once copious work on Homer,¹ but it is one of our most important sources of fragments and reports of ancient commentators on Homer.² Yet while Proclus' relationship to Homer continues to generate interest, there are serious problems that the foundational work of scholars such as Sheppard and Lambertson has raised which have not yet been successfully answered. As is so often the case, the story begins with E.R. Dodds, whose lasting significance for Neoplatonic scholarship is hard to overestimate.³ At the same

¹ Among the works of Syrianus, now lost, to which Proclus makes reference, are the *Solutions of Homeric Problems* (*In Remp.* 95.30-1) and a treatise on the topic of Zeus and Hera (*In Remp.* 133.5-7). In addition, the *Suda* also attributes a commentary in seven books to Syrianus, entitled *On the Gods according to Homer*. There is some question as to whether Proclus may also have written a *Solutions of Homeric Problems*. However, it is difficult to determine without more evidence than we currently have. Besides the fact that the only evidence for its existence is its mention in the *Suda*, it appears in a list of titles attributed to Proclus that are duplicates of titles it attributes to Syrianus. K. Praechter believes that this proves Proclus did not write such a treatise. Sheppard, however, is inclined to think that it is possible Proclus may have written works with the same title as those of his master. See Anne D.R. Sheppard, *Studies of the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 46. Also according to the *Suda*, the fifth chapter of Hierocles' treatise *On Providence* was devoted to showing how Plato's philosophy was prefigured in Homer and Orpheus. On this see Hermann S. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21-25. See also Luc Brisson, *How the Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 92-93.

² See Robert Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 198.

³ What follows is in many respects simply a sympathetic expansion of Wayne Hankey's account of the history of Dodds' influence on later Neoplatonic studies, such as he traces

time as Dodds shows genuine admiration for Proclus, he levels some very substantial criticisms at him. On the one hand, he argues that Proclus absurdly reduces reality to a mere shadow of logic.⁴ On the other, he claims that Proclus' thought is infected by irrational superstition, one of the chief manifestations of which is his pious submission to such authorities as he took to be infallible.⁵ In this respect both Sheppard and Lambertson follow Dodds, for in their view, the *Sixth Essay* provides evidence of just such weaknesses in Proclus. Proclus' pious attachment to the idea of Plato and Homer's infallibility⁶ drives him to reduce Homer to a mere expression of his rigid and overly exact idea of the order of reality.⁷

Unlike Dodds, neither Sheppard nor Lambertson seem inclined to think that the theurgic aspect of Proclus' philosophy is inherently in conflict with the rational content of his thought.⁸ One might suppose that this would, in some respect, mitigate the degree to which they say that Proclus makes Homer's inspired poetry no more than a vehicle for his rational doctrine. For if Proclus believes, as they say he does, that the hearing of

in his article, "Re-Evaluating E.R. Dodds' Platonism," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103 (2007): 499-541.

⁴ E.R. Dodds, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), xxv: "Proclus' ontology becomes so manifestly the projected shadow of logic as to present what is almost a *reductio ad absurdum* of rationalism."

⁵ *Ibid.*, xii, xxv.

⁶ Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 130; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 164, 183.

⁷ Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 202; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 164, 232.

⁸ Both Sheppard and Lambertson seem content to describe the importance of theurgy to Proclus' interpretation of Homer without getting involved in the debate as to whether this marks the decline of philosophy (*Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 151-161; *Homer the Theologian*, 163). The closest either of them come to entering the debate is the single instance where Lambertson, in passing, sympathizes with those who see it as belonging to the "intellectual muddle of late Greek philosophy," on his way undermining any hard and fast distinction between the "clarity and directness" of fifth century Athens and the "muddle" of late antiquity (*Homer the Theologian*, 300-301).

Homer is a kind of theurgy, that, as such, raises the soul to a union with the gods beyond rationality, then he would seem to be describing an aspect of Homer's poetry which is beyond his own philosophical description of reality. However, neither scholar grants this significance to the doctrine. In Sheppard's case it is because she believes that Proclus, unlike Plotinus, did not have a genuine experience of mysticism, so much as a theory of it.⁹ Thus, when Proclus is speaking about the way that Homer's poetry transcends human reason, he is not sharing fruit he has gleaned from a true experience of that transcendence. Rather, his description of the contents that he ascribes to Homer's transcendence is no more an occasion to rehearse the doctrines of his static rational system.¹⁰

This does not mean, however, that there is no way at all in which Proclus goes beyond reason. For a consequence of the idea that Proclus imposes his doctrines on Homer's poetry rather than truly discovering them there is the conclusion that Proclus does in fact supersede the bounds of reason, but not in a particularly positive way. Lambertson is quick to pick up on this corollary. He argues, not that Proclus fails to find something in Homer that transcends philosophical rationality, but that the very problem with his reading of Homer is that he leaves behind a rational reading of the text in its very

⁹ Sheppard, *Studies of the 5th and 6th Essays*, 177. Even though Sheppard's position is generally much more moderate than those who see the emergence of theurgy as a problem in itself, this feature of her position is directly inherited from them. Most directly she is, as she says, following J.M. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism," *Hermes* 92 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1964): 220. However, she is aware that this doctrine is connected to Dodds as well. See Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 70.

¹⁰ Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 202.

eagerness to locate his rational system in the text.¹¹ It is only in looking “far beyond the text,”¹² in “departing extravagantly” from its “most obvious meaning”¹³ that Proclus’ interpretation is even possible. One gets the sense, he says, that Homer’s words are only getting in the way. Proclus is not then irrational in believing in theurgy,¹⁴ but in looking for the gods of theurgy in Homer.

Trimpi’s devotion to the theory of poetry that he finds in Plato and Aristotle¹⁵ leads him to similar conclusions, but he gives the problem a more philosophical form. Unlike Lambertson he is not concerned with how accurate Proclus’ symbolic interpretation of Homer may or may not happen to be, but with its very character as symbolic. That is to say, the problem is not that Proclus is wrong or unconvincing regarding the meanings that he finds to be at once hidden and evoked by the more obvious sense of the text, but that he is looking beyond its apparent sense in the first place. According to Trimpi, Proclus does not just happen to overlook the most rational readings of Homer because of his attachment to the idea of Homer’s authority, but does so as a matter of philosophical principle, as someone who is actively endeavoring to move beyond reason and who sees the opportunity for do so in the symbols (σύμβολα) of

¹¹ Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 170: “If the text appears to violate known truths believed to be represented in it, then the failure must lie in the inadequacies of the fragmented account itself, and the text is easily twisted and even ignored in favor of a synthetic effort to go beyond it and demonstrate the correspondence between myth and reality.”

¹² *Ibid.*, 232.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁴ The way that Proclus’ understanding of Homeric theurgy refutes the notion that theurgy is inherently irrational is treated throughout chapters Three and Four but especially pages 36-41, 74-93.

¹⁵ Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and its Continuity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 73-79, 229-236.

Homer's poetry.¹⁶ He is concerned that Proclus' focus on symbolic interpretation causes him to "disregard the middle ranges of experience which have always provided literature with its principle materials" in such a way that the best that one can hope from them is that they will not get in the way of the soul's ascent.¹⁷ Trimpi's work, in this way, provides the important clarification that there is no separating Proclus' theory of interpretation from his practice of interpretation. If there is a problem with his interpretation it is not in the poor execution of an otherwise admirable theory, but a problem with the theory itself.¹⁸

Kuisma does not contest Trimpi's claim that there is something inherently problematic about Proclus' symbolic interpretations of Homer,¹⁹ but suggests that Proclus resorts to such interpretations as little as possible.²⁰ The reason he gives for this is that Proclus himself did not find symbolic interpretation persuasive²¹ and thus, only used it as much as it was necessary to show Plato and Homer's agreement.²² As evidence he points to the fact that the greater part of Proclus' interpretations of Homer are literal,

¹⁶ *Trimpi, Muses of One Mind*, 218.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 238-239. Trimpi is not speaking specifically about Proclus here, but about general features of the position that he believes that Proclus and Plotinus share as Neoplatonists.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁹ Oiva Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996), 118: "If Proclus had been content with proposing such abstract similarities, his views would not deserve serious criticism. Whether the analogical similarities work well or not is mostly a matter of taste." See also *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35, 69, 79, 91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8, 110, 117, 124.

²² *Ibid.*, 89: "the end of interpretive pursuits is clearly to show that Homer and Plato are not in disagreement. All methods of interpretation should serve this end." See also *Ibid.*, 51, 69-70.

rather than symbolic.²³ However, in arguing that Proclus resists symbolic interpretation as much as possible, he finds himself in the awkward position of arguing directly against what Proclus says is most important about Homer. For in more than one place, Proclus declares that the symbolic aspect of Homer is not only the most characteristic of Homer's poetry, but the most important thing about it.²⁴ Yet, in spite of his inconsistencies, Kuisma's emphasis on the interest that Proclus shows in the most simple levels of meaning in Homer is a powerful check to the idea that Proclus is simply trying to move past the apparent and even the scientific meanings of Homer's poetry as fast as he can on his way to the mystical knowledge that he seeks in it. But how Proclus' interest in the apparent sense of Homer' poetry might be reconciled with the importance he attaches to its fundamentally symbolic character, neither Kuisma, nor his predecessors, are able to show. For if the purpose of the apparent sense of Homer's poetry is simply to point beyond itself to higher meanings, how is it that the meaning that belongs to the apparent sense in itself seems to be emphasized in this process rather than left behind? How does it transcend and yet simultaneously remain itself?

This dilemma has not yet been resolved. Or at least, it has not been solved in such scholarship as makes Proclus' interpretation of Homer its specific subject. The fact it has not been resolved shows how detached study in this field has been from the crucial advances that have been made by scholars such as Trouillard and Gersh in understanding the central doctrines of Proclus' philosophy. The reason for this seems to be that most of

²³ Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, 114. Cf. Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 194, 215, 222-226. Lambertson also draws attention, though only in passing, to what he sees as Proclus' hesitancy to make use of "unnecessary allegory" when the surface meaning of the text is acceptable. However, he does not attempt to argue that this is the definitive characteristic of Proclus' interpretation of Homer in the way that Kuisma does.

²⁴ *In Remp.* I.81.11-27, 195.14-22, 198.29-199.4.

the work that has been done on Proclus' relation to Homer has been done by those who are more interested in the ancient interpretation of poetry than Proclus. As a result, even though almost every work on the subject states the importance of understanding Proclus' philosophy in order to understand his interpretation,²⁵ the tendency is to mine his works for such evidence as seems most immediately relevant rather than to truly situate his interpretation of Homer in his work as a whole. Trouillard, Gersh and others appear in their footnotes and bibliographies, but very little of their influence seems to follow the information that has been gleaned from them.²⁶

This situation has begun to change as Neoplatonic theurgy has come into favour. Most of the work that has been done over the last fifteen years has regained the more affirmative tone that was previously characteristic only of Coulter's excellent though introductory book²⁷ and of Buffière's brief treatment of Proclus in his great survey of the ancient exegesis of Homer.²⁸ However, with the notable exception of Stern-Gillet,²⁹ the

²⁵ Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, 6; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 162; Sheppard, *Studies of the 5th and 6th Essays*, 11-12; Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind*, 201.

²⁶ Trimpi has a much more meaningful engagement with scholarship on Proclus' philosophy than the other scholars mentioned above. Yet he does so in a way that proceeds by means of assumptions that are exterior to Proclus' own thinking and so produces results that are as strange as they are carefully considered. See, for example, his argument that Proclus' understanding of symbol hints at its object "quantitatively" rather than "qualitatively" (*Muses of One Mind*, 218-219).

²⁷ While not entirely convinced by Proclus' conciliation of Homer and Plato as a reading of Plato, Coulter endeavors to show that the general features of Proclus' allegorical method are congenial to and, in some respect, implicit in Plato's understanding of the structure of the cosmos. See James A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 36-37, 96-101. Moreover, he claims that Proclus anticipates important modern developments in literary theory (30).

²⁸ Buffière tends to see the whole enterprise of the allegorical interpretation of Homer as "un pur jeu de l'esprit" of which we are indulgent "si l'on songe qu'ils auraient pu la pousser plus loin encore." See Félix Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956), 57. However, it remains that the conciliation of Plato and Homer found in Proclus is for him the great achievement of Hellenic thought's long

focus has shifted from the literary to the religious aspect of his engagement with Homer. The scholars of note here are Brisson,³⁰ Ven den Berg,³¹ St. Germain,³² Van Liefferinge³³ and Struck.³⁴ Yet, despite growing scholarly sympathy with Proclus' reading of Homer the problems posed by the earlier generation of scholars are still largely unanswered. St. Germain has correctly shown that Proclus' affirmation of the transcendent content of the σύμβολα he finds in Homer's poetry does not result in a mere negation of their apparent meaning, but that the appearance of the σύμβολα is somehow produced in the act of going beyond that appearance.³⁵ However, what it is about

endeavor to "réconcilier les deux grands génies de la Grèce . . . dans un même culte" (589).

²⁹ Suzanne Stern-Gillet, "Proclus and the Platonic Muse," *Ancient Philosophy* 31.1 (2011): 363-381; *idem*, "Divine Inspiration Transformed: From Hesiod to Ficino." In *Religion and Philosophy in the Platonic and Neoplatonic Traditions* (Stuttgart: Academia Verlag, 2012): 1-18.

³⁰ Luc Brisson, "Proclus et l'orphisme," *Proclus: Lecteur et interprète des anciens: Actes du Colloque International du CRNS (2-4 Octobre 1985)*, publiés par Jean Pépin et H.D. Saffrey (Paris: CRNS, 1987), 43-103; *idem*, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³¹ R.M. Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essay, Translations Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

³² Philippe St. Germain, "Remarques sur les symbolismes du *Commentaire sur la République de Proclus*," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 62. 1 (2006): 111-123; *idem*, 'Mythe et éducation: Proclus et la critique platonicienne de la poésie.' *Laval théologique et philosophique* 62.2 (2006): 301-318.

³³ Carine Van Liefferinge, *La théurgie: Des oracles chaldaïques à Proclus* (Liège: Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 1999); *idem*, "Homère erre-t-il loin de la science théologique?: De la réhabilitation du 'divin' poète par Proclus," *Kernos* 15 (2002): 199-210.

³⁴ Peter T. Struck, "The Symbol Versus Mimesis: 'Invocation Theories' of Literature," in *Mimesis: Studien zur literarischen Repräsentation*, ed. Bernhard F. Scholz (Tübingen: Francke, 1998), 149-164; *idem*, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2004.

³⁵ St. Germain, "Remarques sur les symbolismes," 121: "La poésie qui résulte de cette expérience n'est pas elle-même l'union."

Proclus' view of the structure of reality that makes it necessary that they should appear together, and how it is that this is actually possible, has not yet been demonstrated.

Be that as it may, there have been some promising developments in the direction of such a demonstration by Van den Berg and St. Germain. Van den Berg has already begun the work of clarifying Proclus' position on poetry with reference to recent work that has been done on the structure of the soul's self-knowledge in Proclus' commentary on Euclid.³⁶ St. Germain, with Trouillard as his guide, has begun to explore the implications of Proclus' idea that the σύμβολα of Homer's poetry are demiurgic as well as anagogic.³⁷ The purpose of this project then is to follow up upon these beginnings in earnest.

At each step the procedure will be to attempt to determine what it is about Proclus' understanding of reality that makes the structure that he finds in inspired poetry both possible and necessary. This task will require that we avail ourselves of a wide array of scholarly helps. But of especial use in demonstrating the rational necessity that binds together the various phenomena which Proclus finds in inspired poetry are Trouillard on symbol,³⁸ Gersh on self-constitution,³⁹ Butler on divine identity⁴⁰ and

³⁶ Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns*, 119-136.

³⁷ St. Germain, "Remarques sur les symbolismes," 117.

³⁸ Jean Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*: (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972); *idem*, "L'activité onomastique selon Proclus," in *De Iamblique à Proclus: Neuf exposés suivis de discussions* (Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1975, 239-256); *idem*, "Les fondements du mythe selon Proclus," in *Le mythe et le symbole* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 11-37; *idem*, "Le symbolisme chez Proclus," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 7 (1981): 297-308; *idem*, *La mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982).

³⁹ Stephen Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); *idem*, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

⁴⁰ Edward Butler, "Polytheism and the Henadic Manifold," *Dionysius* 23 (2005): 83-104; *idem*, "Offering to the Gods: A Neoplatonic Perspective," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*

MacIsaac on the soul's self-knowledge.⁴¹ By this procedure we will not only come to see how and why it is that the most obvious meanings in Homer can remain present in the very act of leading past themselves to more exalted meanings, but also the specific role that poetic inspiration plays among the other motions of the soul. Moreover, in doing so we will find that Proclus' interpretation of Homer does not drive him from one irrationality to another, from an irrational need to reconcile Homer to Plato,⁴² to an irrational reduction of Homer to a mere shadow of Proclus' rational understanding of reality,⁴³ to an irrational transcendence of the truly rational meaning of Homer's text.⁴⁴ Rather, we will find, in each instance, that Proclus discovers in Homer the means by which the soul may express and unfold its rational capacities to a degree that it is not capable of on its own. Reason does not try to force Homer into being what it is and in doing so cease to be reason. Rather, reason is only fully reason insofar as it has transcended itself through Homer.

(Summer 2007): 1-20; *idem*, "The Gods and Being in Proclus," *Dionysius* 26 (2008): 93-114.

⁴¹ D. Gregory MacIsaac, "Phantasia between Soul and Body in Proclus' Euclid Commentary," *Dionysius* 19 (2001): 125-136.

⁴² See Chapter Two.

⁴³ See Chapter Three.

⁴⁴ See Chapter Four.

CHAPTER TWO

Irony and Inspiration: Homer As the Test of Plato's Philosophical Coherence

ἀνοίξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου, φθέγγομαι προβλήματα ἀπ' ἀρχῆς
- Psalm 78.2

The Sixth Essay of Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic* marks the apogee of ancient philosophical interpretation of Homer. Some have said that the greatness of this work lies principally in its exhaustiveness, that its value is not in its originality so much as its synthesis of close to a thousand years of Homeric interpretation.⁴⁵ In this alone it certainly warrants more scholarly attention that it has received to date. However, to leave it at that would be to miss its greater significance. In Proclus' *Sixth Essay* we have the first extant attempt to understand the long-assumed concord of Plato and Homer *philosophically*.⁴⁶ This may strike us as odd. After all, we know that the idea of their concord served as a basis for Platonic interpretations of Homer as early as Plutarch.⁴⁷ Moreover, a significant (if not representative) amount of this work survives. However, what we do not have before Proclus⁴⁸ is an attempt to make this belief an explicit

⁴⁵ Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 164, 198.

⁴⁶ Félix Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère*, 30: "Proclus, suivant les traces de son maître Syrianus, s'est donné pour tâche de fonder en raison ce qui était depuis longtemps admis."

⁴⁷ Plutarch is the first, on record, not to treat Plato's borrowings from Homer as problematic. See for example his "How to Study Poetry" in *Plutarch's Moralia I*, ed. E. Capps, T.E. Page and W.H.D. Rouse, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (London: William Heinemann, 1927), 35f-37b. On this see also Pseudo-Plutarch. *Essay on the Life and Poetry of Homer*, eds. J.J. Keaney and Robert Lamberton. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996), 122-123.

⁴⁸ Even in Porphyry's *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. and intro. Robert Lamberton (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1983), a work whose whole procedure is to make the

philosophical subject, to discover the *reasons* for it. It is one thing to use Plato to read Homer. It is quite another thing to ask what this means for Plato himself and why it is that he needs Homer to begin with. In this endeavor it remains that Proclus is completely reliant on the work of prior exegetes and philosophers. There is almost no specific instance of his interpretation of Homer that cannot, in some way, be traced to an earlier figure in the tradition.⁴⁹ Yet in showing the way that the Platonic interpretation of Homer emerges from a necessity in Platonism itself, his conservatism unexpectedly takes the form of a new and radical insight. Platonic philosophy does not simply interpret the Divine Homer because it can do so authoritatively, it interprets Homer so that it may be philosophy.

For Proclus, Plato must be in agreement with Homer because Plato must be in agreement with himself.⁵⁰ The reason for this is that Homer has a double-life. In addition to whatever he may be in himself he is also a source of apparent self-contradiction in Plato. In the *Republic*, Homer is accused of being “third from the truth”.⁵¹ Yet in the

authority of Homer intelligible through Plato, the agreement of Homer and Plato is always assumed and never made the direct object of philosophical scrutiny.

⁴⁹ For the most part, Proclus does not seem to come up with his own allegorical interpretations so much as spiritualize Stoic physical allegory (Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère*, 558), a process in which he is, in turn, heavily dependent on the previous work of Syrianus. On this see Sheppard's book *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 47, 85, 102-103. This spiritualization of Stoic physical allegory mirrors the Neoplatonic spiritualization of the Aristotelean doctrine of causation, which, like Stoic allegory, properly applies to physical realities. On the Neoplatonic spiritualization of Aristotle see Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 32.

⁵⁰ *In Remp.* I.70.3-7, 70.15-71.2, 71.17. All translations from this work are mine. However, in my translations I have received invaluable guidance and help from the French of Festugière. See *Commentaire sur la République*, 3 Vols. trans. and notes A.J. Festugière (Paris: Vrin, 1970).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I.70.21: “τρίτος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας.” Cf. *Republic* X 597e.

Phaedo he is called “a divine poet”.⁵² In one place Homer is a “maker of semblances” (εἰδωλοποιὸν) and “phantoms” (φανταστικὸν),⁵³ in another he is one who has “established his intelligence among the gods.”⁵⁴ As a Neoplatonist for whom Plato is a kind of holy-scripture⁵⁵ the problem has to be solved in a way that preserves Plato’s authority. All his comments on Homer must be shown to be right in some way and yet be reconciled with each other. Both his criticisms and his praises of Homer must be preserved as such and yet be shown to agree. For his praises of Homer to remain praises this will mean that the criticisms will mostly function as a way of purifying them, through a process of negation. In this way what is revealed in these praises is more clearly evident, namely the unity of Plato and Homer and that in which their unity consists. Thus, his attempt to discover the “one same science and intellectual intuition”⁵⁶ that unites Plato’s comments on Homer will, in the same movement, be an attempt to discover the “communion of doctrine” (τῆς κοινωνίας τῶν δογμάτων) that he shares with Homer.⁵⁷

However, even this first beginning leaves us in considerable difficulty. For, according to most scholars, the way that Proclus frames this endeavor is handicapped by a serious flaw. It depends upon either a willful or an actual ignorance of Socratic irony.⁵⁸

⁵² *In Remp.* I.70,19-20: “θεῖος ποιητής.” Cf. *Phaedo* 95a.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I.70.30-31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I.70. 25-6: “τοῖς θεοῖς ἐνιδρύσαντα τὴν ἑαυτοῦ νόησιν.”

⁵⁵ The different kinds of holy-scripture will be discussed at a later point (88-108). The *locus classicus* for Proclus’ articulation of the distinctions of this gradation is *Th.Pl.* I.4.

⁵⁶ *In Remp.* I.70.4-5: “μῖα ἐπιστήμη ἀπαντα καὶ νοεῖς ἐπιβλέψεως.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I.71.4, 13-14.

⁵⁸ See Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 101, 107, 132-33; Kuisma, *Proclus’ Defense of Homer*, 33, 64, 144; Suzanne Stern-Gillet, “Divine Inspiration Transformed: From Hesiod to Ficino,” in *Religion and Philosophy in the Platonic and Neoplatonic Traditions: From Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. Kevin Corrigan, John D. Turner and Peter Wakefield (Germany: Academia Verlag, 2012), 8-14 and *idem*, “Proclus and the Platonic Muse” *Ancient Philosophy* 31.1 (2011): 371-374. Cf. Van den Berg,

Sheppard, for example, says that to “avoid the error of not taking Plato’s irony seriously enough Proclus falls into the opposite mistake of taking Plato far too seriously.”⁵⁹ On the other end of the spectrum, Stern-Gillet (rather less charitably) insinuates that Proclus has deliberately “closed his eyes” to Socrates’ irony.⁶⁰ These are serious charges. If the passages in which Plato seems to praise Homer are merely ironic, Proclus will not seem to have much cause to believe that Plato must be reconciled to Homer in order to be reconciled to himself. That said, the majority of the scholars who raise this criticism do not want to push the matter that far. Very few want to claim that Socrates’ ironic statements about Homer reveal nothing at all about Plato’s actual view.⁶¹ Rather, the general mood seems to be one of regret that such a significant and interesting work was

Proclus' Hymns, 102 note 30 and *Proclus' Commentary on the Cratylus in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 162, esp. note 5, where he claims that Proclus’ reading of the *Cratylus* also has this deficiency and draws attention to the way it is reproduced in the arguments of the *In Remp.* Cf. also John Dillon, “Philosophy and Theology in Proclus,” in *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O’Meara*, eds. F.X. Martin, O.S.A and J.A. Richmond (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 67 where he, like Van den Berg, accuses late Platonism and specifically Proclus of obliviousness to Socratic irony relative to the conciliation of Plato with the ‘theologians’. See also Brisson, *How the Philosophers Saved Myths*, 76. Brisson articulates this same position with reference to the late Platonic interpretation of the *Republic* though without specific reference to Proclus.

⁵⁹ Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 107.

⁶⁰ Stern-Gillet, “Divine Inspiration Transformed,” 3.

⁶¹ Sheppard, for example (*Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 106-107) refrains from saying that there is *nothing* of Plato’s view in Socrates’ ironic praises of inspired poetry. She stresses rather that it is very difficult to determine when Socrates’ irony should be taken seriously and when it should not. Proclus is not wrong in pointing to an ambiguity in Plato’s treatment of poetry, nor is he wrong in sometimes taking Socrates’ ironic statements seriously. He is, however, wrong in consistently taking them to be serious. Similarly John Dillon (*Philosophy and Theology*, 66-67), when he says that Socratic irony is “lost on Proclus,” is not saying that he is completely wrong but that he, along with other Late Platonists, fails to appreciate Plato’s “complex attitude” towards the ‘theologians.’ On a different tack, Buffière (*Les mythes d’Homère*, 63) and Coulter (*The Literary Microcosm*, 15, 37, 119) show an interest in minimizing the presence of irony in certain sections of Plato that are important for Proclus’ conciliation of Plato and Homer, but in doing so admit that it is a problematic feature of Proclus’ interpretation.

lessened by this deficiency. We find ourselves somewhat embarrassed at the irrationalisms that both cause and are caused by the attachment Proclus has to his sources and we look to affirm what remains brilliant and unclouded. In short, the spirit of E.R. Dodds is still with us, even among Proclus' sympathizers. Yet, strangely enough, it is to his example that we must turn if we would seek to answer this criticism.

The debt that the modern study of Neoplatonism owes to E.R. Dodds is well known. Among his other great academic accomplishments, Dodds, in his famous essay *The Parmenides of Plato and the Neoplatonic One*,⁶² rescued scholarly opinion from the notion that Neoplatonism was somehow inherently irrational. He did this by demonstrating that the characteristic achievement of the Neoplatonic movement, the discovery of a complete account of the order of reality in the hypotheses of the *Parmenides*, was not the pious misunderstanding of a Platonic joke or logical exercise, but a properly philosophical interpretation of Plato.⁶³ Where others saw only an earnest ignorance of Socratic playfulness Dodds found philosophical reasons. Clearly this is germane to our purposes. It would seem that the ability of modern scholarship to appreciate the rational content of Neoplatonic philosophy is in some respects proportional to its ability to appreciate the coherence of the Neoplatonic interpretation of Socratic irony.⁶⁴ To find a way to answer the claims of Proclus' critics mentioned above we have only to extend the logic, already proven by Dodds and accepted by scholarship.⁶⁵

⁶² E.R. Dodds, "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Neoplatonic One," *The Classical Quarterly* 22.3 (Jul.-Oct., 1928): 129-142.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, *passim* but esp. 132-135, 139-140.

⁶⁴ See John Dillon's notes in *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow, trans. and intro. John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 99 for a similar interpretation: "It is amusing, however, to note Proclus' view that Pythodorus misunderstands the tenor of Socrates' remarks and is thus surprised, in

Unfortunately, Dodds stands against such an extension. His belief in the rationality of the hyper-cosmic order that the Neoplatonists find in the *Parmenides* does not extend so far as the religious applications that the followers of Iamblichus found for it. For Iamblichus as for Proclus, the hierarchical order that they found in the *Parmenides* was the key to demonstrating the conciliation of Plato with such ‘theologians’ as the Chaldean Oracles and Orpheus, Hesiod and Homer.⁶⁶ Dodds goes so far as to describe this conciliation as a ‘spineless syncretism’⁶⁷ that is “less a philosophy than a religion.”⁶⁸ The scholars mentioned above are certainly more congenial in their expression but the form of their criticism of Proclus is the same. Proclus’ attachment to his theological authorities hinders him from an appropriately philosophical understanding of Plato.

130aff., that Zeno and Parmenides are not annoyed, because Pythodorus is an inferior entity and thus takes Socrates’ comments on Zeno as criticism and irony. We are all inferior beings now, I fear.” We should not assume, however, that this statement in any way contradicts his opinion in *Philosophy and Theology* referenced in note 18. His argument here is substantially that of Dodds (“The *Parmenides* of Plato,” 134): even if the *Parmenides* is a *παιδιά* it is not for that reason merely ironic. The problem, for Dillon, is that Proclus does not seem to notice Socratic irony when it is really there.⁶⁵ There are ultimately two ways of extending Dodds’ logic here. The first, and most straightforward manner, is to attempt to show of Plato’s statements on Homer what Dodds showed regarding the *Parmenides*, that what appears to be irony on account of its playfulness, is not fundamentally ironic. However, the best that can be hoped for in this direction is that it will blunt, rather than do away with the criticisms we have seen made by Sheppard and others. Even if some of Socrates’ affirmations of Homer are not ironic, the idea that none of them are, is not believable. The ultimate futility of such a procedure is evident in the tentativeness of the laudable (if somewhat misguided) attempts of such scholars as Buffière and Coulter to downplay the irony of the relevant passages (see note 18). The second way to extend Dodds’ logic is to show how Proclus may take Socrates’ ironic statements seriously precisely *as* ironic statements. This will be the procedure followed here.

⁶⁶ Brisson, *How the Philosophers Saved Myths*, 90-106.

⁶⁷ E.R. Dodds, “Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism,” in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 286.

⁶⁸ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, 122.

Yet the failure of modern scholarship to discern philosophical reasons in Proclus' reading of Socratic irony relative to the 'theologians' does not seem to be based in a lack of such reasons on Proclus' part. There is no denying that the texts that are most foundational for Proclus' reconciliation of Plato and Homer are examples of Socratic irony. Yet what these conclusions fail to account for, as inescapable as they may seem, is the way in which the theory of interpretation that Proclus develops in the *Sixth Essay* may inform his interpretation Socratic irony. The pivotal feature here is Proclus' development of the concept of the poetic symbol (σύμβολον).

In Proclus' words, Socrates' first criticism of Homer⁶⁹ is that he says shameful and monstrous things about the gods.⁷⁰ If myths do not want to completely miss the truth they must resemble (ἀπεικάζεσθαί) the realities that they depict.⁷¹ Therefore, mythical figurations (πλάσμασιν)⁷² of the gods must then aim at beauty and goodness.⁷³ However, Proclus shows that these expectations run against the cosmic order. In *Nature*,⁷⁴ the invisible is represented by the visible, the eternal by the temporal, the intelligible by the sensible.⁷⁵ The myth-makers, in agreement with the cosmic order do likewise, symbolizing what is beyond reason by what is against reason, what is above Nature by

⁶⁹ Cf. *Republic*, II.377d-383c.

⁷⁰ *In Remp.* I.72.10-12. Cf. *Republic*, II.377e-378e.

⁷¹ *In Remp.* I.73. 14-15. Cf. *Republic*, II.379b.

⁷² Πλάσμασιν is here translated as "figurations" rather than "fictions" as Festugière has it (*Commentaire sur la République*, I.73.30) because, as we shall see, Proclus says they are as true as human opinion is capable of being. However, because humans often deceive themselves in relation to this level of representation (e.g. *In Remp.* I,115.23-26), it is still necessary to bring across something of the negative connotations this word can have relative to ideas of artificiality and deception. Therefore, "figurations" is preferred to a neutral term like "figures".

⁷³ *In Remp.* I.73. 24-27. Cf. *Republic*, II.377c, 379c, 382d.

⁷⁴ Coulter argues that Plato's understanding of Nature is "allegorical in its basic assumptions" (*The Literary Microcosm*, 37-38).

⁷⁵ *In Remp.* I.77. 13-19. Cf. *Tim.* 30c-31c, 37d-38b, 39e-40a, 42e-43a, 44d.

that which is against it, what is simple beauty by what is variegated and ugly.⁷⁶

However, the myth-makers do not do so in imitation of Nature, but rather by means of the images of the gods that daemons inspire in their imaginations through their symbolic activity.⁷⁷ Yet the symbols (σύμβολα) they impart are not arbitrarily given. While the symbols of Homeric myths depict the gods themselves only by a kind of analogy of contradiction,⁷⁸ they are accurate likenesses of the daemons.⁷⁹ For every god is the head and source of a ‘series’ (σειρὰ)⁸⁰ of lesser divinities, that proceeds from the god according to a progressive unlikeness.⁸¹ Those that proceed most immediately from the god are most like to it. Those that appear towards the end of the causal chain and through the mediation of the most secondary divinities, are the most unlike the god.⁸² Yet each

⁷⁶ *In Remp.* I.77. 24-29.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I.86.10-15: “καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐκείνων ἐνεργείας συμβολικῶς τὰ πολλὰ δηλούσης.”

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, I.77. 21-23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, I.79.2-4, 86.19. This is possible because human imagination is the same as daemonic body. See Jean Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 40-41, 153, 251. See also E.R. Dodds’ commentary at *El.Th.* 320-321.

⁸⁰ *In Remp.* I.92. 2-9. See also 91.21-25, 94.8-13.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, I.113.20-114.29 *passim*.

⁸² The foundation of the doctrine outlined in this paragraph is Plato’s description (*Symp.* 201e-204b), of Eros as a daemon that, as such, mediates between the human and the divine (*Symp.* 201e-204b). Xenocrates further develops the doctrine by arguing that a feature of the intermediary status of daemons is that they are susceptible to passions and involuntary change. On this see John Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 129. Plutarch, from whom we have the report of Xenocrates’ views on the subject, uses the doctrine to account for the scandalous appearance of both sacred poetry and religious rituals. See “Isis and Osiris,” in *Moralia V*, eds. E. Capps, T.E. Page and W.H.D. Rouse, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1936), 360e-361c. A similar account is found in Maximus of Tyre who also notes a correspondence between the structure of religious rituals and the structure of Homeric myth, but does not seem to notice the significance of his understanding of daemonic mediation to understanding that structure. See Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes*, ed. Michael B. Trapp (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1994), XXVII, XXIX. In Iamblichus the doctrine more or less takes the form in which Proclus receives it from Syrianus save that Iamblichus is silent on the possibility of the doctrine’s application to inspired poetry. See

member of the order that is founded in the god, however unlike, bears its name and, in some way, as a particularized form of its providence, its character.⁸³

It is for this reason that it is not impious of Homer to depict Achilles or Diomedes fighting gods or the gods fighting each other. It is impossible that Achilles, for instance, who of the all Homeric heroes is the most pious and who personally advocated for the interests of Apollo's priest, would shout insults at the first and highest Apollo.⁸⁴ However, a divinity that was among the lowest and most particularized in the Apollonian series, a daemon that presides over particular things, would be Achilles' equal.⁸⁵ The principle here is that the lowest level of divine life is at the same level as the highest level of human life,⁸⁶ especially when that human life is moved (κινῆται) by the gods themselves.⁸⁷ Therefore, since the providential care that this daemonic Apollo has for Hector hinders Achilles from the good he seeks, Achilles is just as entitled to call that deprivation 'evil' as he would if any other hero did the same thing.⁸⁸ In a more general way, the sympathy that each daemon has with the allotted objects of their care in the world of becoming⁸⁹ drive the armies of daemons and even divinities as high as angels to war with each other.⁹⁰ In the conflict of Hera and Artemis we see the battle of rational

On the Mysteries, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), I.5-9.

⁸³ *In Remp.* I.91.7-18; *contra* Trimpf, *Muses of One Mind*, 237-238: "the symbol predicates no explicit relation between what it signifies and the external form which embodies its existence."

⁸⁴ *In Remp.* I.146.17-21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I.149.5-9.

⁸⁶ *El.Th.* 112 (Dodds, 98.33-100.4).

⁸⁷ *In Remp.* I.149.7-9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, I.147.19-148.13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, I.93.28-94.5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 91.1-4.

and irrational love in the cosmos,⁹¹ in that of Athena and Ares the strife between a providential order that conforms to Intellect and an order of Necessity that is manifest in the vigour of physical forces.⁹² In the myths of their combats the whole battle of the world of becoming comes into view.⁹³ Yet in their conflict the initiated eye is able to see hidden, as behind a sacred veil, the blissful and peaceful pre-relations of the gods to whose series they belong.⁹⁴

As we may have been lead to expect by the examples above, many of the divine encosmic battles depicted by Homer are divided between one side which seeks to aid the encourage the soul's participation in intellect and another that seeks to facilitate the soul's participation in matter.⁹⁵ Apollo is among as the latter as one that aids, perfects and unites what the generative power of Poseidon disperses.⁹⁶ In the *Sixth Essay* the perfecting and unifying activity of the Apollonian series is manifest through divine poetry, for it is the daemons of his series that inspire Homer and the other divine poets in the way described above.⁹⁷ By the very ugliness (αἰσχρότητα)⁹⁸ of the symbols that they

⁹¹ *In Remp.* I.95.3-7.

⁹² *Ibid.*, I.95.7-12.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, I.107.25-30.

⁹⁴ When speaking of the gods revealed in the σύμβολα of Homeric poetry Proclus generally does not mention divinities any higher than the demiurgic gods that are in Zeus (*Ibid.*, 90.13-29). However, there are a few instances in the *Sixth Essay* that suggest that Homeric poetry can reach at least as far as the Intellectual Monad (*Ibid.*, I.134.12-19). The significance of this will be dealt with at a later point (53-55).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.94.13-25.

⁹⁶ We find this opposition at *Ibid.*, I.94.29-95.3. However, to get a clear sense of the character of this opposition it is necessary to turn to Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* (86.6-19, 96.26-97.7, 99.7-8). On this see also Festugière, *In Remp.* I.112 note 2.

⁹⁷ *In Remp.* I.92.29, 193.19-25. The Apollonian daemons that accomplish this inspiration directly are, of course the Muses (*Ibid.*, I.192.9-12, 180.12-19).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.76.18.

inspire in the poets, that is to say, by the very ugliness of their own likenesses,⁹⁹ they move (κινεῖν)¹⁰⁰ those who have done away with all that is juvenile in their soul¹⁰¹ to search for the truth that is hidden beneath their tragic (τραγικὸν) unnatural (παρὰ φύσιν) and even monstrous (τερατολογία)¹⁰² appearance.¹⁰³ It is thus that they “strike with amazement those who have prepared themselves for participation with them and trained themselves for the receiving of light and raise them on high towards *henosis* (ἔνωσις) with the gods.”¹⁰⁴ At a later point we shall have to ask ourselves what this means,¹⁰⁵ but for the present, what is most significant here for our present purposes is the association of this perfecting of the soul with daemonic laughter.

Proclus answers the problem Socrates raises about Homer’s depiction of the laughter of the gods¹⁰⁶ in much the same way as we have seen him resolve Socrates’ earlier criticisms. The gods, of course, do not laugh, but the daemons do, they and all the other grades of divinity that live in the cosmos. In a general way laughter is associated with their mediation of the providential care of the transcendent gods to the sensible world. The gods on high are said to laugh because these ‘young gods’¹⁰⁷ are amused by

⁹⁹ *In Remp.* I.79.2-4.

¹⁰⁰ In this Proclus seems to contrast with Porphyry for whom the possible mystical significance of the Christian sacraments does not excuse their unsettling outward sense. See Porphyry, *Porphyry’s Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*, ed. and trans. R. Joseph Hoffmann (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1994), 49. Kuisma mentions this text in passing (*Proclus’ Defence of Homer*, 136 note 5).

¹⁰¹ *In Remp.* I.80.23-30. Cf. also 79.27-80.4, 80.12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, I.86.1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, I.85.16-19.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, I.86.7-10: “καταπλήττοντα τοὺς εἰς τὴν μετουσίαν αὐτῶν ἐγειρομένους καὶ γυμναζομένους πρὸς τὴν τοῦ φωτὸς καταδοχὴν καὶ εἰς ὕψος ἐπαίροντα πρὸς τὴν ἔνωσιν τῶν θεῶν.”

¹⁰⁵ This is the subject of Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁶ *In Remp.* I.122.25-123.38. Cf. *Republic* III.388e-389a.

¹⁰⁷ This is a reference to *Tim.* 42e.

the changeability of the natural order that they sustain and govern.¹⁰⁸ However, laughter does not apply to their providential activity as a whole, but to such instances of it as result in the perfection of a nature. Relative to temporal perfection divine laughter symbolizes their providence over the immortal beings of the celestial realm, their tears their providence over the mortals of the sublunary world.¹⁰⁹ Relative to generative perfection one refers generation to the laughter of the gods and decay to their tears.¹¹⁰ It makes sense that examples of a strictly bodily perfection would be given here since the encosmic gods are understood to exert providence over the world of generation, that is to say, the world of bodies, but this does not mean the distinction is limited to them. We must remember that in the divine battles mentioned above we have seen examples of divinities of the world of generation mediate such things as ‘rational souls’ (ψυχῶν λογικῶν)¹¹¹ and ‘providence according to intellect’ (κατὰ νοῦν πρόνοιαν),¹¹² things that may involve bodies but also participate in degrees of reality that are superior to bodies. It is therefore no surprise when Proclus makes it clear that his understanding of divine laughter refers to the result of these more complex forms of encosmic causality as well. For prior to Proclus’ examples he shows that the laughter of the gods symbolizes the providential activity of *all* the gods, insofar as they collaborate with Hephaestos, not only in the creation of things but in leading them to their perfection (τελεσιουργοῖς), regardless of whether that perfection is material or spiritual.¹¹³ Divine laughter then will refer to the providential perfection of a given cosmic entity. Divine tears will refer to the

¹⁰⁸ *In Remp.* I.127.4-11.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, I.128.11-13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I.128.13-16.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, I.95.3-7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, I.95.7-12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, I.127.16-21.

way that the perfection of one thing can be hindered or destroyed by the perfection of another.¹¹⁴

This idea that divine laughter symbolizes the providential perfection of souls as well as bodies is made more explicit in Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*.¹¹⁵ His interpretation of that dialogue hangs on the idea that the main characters of the dialogue represent specific divine realities. Parmenides, Zeno and Socrates are analogies of Unparticipated Intellect, Participated Intellect and an individual intellect respectively.¹¹⁶ But beyond even these divinities, he sees in them analogies of the highest spiritual realities, the members the Intelligible Triad. In this case Parmenides stands for Being, Zeno for Life and Socrates for Intellect.¹¹⁷ In connection with either level of analogy Proclus is able to say that the smiles of Parmenides and Zeno at 130a symbolize the divine goodness. Zeno's laughter, on the other hand, as something that is much more perceptible than a smile, symbolizes the providential mediation of that divine goodness to what is below.¹¹⁸ Thus when Zeno turns Socrates back to Parmenides by his laughter, Proclus sees it as a representation of the way that the divine goodness that remains above, through manifesting itself to what is below, turns that lower reality back towards its

¹¹⁴ The distinction here, which is fundamentally the distinction between Necessity and Providence, is worked out in greater detail in Proclus' account of the two urns of Zeus (*In Remp.* 98.26-100.18). However, the clearest example of the frustration of one perfection by another in the *Sixth Essay* is in the instance referenced above in which the Apollonian daemon hinders Achilles from the desired good of killing Hector. Both daemon and hero seek a good, yet the success of one means the frustration of the other (*In Remp.* 148.3-8).

¹¹⁵ Andrew Smith's essay, "The Neoplatonic Socrates," directed me to this passage. See Andrew Smith, "The Neoplatonic Socrates," in *Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus: Philosophy and Religion in Neoplatonism* (Farnham: Variorum, 2011), 458.

¹¹⁶ *In Parm.* 628.1-14. In my work with this text I have had the assistance of Morrow and Dillon's English translation. See *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 628.14-15.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1022.18-28.

perfection in the unity of the higher.¹¹⁹ Insofar as this overflowing of divine laughter remains a strictly spiritual process it is not also a game. It is only the divine perfection of physical things that it is called a ‘game’ (παιδιὰ).¹²⁰ However, insofar as this spiritual process may involve the physical world, as it does in the reversion of human intellect to the unity of the Intellectual gods, it is a game as well, a ‘serious’ (πραγματειώδη) game since it involves Intellect, but a game nonetheless.¹²¹ The daemonic activity we have seen at work in Homeric symbol is then just such a ‘serious game’. On the bodily level it perfects the imagination, since imagination is for soul a kind of body.¹²² On the intellectual level this perfection of the soul’s imagination results in the perfection of the soul itself in its unification with the Intellectual gods.¹²³ Thus, Proclus’ demonstration that Homer is blameless in his use of laughter as symbol of the providence of the gods leads us to a second conclusion: Homeric poetry not only rightly and effectively represents the gods with the image of laughter, it is itself an appearance of such playfulness and such laughter.¹²⁴

Now at last we find ourselves in a position to appreciate what is at work in Proclus’ interpretation of Socratic irony. For now that we have an outline of Proclus’ account of Homeric σύμβολον it begins to appear that it does not ignore Socratic irony, but mirrors it. This is most clearly demonstrated in relation to Plato’s *Symposium*.

¹¹⁹ *In Parm.* 1022.28-1023.4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1036.4-7.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 1036.7-12, 1051.29-30

¹²² Trouillard, *La mystagogie du Proclus*, 153, 251.

¹²³ *In Remp.* I.86.7-10.

¹²⁴ In his development of “seriousness” and “laughter” Proclus seems to be following Plotinus quite closely. See, for example, *Ennead III*, 8 in *Ennead III*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1.1. Plotinus in turn appears to be following Aristotle’s discussion of amusement and exertion at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1176a30-1177a15.

Towards the end of the dialogue Alcibiades famously compares Socrates' ironic¹²⁵ exterior to that of a Silenus figurine.¹²⁶ On the surface he is like one of the daemons¹²⁷ of Dionysus' retinue: outrageous (ὕβριστής),¹²⁸ playful (παίζων),¹²⁹ laughing (κατεγέλασεν)¹³⁰ and causing laughter (γελοῖοι),¹³¹ deceptive (ἐξαπατῶν).¹³² Yet beneath that strange surface is found a serious interior, filled beautiful and golden statues of the gods.¹³³ Nor is this any less true of his words as it is of himself. Though his ideas are clothed in words as course as a satyr's hide,¹³⁴ they are able to possess and astound those who are prepared with the sight of the gods that are within them.¹³⁵ This is, of course, analogous to the way that we have seen Proclus portray the Homeric σύμβολον. In both cases a daemonic, monstrous and playful exterior covers a divine, beautiful and serious interior. The act of piercing this exterior is compared with religious ritual.¹³⁶ Moreover, he one who does so is said to be 'struck,'¹³⁷ 'possessed,'¹³⁸ and filled with 'madness' (μανία).¹³⁹

¹²⁵ The ironic character of the Socrates' Silenus-like surface is implicit throughout Alcibiades' speech (*Symp.* 215a-222c), but he explicitly links it with Socrates' ironizing activity at 216e (εἰρωνευόμενος).

¹²⁶ *Symp.* 215b-217a, 221e-222a.

¹²⁷ On the daemonic nature of Socrates see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. and intro. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 148, 161.

¹²⁸ *Symp.* 215b, 219c, 221e, 222a.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 216e.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 219c.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 221e; 222a.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 222b.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 216e-217a.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 222e.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 215c-d.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 215c-d. Cf. *In Remp.* I.110.21-111.2.

¹³⁷ In both works a version of the verb πλήσσω is used. Plato uses πληγείς in the *Symposium* (218a). Proclus uses καταπλήττοντα (*In Remp.* I.86.7).

Even so, while the closeness of this parallel shows that Proclus sees an analogy between the way that Homeric σύμβολον and Socratic irony work, we will need to look outside of the *Sixth Essay* in order to determine what this actually means for Proclus' interpretive method. It certainly seems to suggest that Proclus would see the surface of Socratic irony as different from the truth it clothes, and that, like a Homeric σύμβολον, one would have to look beneath that surface to have access to its truth. However, it is not until we look at specific examples of his interpretation of Socratic irony that we are able to determine that this is so. The two most important examples are found in his commentaries on the *Cratylus* and the *Alcibiades*. In his *Commentary on the Cratylus*¹⁴⁰ Proclus determines that when Socrates says that he does not “know the truth” it is not true in the most obvious sense. What Socrates really means is that “though he knows it according to his disposition (ἔξιτιν), he does not have it at the ready.”¹⁴¹ Likewise when, in the *Alcibiades*, Socrates declares his desire to learn from the man who taught Alcibiades about what is just, it is not “merely irony, but also the truth, for Socrates would not flee

¹³⁸ In both works a version of the verb κατέχω is used. Alcibiades claims that Socrates' words “cause possession” (κατέχεσθαι ποιεῖ) in those who hear them (*Symp.* 215c-d). In the *Sixth Essay*, Proclus claims that poetic inspiration is a “possession” (κάτοχον, *In Remp.* I.181.3) and that this “possession” is passed by the poet to those who hear it (*In Remp.* I.182.21-183.26).

¹³⁹ *Symp.* 218b; *In Remp.* I.181.19.

¹⁴⁰ *In Crat.* 10.1-10. Cf. David Sedley, “Socratic Irony in the Platonist Commentators,” in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2002), 52. My argument here is in many respects simply an attempt to further contextualize and expand upon Sedley's excellent work.

¹⁴¹ *In Crat.* 10.8-9. All translations are my own. However, in my translations I have been aided by the English of Brian Duvick. *On Plato's Cratylus*, trans. Brian Duvick, ed. Harold Tarrant (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

from hearing one who truly knows.”¹⁴² In both examples, the ironic surface of what Socrates says is associated with an element of deception.¹⁴³ It is that which makes it necessary to ask the *way* in which what Socrates says it is true.

Yet, while these examples demonstrate that the structure of Socratic irony does indeed have an analogous structure to that of Homeric σύμβολον¹⁴⁴ they also show that its mode of representation is much more nearly akin to its object.¹⁴⁵ As the ontological difference between Socrates’ Silenian exterior and his golden interior is much less than that between a daemon and the intellectual gods, so the difference between Socrates’ feigned ignorance, and what he actually knows, is much less than that between the wars of the daemons and the divine activities they represent. However, quite aside from its ontological necessity, this is only fitting relative to the purpose of Socratic irony. It is due to the radical inferiority and unlikeness of a σύμβολον’s surface relative to the divine realities at which it hints that it does so much harm to the immature and unphilosophical soul that confounds them.¹⁴⁶ Socratic irony, on the other hand, is adapted to the young

¹⁴² *In Alc.* 230.18-231.1: “μόνον εἰρωνεῖαν νοήσωμεν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀλήθειαν οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ὁ Σωκράτης ἀπέφυγεν ἀκρόασιν τοῦ ἐπιστήμονος.” Translations from this text are my own. However, in these I have found Segonds’ French translation, and the English of O’Neill very helpful. For the latter see Proclus, *Alcibiades I*, trans. and comm. William O’Neill (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965).

¹⁴³ In this section of *In Crat.* Socrates’ comments are called “dissimulations” (εἰρωνεῖαι, 10.8). Likewise, in this section of *In Alc.*, Proclus says that Socrates is “pretending” (προσποιεῖσθαι) to need a teacher (231.6).

¹⁴⁴ *In Alc.* 231.8-16. Here Proclus, compares the structure of Socrates’ irony to the cosmos, in the same way as he did with Homeric poetry at *In Remp.* I.77.13-29. Cf. Segonds’ useful comments (*In Alc.* 414).

¹⁴⁵ This is also suggested by the difference in the intensity of the poetic language used to describe them. Where the daemonic exterior of Socratic irony is only “outrageous” (ὕβριστής, see note 75), that of Homeric symbol is “unnatural” (παρὰ φύσιν) and “monstrous” (τερατολογία, see note 52).

¹⁴⁶ *In Remp.* I.74.12-16, 74.30-75.19. That is to say, Socrates’ ironic deception does not tempt the young to blasphemy and its fearful consequences in the way that Homeric

and poorly educated, so much so that Proclus sees the philosophical maturity of Socrates' interlocutor as proof that Socrates is not being ironic.¹⁴⁷ Seeing as the surface of Socratic irony seems to deceive *all* the immature souls for which it is intended, if it too had as a great an inferiority to its object it would seem better equipped to destroy than to educate the youth of Athens. As it is, it remains well adapted to their education. The deceived must partake of Intellect according to the mode of deceit.¹⁴⁸ Those who are deceived by Homeric σύμβολα are punished by their own action¹⁴⁹ since they were deceived in partaking of what was inappropriate for their state of soul. But since those who are deceived by Socratic irony are deceived by what is appropriate to them we can expect that it will have more immediately positive effect. It is clear that this is what Proclus expects since he makes both irony¹⁵⁰ and the concern that the youth of the city should only hear what is good for their education,¹⁵¹ characteristic of Socrates.

poetry does, in part, because Socrates only has statues (ἀγάλματα, *Symp.* 216e, 222a. Cf. *In Remp.* I.73.21) of the gods hidden in himself and in his words, in the form of philosophical ideas (*Symp.* 221d-e, 218b. Cf. *In Remp.* I.73.22). Whereas, the σύμβολα of Homer's poetry contain the very gods themselves.

¹⁴⁷ *In Tim.* I.62.26-29. On this point see Sedley, *Socratic Irony*, 47-8.

¹⁴⁸ *In Remp.* I.104.28-105.10. As Festugière notes, Proclus is echoing Plotinus' *Ennead* II.3.11:8 in this passage (*In Remp.* I.121).

¹⁴⁹ Keeping in mind that Proclus compares the way divine revelation is manifest in Homeric σύμβολα to the way it is manifest in dreams (*In Remp.* I.86.10-15), cf. Proclus' discussion at *In Remp.* I.100.21-106.11, where he shows how the dreams that the gods send lure unworthy recipients to their destruction through their own dispositions, rather than through some form of external coercion. For an unworthy person to seek out inspired poetry, would be to seek out the terrible chastisement that the gods send the impious in dreams.

¹⁵⁰ Sedley (*Socratic Irony*, 44) quotes Proclus (*In Remp.* I.60.24-28). Sheppard also notes this passage (*Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 108 note 8), but does not make any conclusions beyond mentioning it as an instance where Proclus "recognizes Socrates' tendency to irony."

¹⁵¹ *In Remp.* I.79.18-80.1.

Of course, we have not yet addressed the most decisive issue. If Socratic irony, like Homeric σύμβολον, has a surface that is unlike enough to what it represents that one must work out the way in which it is true, why then does Proclus accept Socrates' opinions about Homer unequivocally? The answer to this lies in the difference between what their respective surfaces are deceptive about. The examples discussed above are the only places that I (or Sedley it would seem) have been able to find where Proclus endeavors to find the truth hidden behind a Socratic expression that he sees as ironic. The controversy of both these passages is related to the question of what Socrates does and does not know.¹⁵² Yet when Socrates speaks ironically about other subjects, such as Homer, Proclus takes whatever opinions Socrates offers as authoritative.¹⁵³ Thus, it would seem that the meaning of Socratic irony only becomes controversial for Proclus when the opinion in question is itself an assertion of Socrates' apparent ignorance. The deception of Socratic irony then, contrary to Homeric σύμβολον, does not lie in its opinions as such but in his dissimulation that it is his interlocutor and not he himself that has the power to demonstrate the truth of the opinions that he is putting forward.¹⁵⁴ In this way, Proclus is free to take Socrates' opinions as unequivocally true, even when given ironically, except when those opinions concern his ignorance, in which case they

¹⁵² Sedley, *Socratic Irony*, 51-52.

¹⁵³ This is not simply implicit in the way Proclus interprets Socrates. Proclus lists Socrates among those characters in the dialogues who may be taken to speak for Plato (*In Remp.* I.110.15-17).

¹⁵⁴ This is in partial contradiction of Pierre Hadot's characterization of Socrates as he appears in the traditions that reflected back on him. On the one hand he agrees that "irony is a psychological attitude in which the individual uses self-depreciation to attempt to appear inferior to what he really is" but then he goes on to suggest that it also involves Socrates' use of "words or speeches that the audience would have expected to hear coming out of the mouth of his adversary" (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 152-153). It is worth noting here that in this brief history of the reception of Socrates he nowhere mentions the work of either Proclus or Olympiodorus on Socratic irony.

are true in the same qualified way as his feigned ignorance is in general. Therefore, while it is true that Proclus' insistence that Plato must be reconciled to Homer to be reconciled to himself depends on treating opinions that Socrates has given in the ironic mode as authoritative statements, this does not in any way demonstrate that he is acting in ignorance of Socratic irony. Rather, his position is the fruit of a philosophical understanding of Socratic irony that is wholly in accord with the rest of his philosophical system.

Even so, this does not, by any means, dispense of all ambiguity. Reconciling Socrates' statements, both with each other, and with those made by such other characters in Plato's dialogues as Proclus takes to speak with Plato's authority, is a task as complicated as the structure of reality. One of the ways that this task becomes complicated for Proclus is when the statement under consideration refers to an object that is itself complex. If the object of such a statement exists on multiple levels of reality one must first determine which of the modes of the object's existence is meant if one is not to be mistaken about it. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this kind of complexity in the *Sixth Essay* is Proclus' treatment of blindness of Homer. Socrates says that Homer is blind because his poetry slanders Helen.¹⁵⁵ This statement is simply true. Socrates is not equivocating here. However, to determine the significance of this truth Proclus must determine the register in which this truth operates. Of the three ontological and epistemological levels present in Homer's poetry,¹⁵⁶ this particular statement is found to refer to the lowest level of Homeric poetry: the level of appearances.¹⁵⁷ Homer has

¹⁵⁵ *In Remp.* I.176.173.4-25.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I.177.7-178.5, 192.6-193.17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I.176.13-16.

indeed sinned insofar as he has lead the soul to the contemplation of physical beauty.¹⁵⁸

Yet, because this only applies to the lowest and least characteristic level of Homeric poetry, Proclus is able to subordinate this authoritative statement to those that refer to its highest and most characteristic level.¹⁵⁹ In this way, the truth of the statement that he is blind as a punishment becomes an image of the higher reality that Homer is said to be blind because of his more fundamental rejection of physical beauty in favour of spiritual.

Another difficulty in understanding the authoritative statements of the Platonic dialogues is that one must always interpret them relative to the purpose of the dialogue in which they are found, and only then begin to work out how they fit with the authoritative statements of the other dialogues. According to Proclus, every Platonic dialogue is a sort of cosmos, wherein each part represents some part of the cosmos as a whole.¹⁶⁰ Thus, just as the cosmos, as a whole, has an end (τέλος) and good (ἀγαθόν) towards which it strives, so each dialogue has a good and end which is the purpose of its demonstrations.¹⁶¹

However, the immediate end of a dialogue is not the same as that of the cosmos as a whole, nor do the dialogues themselves share the same end. While the end of a dialogue, as its end, has an analogy to the good of the cosmos as a whole, the subject that plays the part of that end may relate to any aspect whatever of the greater cosmos. The *Alcibiades* is about “the care of ourselves and the knowledge of the same.”¹⁶² The *Parmenides* is about all things “insofar as they are divinized,”¹⁶³ the *Timaeus*, about physics.¹⁶⁴ Thus,

¹⁵⁸ *In Remp.* I.176.27-177.2.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I.174.4-10.

¹⁶⁰ *In Alc.* 10.6-8.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.19-22, 10.20-23.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 9.19-20: “τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ τὴν ταύτης γνῶσιν.”

¹⁶³ *In Parm.* 641.1-6: “καθ’ ὅσον πάντα τεθέωται.”

¹⁶⁴ *In Tim.* I.1.1-15.

the attempt to conciliate the various Platonic dialogues becomes the complex task of linking together rational *cosmoi* that operate in as many different registers as are found in the cosmos itself, as many different registers, that is, as there are in the cosmos insofar as it is known and participated by the rational activity of the soul.¹⁶⁵

A further complication emerges relative to certain objects' lack of intelligibility. No one can speak with absolute certainty about the world of matter because of its instability. The best one can hope for in such circumstances is a 'likely story' (τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον).¹⁶⁶ On these subjects even Socrates can be wrong. While Socrates is never contradicted relative to a philosophical statement about that natural world, he is contradicted occasionally relative to certain applications of his philosophical knowledge to the sensible world. For example, Proclus argues that the reason that there was no record during Socrates' time of Homer giving laws to a city, is not because Homer never did so, but because of the poor historical record.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, he contends that more recently some nations have been known to turn to Homer and his writings as judges of justice.¹⁶⁸ However, regarding such things as can be known with certainty, such things as belong to the levels of reality that are superior to bodies, it remains that Proclus can take Socrates' statements about the levels of reality to be unequivocally true, without taking away anything from the deceptive power of Socratic irony.

¹⁶⁵ For an important point of comparison to Proclus' understanding of the Platonic dialogue see the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, trans. L.G. Westernik (Amsterdam, North-Holland Publishing Company, 1962), V, IX.

¹⁶⁶ *Tim.* 29d; *In Tim.* 351.20-353.29. Cf. Marije Martin's helpful discussion of this subject in her book *Philosophy on Nature and its Methods in Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 245-250.

¹⁶⁷ *In Remp.* I.200.8-14.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, I.200.14-17.

Here, however, it is important to note that Proclus' philosophical understanding of Socratic irony does not create the controversy which he seeks to resolve in Plato so much as extend it to the point that it becomes resolvable. From a very early point Plato's critics had observed an apparent contradiction between Plato's rejection of Homer and the obvious influence of Homeric myth on his dialogues.¹⁶⁹ This, of course, left Plato open to the charge that he was incoherent. Depending on the sympathies of the accuser, such a charge would take different forms. For Epicureans it tended to take the form of a defence of Plato's denunciations of poetry against his use of mythic poetry.¹⁷⁰ For Stoics¹⁷¹ and others sympathetic with Homer¹⁷² it more often took the form of a defence of such poetry

¹⁶⁹ *In Remp.* I.163.13-177.3 *passim*.

¹⁷⁰ This criticism of Plato surfaces in the first generation of Epicurean philosophers, most notably in the arguments of Epicurus' student Colotes. His formulation of the criticism was powerful enough that Porphyry, Macrobius and Proclus all evoke his name when seeking to defend Plato against it. See Jean Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1958), 137-138. Eleni Kechagia has provided a helpful list of relevant citations in her book *Plutarch Against Colotes: A Lesson in History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49, 68: *In Remp.* II.105.23-106.14, 109.8-12, 111.6-9, 113.9-13, 116.19-21, 121.19-25 and Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius. *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. Iacobus Willis (Democratic German Republic, Teubner, 1963) I.2.3-5. As Kechagia points out (*Plutarch Against Colotes*, 49 note 11) both Macrobius and Proclus seem to have their information on Colotes from Porphyry's lost *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, the fragments of which have been published together in "Porphyry's Commentary on Plato's Republic," in *To Gaurus on How Embryos are Ensouled and On What is in Our Power*. trans. James Wilberding, ed. Richard Sorabji (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), 135-139.

¹⁷¹ From its founding, Stoicism was involved in defending Homer against his critics, something that it had inherited from the Cynics. However, most of what we know about this aspect of early Stoicism is through reports of later writers (Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie*, 127-131). The available evidence shows that this defense of Homer sometimes involved anti-Platonic polemic: see Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell and David Konstan, intro. John T. Fitzgerald (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), xx-xxi. However, due to lack of evidence, it is difficult to tell if Stoic apologetics involved the accusation that Plato contradicted himself in his criticism of Homer prior to the 1st century C.E. (Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, 4, 76-79).

¹⁷² Aelius Aristides, a rhetorician of the Second Sophistic, devotes an entire work to showing the self-contradiction involved in Plato's apparent rejection of poetry, together

as Plato had gleaned from Homer against his critique of Homer. Proclus denies none of it. Not only does he accept these traditional criticisms, but develops them in greater detail. Plato speaks against poetic imitation (μίμησις) but then practices it every bit as evocatively as Homer.¹⁷³ He criticizes Homer for his portrayal of wicked characters, but then does the same himself.¹⁷⁴ He forbids depictions of the punishments of the underworld, but then expands on Homer's account of these punishments.¹⁷⁵ In short, he expels the poets, but is himself one of the greatest of their number.

However, these negations, in themselves, do not yet offer Proclus a way forward. Insofar as this apparent contradiction in Plato remains a simple opposition of Plato's philosophical content to his periodic use of mythic poetry it is difficult to save Plato from charges of inconsistency and harder still to argue that he has any kind of unity. There is no common ground on which to work. In this regard the anti-Platonic polemics of Homer's apologists prove much more valuable to Proclus than those of the Epicureans, precisely because of their greater severity. While Epicureans such as Colotes do no more than oppose Plato's doctrine on poetry to the Plato's use of poetry, Stoics like

with the other arts of oration. See "To Plato: In Defence of Oratory" in *Aristides I*, trans. C.A. Behr, ed. E.H. Warmington (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 278-557 *passim*. Given that Proclus answers him on another matter in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* (*In Tim.* I.7) and that later Platonists, such as Olympiodorus also dealt with his arguments on poetry (*Com. Tim.* I.271 note 734) it seems credible that Aristides' *Defence of Oratory* may not just be a convenient example of the arguments that Proclus is working against, but that Aristides may have actually been in his mind as he wrote. Cf. also Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters V*, ed. and trans. S. Douglas Olson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 505b. On Aristides' and Athenaeus' critique of Plato's reading of Homer see Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 125, 127, 131.

¹⁷³ *In Remp.* I.160.17-161.8. Cf. also 163.19-164.7 where Proclus lists examples of Plato's imitation of Homer's imitative poetry.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I.159.19-160.1

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I.122.15-20, 168.3-10. This subject is further developed throughout I.117.23-122.20 and 168.3-169.24.

Heraclitus¹⁷⁶ and rhetors like Aelius Aristides¹⁷⁷ show, in addition, that Plato is conflicted about poetry on even the doctrinal level. By adopting and expanding this stronger negation of the Platonic position, that the duality which Plato seems to suffer relative to Homer also belongs to the *content* of his philosophy, Proclus is able to deal with the controversy in a form that is philosophically intelligible *on both sides* and in doing so sets the stage for a properly philosophical solution. Thus, far from generating a false controversy in order to save Homer, Proclus simply sharpens the strongest form of the controversies developed by Plato's critics in order to find a way to save Plato from those same critics.¹⁷⁸ If there is any prejudice that is predetermining the outcome of Proclus' reading of Plato's works relative to Homer it is not his attachment to Homer, strong though it is, but simply his belief that Plato's works have a unity which can be rationally articulated.

It is clear, then, that the necessity that moves Proclus' argument is not extrinsic to Plato even if it might be said to be a transformation of him. The idea that Plato must be reconciled to Homer, in order to be reconciled to himself, does not come into existence

¹⁷⁶ Heraclitus accuses Plato of stealing his distinction between the rational and the irrational soul from Homer (*Homeric Questions*, 17.2-18.1). Proclus, likewise, claims that Plato has his doctrine of the soul from Homer, but points to different texts which in turn produce a different doctrine of the soul than that identified by Heraclitus (*In Remp.* I.171.18-172.30). Proclus' version of the story, namely that Plato discovers the doctrine of the *immortality* of the soul in Homer, has a more direct anti-Platonic precursor in the rhetorician Atheneaus (*The Learned Banqueters*, 507e). See Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 127. This is not to suggest that Proclus is dealing precisely with Heraclitus or with Atheneaus, but simply that Proclus is only suggesting what Plato's detractors had long been happy to assert.

¹⁷⁷ Aristides does not accuse Plato of stealing doctrines from Homer, but of being self-contradictory in the statements he makes about poetry generally, among the other forms of oratory (*In Defense of Oratory*, 15-19, 438-466).

¹⁷⁸ In other words, Proclus arrives at his affirmations of Plato's agreement through negations, a process which he elsewhere describes as "super-negation" (ὑπεραποφάσεσιν *In Parm.* VII. 1172. 27). See Trouillard, *La mystagogie du Proclus*, 242.

only under the cover of a studied or real ignorance of important features of Plato's presentation. Rather it comes from a philosophically consistent reading of Plato that arises in answer to traditional criticisms made against him. However, this is not yet to prove anything about the doctrine by which he actually effects the solution that he necessarily seeks, the doctrine of the σύμβολον. In a preliminary way, what we have seen of this doctrine certainly *seems* to address Socrates' concerns about Homer. If Homer's σύμβολα of the gods are not understood to be likenesses of them, but of the daemons who are the lowest in their causal chain then it follows that they are not unfitting in their appearance.¹⁷⁹ If by these, their likenesses, the daemons will lead the soul to the gods, then they cannot be guilty of leading the soul away from itself through representations of ontologically inferior levels of reality.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, if Homer is reserved for those who are mature of soul, then it is no matter that it would be ruinous to use him for the education of youths.¹⁸¹ Yet it remains difficult to tell if this mixture of philosophical concepts and mythical images has a genuine demonstration of a metaphysical reality hidden in it or if it is only a metaphorical solution that Proclus has yet to properly understand. We know that the need for the doctrine of the σύμβολον is philosophical in character, but can this need be answered without adding an irrational appendage to an otherwise rational system? It is to this question we must turn in the following chapter.

¹⁷⁹ *In Remp.* I.113.20-114.29 *passim*. Cf. *Republic*, II.378 c-d.

¹⁸⁰ *In Remp.* I.86.7-10 Cf. *Republic*, X. 603b, 605b-c.

¹⁸¹ *In Remp.* I.80.11-13 Cf. *Republic*, II. 378e.

CHAPTER THREE
Rational Mystagogy: Homeric ΣΥΜΒΟΛΟΝ
as the Means of the Soul's Conversion To Its Causes

Εὔχεται γὰρ πάντα κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν τάξιν καὶ ὑμνεῖ τοὺς ἡγεμόνας τῶν σειρῶν ὄλων ἢ
νοερῶς ἢ λογικῶς ἢ φυσικῶς ἢ αἰσθητῶς

- Proclus, *On the Priestly Art*, 8-10

It is evident from what we have already seen that the literary role of Proclus' concept of the Homeric σύμβολον is inseparable from its religious dimension. The exegetical σύμβολον of the Stoics and the liturgical σύμβολον of the Pythagorean tradition and especially of the *Chaldean Oracles* are, for him, all one.¹⁸² However, in saying so we should be careful not to assume that the Stoics, with their more scientific emphasis, provide the σύμβολον with a non-religious identity that pre-exists its union with the more cultic formulations of the Pythagoreans and the *Chaldean Oracles*. We do not find a union of sacred and secular in Proclus' understanding of the Homeric σύμβολον in the modern so much as in the ancient sense. That is to say, it is a union of two different kinds of theology: one which comes from the soul's own rational powers and another which is provided it from above.¹⁸³ On the more Stoic side of the emphasis, the σύμβολα of Homer have a meaning that is only knowable insofar as one has a grasp of the philosophical science of theology. We have seen that it is only in light of Plato's own theology that one is able to discern what is really meant by his strange depictions of

¹⁸² St. Germain, "Remarques sur les symbolismes du Commentaire sur la République de Proclus," 111-123; Struck, "The Symbol Versus Mimesis," 151-154; Sheppard, *Studies of the 5th and 6th Essays*, 156.

¹⁸³ On the existence of this distinction as early as Aristotle see Robert D. Crouse, "St. Albert, St. Thomas, Aristotle: *Philosophia ancilla theologiae*," in *Tommaso d'Aquino nella storia de pensiero, I: Le fonti del pensiero di S. Tommaso, Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario* (Naples: 1975), 181-185.

the adventures of the Olympian gods. On the more Chaldean side of the emphasis, these σύμβολα are also the very means of mystical ascent to the gods known in part by the science of theology.¹⁸⁴ That is to say, they are living apparitions of the daemons that manifest the character of the gods to the lower reaches of the cosmos, apparitions which in some fashion provoke the ascent of purified souls to union with the respective deities that are visible in them. Homer does not simply articulate the divine ordering of reality in a way that is in concert with the philosophical positions of Plato;¹⁸⁵ the hearing of his myths is on the same level as “the most holy rites and the most perfect of mysteries.”¹⁸⁶ It is this more ritualistic sense of the inspired σύμβολον that is the more problematic relative to modern scholarship. For it was once assumed that any such manifestation of religious ritual in Proclus’ philosophy was primarily the result of an irrational affinity for superstition that Proclus was said to share with his age.¹⁸⁷ However, more recent scholarship has tended to argue that the rigour of Proclus’ philosophy is not diminished by its religious element, emphasizing rather that the ritual use of σύμβολα as means of the soul’s return to its divine causes, or ‘theurgy’ as Proclus calls it, is the logical corollary to his doctrine of the embodied individual soul.¹⁸⁸ Even though it naturally

¹⁸⁴ Of course, this distinction between the Stoic and Chaldean accounts of the σύμβολον cannot be made absolutely. The doctrine of sympathy that makes this ritualistic sense of the σύμβολον intelligible comes from the Stoics (Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 232). Cf. Posidonius, *Vol.III: The Translation of the Fragments*, Trans. I.G. Kidd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, Fr. 106, 217, 219.

¹⁸⁵ *In Remp.* I.71.2-17, 164.8-13.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I.80.18-19.

¹⁸⁷ Dodds, *El.Th.* xxv-xxvi.

¹⁸⁸ That theurgy is the natural corollary of his doctrine of soul was already argued by Dodds (*El.Th.* xx). Yet it is only in more recent scholarship that this position is presented as a reason to be sympathetic with its inclusion. This development is seen as early as Festugière’s article “Contemplation philosophique et art théurgique chez Proclus,” in *Studi di Storia religiosa della tarda antichità* (Messina: University of Messina, 1968),

belongs to the essence of individual soul, as a spiritual principle, to be capable of reverting on its divine causes,¹⁸⁹ the activities of the embodied soul are so decisively entangled in materiality that it cannot hope to do so without the assistance of those same divine causes. The soul must turn to the divine σύμβολα of the mysteries for the means of ascent it cannot find in its proper nature, for in them the gods are present to it in a way that they are not in the structure of its own activity.¹⁹⁰

In a provisional way, this is true enough. Yet even so, to properly understand the necessity of the religious dimension of Homeric σύμβολον to Proclus' philosophy will require more than simply reading Proclus' *Sixth Essay* in the light of current scholarship on his understanding of theurgy. The most obvious reason for this is that the *Sixth Essay* does not itself contain the means by which the full significance of its own presentation of Homeric theurgy can be grasped. This does not point to a deficiency in the text so much as to its educated audience. It is not an introductory text, but is presented as a speech that was given to the initiated members of the Platonic Academy¹⁹¹ on the occasion of Plato's

12-17. Although, with Festugière, theurgy still represents a weakening of the rigour of philosophy, if only for the sake of those who are not capable of practicing it. See "Proclus et la religion traditionnelle," in *Études de la philosophie grecque* (Paris: Vrin 1971), 577. However, by the time of H.D. Saffrey, this argument had become a part of understanding how theurgy completes, rather than lessens the rigour of Proclus' philosophy. See "La théurgie comme phénomène culturel chez les néoplatoniciens (IVe-Ve siècles)" *Koinônia* 8 (1984): 164-166. See also Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," *Traditio* 14 (New York, Fordham University, 1985): 6, 12.

¹⁸⁹ *El.Th.* 193, 208 (Dodds, 168.20-29, 180.15-29).

¹⁹⁰ *Ex. Chald.* I, V (Des Places 206.3-207.2, 211.18-212.16). See also Trouillard, *La mystagogie du Proclus*, 225; *idem*, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, 175-179.

¹⁹¹ This is most conspicuously evident at the end of the essay where Proclus concludes: "These things, dear disciples, said in memory of the communion (συνουσία) of our leader with us, may be told to you by me, but may not be told by you to the many" (*In Remp.* I.205.21-23). Festugière (*In Remp.* I.221 note 8) and Kuisma following him (*Proclus' Defense of Homer*, 15) argue that this statement should not be taken seriously

birthday.¹⁹² Since his audience has the benefit of relatively advanced philosophical training Proclus is able to assume a familiarity with his system which most of his modern readers will not have. Therefore, any attempt to understand our subject will depend on contextualizing it appropriately within Proclus' larger work.

In the present case, it will be most important to attend to Proclus' work on the soul's particular form of knowledge and activity: *διανόησις*. The reason for this is that Homeric theurgy, as it is described in the *Sixth Essay*, is not, in the strictest sense, physical. When Proclus insists that Homeric theurgy is on the level of the 'most holy rites' he is not simply being hyperbolic. There is a clear ontological difference between it and the kind of ritual that is performed with sensible *σύμβολα*. Homeric theurgy begins with what is typically the most immediate result of physical theurgy, the apparition of the god in the imaginative faculty of the soul.¹⁹³ It remains that Proclus is aware that Homeric *σύμβολα* are not simply divine apparitions, but also the words used to evoke

as such but that it is there simply to "add solemnity" to the conclusion. This reading, however, is hard to reconcile with Proclus' repeated injunctions that only those who have received an advanced level of moral and philosophical education may hear Homer in safety (*In Remp.* I.74.30-77.12, 79.18-81.10). Sheppard is also inclined to see this warning is genuine (Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 33), but on account of the fact that Saffrey has demonstrated that Proclus often uses *πολλοί* as a code for "Christians", rather than the internal evidence mentioned above. See H.D. Saffrey, "Allusions antichrétiennes chez Proclus: le diadoque platonicien," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 59 (1975): 553-63. Cf. *In Remp.* I.74.8.

¹⁹² *In Remp.* I.71.21-27.

¹⁹³ A good example of the role of physical theurgy relative to the kind of theurgy which begins with poetic inspiration is found at *De Sacr.* 1.13, 78-85. There Proclus indicates that humans first made contact with daemons by means of physical rites that they derived by observing the forms of mystagogy practiced by lesser forms of life relative to their physical principles. It is from the daemons that they learned rites that allowed them to ascend to superior powers and thus to leave nature and its energies below.

those apparitions.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, he indicates that the σύμβολα of Homeric myth and those like them, play a decisive role in physical ritual.¹⁹⁵ However, his concern in the *Sixth Essay* is not how to evoke these apparitions correctly with Homeric speech, but how one may relate to such apparitions in a way that benefits rather than harms the soul of the beholder. Thus the form of theurgy described here has the distinction of operating entirely within the structure of the soul's own *dianoetic* activity. For, as we shall see, the apparitions of the gods, such as one finds in Homer, are ranked together with the imaginative phantasms that the soul projects from itself in order to reflect upon the plenitude its own innate reasons (λόγοι). Homeric theurgy is, in short, a rational theurgy. It is, therefore, in coming to understand how the soul knows and acts that we will be able to understand how the σύμβολα of Homer function within that knowledge and activity to convert or else to punish the soul.

In this way it becomes apparent that Proclus' description of Homeric theurgy in the *Sixth Essay* presents a valuable opportunity to evaluate the rationality of Proclus' theurgic doctrine as a whole. Soul knows everything, but according to its own *dianoetic*, scientific, mode of knowing.¹⁹⁶ Thus, while the individual soul may be said to know all things it is especially suited to knowing reality on its own level. It can apprehend the realities inferior and superior to it, but its grasp of these things, as a rational grasp, will

¹⁹⁴ While Proclus' primary concern is the imaginative aspect of Homer's poetry (*In Remp.* I.74.24-27, 86.15-18, 91.15-18, 92.21-23, 166.23-24) this emphasis does not cause him to downplay the physical hearing of Homer in the process. The audience of Homeric poetry is, for example, often referred to as its "hearers" (ἀκούοντος, *In Remp.* I.76.13, 27, 80.22-23, 93.14, 179.21, 182.10, 191.21, 192.20, 197.7, 198.11).

¹⁹⁵ *In Remp.* I.83.22-26. In this, both physical ritual and the rational ritual of the inspired poets mutually rely on each other. For while it is in the σύμβολα of inspired poetry that the physical rites are efficacious (δραστήριος), inspired poetry can only be heard safely together with physical sacrifice (*In Remp.* I.80.20). Cf. *Republic* II.378a.

¹⁹⁶ *In Eucl.* 16.13-16.

not be exact. Its physics will not be exact due to the physical world's lack of intelligibility relative to it,¹⁹⁷ its metaphysics due to the noetic world's super-abundance of intelligibility.¹⁹⁸ It follows then, that it is in a theurgy that works on the soul's own level, a rational theurgy, such as we find in Proclus' Homer, that we be best able to discern the philosophical significance of theurgy in Proclus' rational system. In doing so we shall find that theurgy is not, as some have supposed, an irrational interruption of the soul's rational activity,¹⁹⁹ but the logical extension of its dialectical heights, an extension moreover, which, always maintains its dialectical character, albeit in a higher and simpler form.²⁰⁰ But perhaps more importantly, it shall help to point a way beyond the unfortunate form of humanism that makes theurgy no more than a solution to the problem of human embodiment²⁰¹ when its necessity extends to the structure of procession and return itself. For humanity does not hymn the Good alone but amidst a mighty chorus in which gods, daemons, beasts, plants and even senseless stones all have their part.

To begin we must look at the theurgic aspect of Proclus' treatment of Homer in the *Sixth Essay* in more detail than we have had occasion to thus far. The kind of poetry found in Homer has its immediate source in the divine poet's state of inspiration (ἐνθεασμὸς).²⁰² As we have seen above, Apollo is the cause of this state through the

¹⁹⁷ See note 152 of Chapter 1.

¹⁹⁸ *In Remp.* I.120.22-121.3.

¹⁹⁹ Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 287, 291.

²⁰⁰ This is, as I understand it, Trouillard's position. See *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 51, 62, 125, 141, 156, 249.

²⁰¹ On the problem of understanding theurgy as merely as solution to the problem of embodiment see Butler, "Offering to the Gods: A Neoplatonic Perspective," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* (Summer 2007): 1.

²⁰² *In Remp.* I.184.11-12.

mediation of the Muses.²⁰³ There is, however, another way in which it is said to come from a familiarity (οικειότης) with the daemonic kind as a whole.²⁰⁴ From this perspective the content of poetic inspiration is the visitation (παρουσία) of the various gods upon the poet's soul²⁰⁵ through the apparitions of their respective daemonic intermediaries.²⁰⁶ We thus we have one formulation that emphasizes the way in which poetic inspiration belongs to a particular procession of Apollo and another that emphasizes the way in which poetic inspiration involves every procession that descends low enough to become visible to the soul which has eyes to see it. This, however, does not present a contradiction so much as a mutual clarification of each form of expression. What this shows is that every daemon, regardless of the deity that it primarily participates, insofar as it has the potential to be visible to a human soul, is a member of the Apollonian series and a mediator of the inspiration that is Apollo's procession through, in and by the Muses. That is to say, if the appearance of daemons to the soul brings about the very inspiration that Apollo brings about by the Muses, there must be a way in which any daemon, in so appearing, belongs to the specific character (ιδιότης)²⁰⁷ of Apollo and the Muses, despite the fact that the apparitions by which they mediate the inspiration of the Muses are at the same time mediations of the specific character of

²⁰³ *In Remp.* I.192.9-10, 193.14-20, 201.20-23.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, I.166.22.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, I.180.24-25.

²⁰⁶ See page 9-10 of Chapter 1; Cf. *In Remp.* I.79.2-3, 86.5-19.

²⁰⁷ The daemonic σύμβολα manifest the specific character of the god they proceed from (*In Remp.* I.83.18-20). This, as we are now seeing, becomes complicated when more than one god is involved in causing a particular daemon and that daemon's manifestation of itself in the human imagination. For according to different perspectives such a daemon may, it appears, be called by the name of more than one god. Another of the ways that the divine identities mediated by differing chains of causality can overlap is found in Proclus' treatment of Apollo, Demeter and Core (*In Crat.* 96.12-25).

completely different deities. In short, it is apparent that poetic inspiration is not simply about contact with the various gods, even though it is a kind of contact with them, but about contact with each god according to Apollo's mode. We know from Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* that his mode is associated with the intellectual harmonization of the soul's proportions,²⁰⁸ its purification from disproportion,²⁰⁹ the unification of what has suffered division²¹⁰ and in general all that it needs to ascend to become united to the intellectual gods.²¹¹ How these things are brought about through his inspiration we shall see more clearly as we progress.

In addition to the language of inspiration, this participation of the Muses is variously referred to as a madness (μανία),²¹² a possession (κατοκωχή)²¹³ and an illumination (ἔλλαμψις). Here Proclus uses 'illumination' more or less interchangeably with 'inspiration', applying it to both the passive²¹⁴ and impassive²¹⁵ aspects of that state. He uses 'possession' and 'madness', however, to speak of these aspects in distinction from each other. This is best illustrated relative to the characteristics that make a soul

²⁰⁸ *In Crat.* 102.20-103.2.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.11-101.5.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.8.

²¹¹ While Apollo exists at every order of reality, the form of activity which he accomplishes through the Muses, which, as we have seen is the activity of poetic inspiration, is most properly manifest as a unification of the cosmos with its transcendent causes (*In Crat.* 88.10-13). This activity necessarily has its end in an intellectual unification in that Apollo manifests this activity as a kind of demiurgy which he has by participation in Zeus (*In Crat.* 97.11-15, 99.25-100.5). This is reflected in the inability of the inspired poets to do anything but name the realities above the upward limit of the intellectual (*In Crat.* 65.20-23).

²¹² *In Remp.* I.180.28, 181.19, 183.29.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, I.180.12, 28, 181.19, 27.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I.180.25.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.180.24.

capable of inspiration. Such a soul must be tender (ἀπαλή)²¹⁶ and unpolluted (ἄβατη).²¹⁷ The soul must be ‘tender’ in the sense that it must be receptive to the impression (εὐτύπωτος)²¹⁸ of the divine illumination that it seeks to receive.²¹⁹ If the soul belongs more to itself than to the illumination it will not easily receive the impression of its activity.²²⁰ It is thus, insofar as the soul is tender, that illumination is for it a domination²²¹ and a possession. The soul must be ‘unpolluted’ in the sense that it must be unmoved by the impressions of activities that are less than the divine illumination.²²² For if it is filled with strange and variegated thoughts the activity of the illumination in it will be obscured.²²³ This is a somewhat more difficult matter than the tenderness of the soul, for it is the illumination of the soul itself that causes it to abandon its ordinary activities for its own superior activity.²²⁴ This creates a question as to how the soul must, in some way, prepossess the unpollution it receives from its illumination in order for to be capable of being receptive of illumination in the first place. We shall have to deal with this problem at a later point.²²⁵ What remains clear is that it is insofar as the illumination of the soul makes the soul impassive to inferior activities that it is called madness.

This inspiration stirs up (ἀνακινεῖ) the imagination (φαντασίαν)²²⁶ to produce imaginations (φαντασίαις),²²⁷ not imaginations of any sort, but those of a symbolic

²¹⁶ *In Remp.* I.181.4, 14.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.181.4-5, 15.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.181.8.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I.181.15-16.

²²⁰ *Ibid.* I.181.5-8.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, I.180.29.

²²² *Ibid.*, I.181.16-17.

²²³ *Ibid.*, I.181.7-12.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, I.180.30-181.2.

²²⁵ See page 71-72, esp. note 365.

²²⁶ *In Remp.* I.160.23.

(συμβολικὴν) character.²²⁸ These imaginative symbols can be said to have a kinship (συγγένειαν) with the daemons that inspire their production,²²⁹ and indeed, to be properly demonic²³⁰ through comparison to the way that daemons typically reveal themselves to human souls in dreams.²³¹ In both cases a daemon appears to the soul according to a mode of presentation that is at once imaginative, symbolic and, relative to the daemon itself, accurate.²³² The accuracy of the daemon's appearance in the human imagination follows Proclus' principle that like knows like, for in Proclus' *Platonic Theology* it is made evident that the body by which the daemon is visible to the human imagination is of the same kind as the imagination that receives it.²³³ The imaginary image is therefore received by the human imagination according to the same imaginative mode as it was given. But the extent of the identity between the appearance of the daemon in the soul and its apprehension by the soul is best appreciated when one considers the way that the same daemoniac appearance in the soul is, in some way, actually caused both by the soul and by the daemon. For the daemon's own appearance to the human soul from within that soul's imagination²³⁴ is at once the very appearance that it inspired the soul to create in its imagination.²³⁵ This means that the daemoniac inspiration of the human soul and the inspired human's own generation of the daemoniac symbol must, in some way, be the same activity taken from different perspectives. The human soul is not then simply

²²⁷ *In Remp.* I.86.16.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.166.23-24.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, I.86.11.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, I.86.19, 78.2-4.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, I.86.10-23.

²³² *Ibid.*, I.86.19, 91.21-25, 92.23-27.

²³³ *Pl.Th.* III.v.125 (Saffrey and Westerink 18.24-19.15); Dodds, *El.Th.* 320.

²³⁴ *In Remp.* I.110.26-111.2.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, I.86.16, 91.15-18.

impressed upon by the form of the daemon as wax is by a signet ring, rather, as we shall see, the impression of the form of the daemon on the soul is the soul's imagining of the daemon, in the same way as it makes the imaginations that it produces from its own nature.

However, while it seems that poetic σύμβολον and the daemonic always come together, the appearance of the daemon in the imagination is not symbolic in relation to itself as a daemon, but, as suggested above, in relation to the god which is present to the soul in it. Now according to Proclus, symbols cannot be imitations (μιμήματα) because they hint at the gods they represent through the very strongest forms of opposition.²³⁶ This, of course, raises questions regarding why it is that the gods must be present to the soul through this analogy of opposites. Proclus provides a partial explanation for this by means of the principle that all things know according to their own mode. Insofar as a being is variegated, that is, insofar as it is opposed to the simplicity of the gods, the mode by which it apprehends the gods will also be opposed to them.²³⁷ However, the variegation that souls see in the gods is not simply of its own making.

As is always the case in Proclus, there is a reality that answers to the subjective state and, in a qualified way, justifies the peculiarities of its particular perspective. Even in themselves the gods can, in some sense, be said to be opposed to their own unified simplicity through the multiplicity of powers that are united in them.²³⁸ But more importantly for our concerns, the gods are also, in a manner of speaking, opposed to their own simplicity through their production of the respective series of entities that participate

²³⁶ *In Remp.* I.198.13-19.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, I.111.16-27.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, I.112.13-113.19.

them. There is a way in which a god, through its various participants “advances itself downward through the different classes, even lowering itself as far as the last things.”²³⁹ This is surely what we have seen happen in the case of the daemons. While in the daemons the gods are not yet the last things, they are the lowest reaches of divinity,²⁴⁰ and it is in them that the gods administer their providence over the last things, the radically divided world of material realities. Thus, from one perspective the daemons are identical with the gods whose series they belong to.²⁴¹ It is as daemons that the gods are present to the lowest levels of existence. However, from another perspective the daemons are also in opposition to the simple transcendence of the gods since their mediation of the gods to material existence requires that they “participate in all kinds of opposition and division” to the point that they are said to be ‘conjoined to matter’ (προσύλους).²⁴² Therefore it would seem that in the oppositions through which inspired poetry refers to the gods we find the needs of the soul’s divided mode of knowledge being met by the actual declension of the gods to the daemonic limits of the divine world. The human soul’s opposition to the gods touches the gods through the divinities in which they are most descended into opposition while still remaining divine.

Even so, we would be wrong to suppose that we have discovered the necessity that links the needs of human subjectivity to the symbolic appearance of the daemon within it. It remains the case that the capacity of the human soul to know the gods is

²³⁹ *In Remp.* I.113.24-25: “τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ διαφοροὺς τάξεις προέρχεται καὶ μέχρι τῶν τελευταίων ὑφίζανη.”

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I.114.20-21. This is somewhat different from the emphasis of the *Elements of Theology* where he makes such souls as perpetually participate both intellect and the henadic gods the lowest level of divinity (*El.Th.* 202 [Dodds, 176.18-30]).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I.91.16-18.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, I.89.20-21: “ἐναντώσεως ἤδη καὶ διακρίσεως παντοίας μετέχειν.”

conditioned by the degree to which it is opposed to their simplicity through its own variegation. However, inspired poetry is not the only way that the soul knows the gods. There is, for example, among the other kinds of poetry that the soul produces, a kind of poetry that comes from the powers that belong to soul, rather than from those superior to it.²⁴³ The purpose of this kind of poetry is not inspiration, but education.²⁴⁴ This educational poetry, as a production of the soul's own powers, cannot escape the variegation that belongs to the soul's own mode. Yet it strives to produce a likeness of the gods that it speaks of, and to some measure succeeds.²⁴⁵ Clearly then, though the variegation of soul may demand that there is a certain degree of opposition between the way soul is able to know the gods and the gods themselves, it does not demand that it make use of oppositions as extreme as those as it receives in daemonic σύμβολον. However, it is relative to this educational poetry that we can begin to glimpse the psychological need that the daemonic mediation of σύμβολον fulfills.

In coming to know the gods through what is like to them, we have seen that the soul does what belongs to its own life. Inspiration, in contrast with this, is something that is manifest in the soul through daemonic agency. Here we must remind ourselves of what

²⁴³ *In Remp.* I.177.23-178.2, 178.6-10, 179.3-9.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I.76.24-77.4, 79.12-18, 81.12-21, 188.24-27.

²⁴⁵ The theological possibilities of learned poetry are attested more than they are developed in the *Sixth Essay* (*In Remp.* I.194.16). Yet it is evident at least that it uses εικόνες rather than σύμβολα to represent its divine objects (*In Remp.* I.84.22-30) and that these εικόνες are as characterized by likeness to their divine objects as those of inspired poetry are by opposition (*In Remp.* I.72.23-73.30). This kind of theology is attributed to Pythagoras in the *Platonic Theology* (*Pl.Th.* I.4 [Saffrey and Westerink, 20.8-12]). For an excellent and thorough essay on Proclus' understanding of Pythagorean theology see Carlos Steel, *Proclus on Divine Figures*, In *A Platonic Pythagoras: Platonism and Pythagoreanism in the Imperial Age*, eds. Mauro Bonazzi, Carlos Lévy and Carlos Steel (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 215-242.

we observed Proclus say regarding ‘tenderness’ and ‘purity’. If the soul belongs to itself more than to the inspiration that it seeks to receive, it will not be able to receive it. If the soul is moved by activities that are inferior to that of poetic inspiration, *even by its own activities*, they will obscure it. Therefore, since the capacity for knowing about the gods through likeness lies in the soul’s own powers as soul, it follows that this capacity is among the things that the soul must be detached from and unmoved by in order to be an adequate receptacle for the inspiration of the daemon. If the daemon is going to be manifest as daemon in the soul on its own level, it seems that it will need to be manifest through a mode of representation other than that of likeness, a mode that is, as much as possible, unlike what it represents, namely, through the negative analogies of poetic symbol. The soul may be able to know certain things about the gods through likeness, but the soul that seeks to know them in a way that goes beyond its own capacity must abandon what it knows through likeness for what it can know about them through the oppositions that the daemons inspire in it.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ This appears to resolve a false dilemma framed by Van den Berg. Dillon has shown that the distinction between εἰκόν as an image defined more by likeness and σύμβολον as an image defined more by unlikeness is not maintained universally in Proclus’ work. In other contexts they seem to be used interchangeably. See “Image Symbol and Analogy: Three Basic Concepts of Neoplatonic Allegorical Exegesis,” in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed., R. Baine Harris (Norfolk: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1976): 254. In order to account for this Van den Berg has tried to discount the idea that the distinction between σύμβολον and εἰκόν is that of their respective unlikeness and likeness to the gods that are represented by them (*Proclus’ Hymns*, 123-126). See Trouillard, *Le Symbolisme chez Proclus*, 299; Carlos Steel, “Proclus: Philosophie en Mythologie,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 48.2. (1986): 196. Instead, he argues that the real distinction between them is that the σύμβολον is a theurgic image by which the soul reverts on the gods and the εἰκόν is a scientific image by which the soul reverts on itself (*Proclus’ Hymns*, 134-136). However, we have seen above that these are not mutually exclusive readings. The σύμβολον can be the means of the soul’s reversion to the gods because it transcends the scientific likeness of the images that the soul is able to make of

However, the knowledge that the soul has of a god *in* the σύμβολον of its daemon is inferior to the knowledge of the god that the soul can attain *through* that same σύμβολον. Poetic inspiration does not stop at the imagination's reception of the daemon's symbolic form. The greater significance of the daemonic σύμβολον is that it provides the soul that imagines it a way of ascent to the god that it symbolizes.²⁴⁷ To show how this comes about Proclus draws attention to the dichotomy of the inner and outer aspects of the inspired σύμβολον; it is daemonic according to its visible exterior but is divine according to its hidden spiritual interior.²⁴⁸ As such, its surface functions as a phenomenal veil (φαινομένοις παραπετάσμασι)²⁴⁹ behind which a divine vision (θεωρία) is concealed.²⁵⁰ This surface, through its very opposition to the god, through its apparent monstrosity²⁵¹ and general implausibility,²⁵² moves (κινεῖν)²⁵³ awakens (ἀνεγείρουσιν)²⁵⁴

the gods of its own power, by making the gods present through the soul through a kind of unlikeness.

²⁴⁷ The theurgic aspect of Proclus' Homer has now been the subject of numerous scholarly works. The work of Sheppard and Liefferinge on the subject, while very helpful in the details, does not go much beyond simply demonstrating that Homeric poetry is a form of theurgy for Proclus. See Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 145-162; Carine Van Liefferinge, *La théurgie: Des oracles chaldaïques à Proclus*, 243-279. Van den Berg has done some important work towards determining what makes Homeric theurgy distinct from other forms of theurgy. See *Proclus' Hymns*, 66-110. However, it is Trouillard, who, although he devoted no work to the *Sixth Essay* as such, has done the greatest amount towards showing the way that the theurgic elements of Proclus' Homer function as a part of his greater system. See Trouillard, *L'Un et L'âme selon Proclus*, 171-189; *idem*, "L'activité onomastique selon Proclus," 239-251; *idem*, "Les fondements du mythe chez Proclus," 11-37; *idem*, "Le symbolisme en Proclus," 297-307; *idem*, *La mystagogie du Proclus*, 33-51. St. Germain has happily brought some of the fruits of Trouillard's work on theurgy to bear more specifically on the *Sixth Essay*. See "Remarques sur les symbolismes," 111-123.

²⁴⁸ *In Remp.* I.79.2-4.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I.74.19.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I.73.15-16.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I.86.1, 85.17.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, I.86.20.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, I.85.18.

and even forces (αναγκάζειν) the soul to search for the divine truth hidden within.²⁵⁵ But this awakening does not simply lead the soul past the surface of the σύμβολον as if it were an exterior object. For, as we have seen, the imagination by which the daemon appears as σύμβολον and the imagination by which human soul receives that σύμβολον are a kind of body for each. This particular imagination is the lower imagination by which the intellectual essence of both daemon and human participate in the world of becoming.²⁵⁶ Therefore, when the soul moves past the imaginative surface of the daemonic σύμβολον, it is moving past its own surface as well, past the body that involves it in the ordered tumult of the cosmos, or as Proclus says, it is a “turn from its fall into genesis towards the divine.”²⁵⁷ The result of this turning around that forms the content of the soul’s awakening is Bacchic fury (βακχεία).²⁵⁸ Proclus defines this metaphorically as “a divinely inspired movement and a tireless dance around the divine, working the perfection of the possessed.”²⁵⁹ More precisely the awakening of the soul brings about an ineffable union with the gods,²⁶⁰

Bringing to perfection a single divine connexion and unifying commixture of both participated and participant, entirely establishing the inferior in the superior, the specific character of the weaker huddled and hiding in the stronger, in which the inferior is huddled and making sure that the most divine alone is acting.²⁶¹

²⁵⁴ *In Remp.* I.85.26, 86.8.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I.85.21-23, 85.26-86.1.

²⁵⁶ Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, 34, 61; *In Tim.* III.275.28-276.2, 298.27-28.

²⁵⁷ *In Remp.* I.181.25-26: “ἀπο τῆς ἐν τῇ γενέσει πτώσεως ἐπιστροφή πρὸς τὸ θεῖον.”

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I.181.26.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I.181.26-27: “κίνησις ἔνθος καὶ χορεία περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἄτρυτος τελεσιουργὸς τῶν κατεχομένων.”

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, I.81.14, 86.10.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I.178.19-24: “ἓνα δὲ σύνδεσμον θεῖον ἀπεργαζομένη τοῦ μετεχομένου καὶ μετέχοντος καὶ σύγκρασιν ἐνοποιόν, ὅλον μὲν τὸ καταδεέστερον ἐδράζουσα ἐν τῷ κρείττονι, τὸ δὲ θεϊότερον μόνον ἐνεργεῖν.”

There are, of course, many gods and many degrees of divinity in Proclus' theology and along with them many different degrees of ἔνωσις that are possible for the soul. Thus, whenever speaking about 'union the gods' we must always determine which gods and consequently, which union, is being spoken of. In this case the gods in question are those of the intellectual world. We already know that this is not a union with encosmic deities because we have seen that this union is beyond the world of becoming. Nor is it the henads, for this is a union with the essences (οὐσίαις) of the gods²⁶² and the henads are beyond essence.²⁶³ More specifically what we seem to be dealing with here are noeric gods, that is, intellectual gods as opposed to gods that are more generally known as intellectual, such as the intelligible-and-intellectual gods and the intelligible gods.²⁶⁴ For while this union is often described in a more generally intellectual way as a kind of contemplation (θεωρία)²⁶⁵ it is also characterized more specifically as a noeric contemplation (νοερός)²⁶⁶ of noeric realities (νοερότερα).²⁶⁷ This is not to suggest that this union could not in turn, lead to a further ascent to still higher forms of union²⁶⁸ with

²⁶² *In Remp.* I.79.1, 84.28.

²⁶³ *El.Th.* 115 (Dodds 100.28-102.12).

²⁶⁴ Saffrey and Westerink have provided a helpful chart in which they have abstracted the active, living relations of the divine hierarchies in Proclus. See *Pl.Th.* lxiii-lxix. The intellectual gods occupy the lowest rank of this triad and the intelligible gods the highest. It is by the intelligible-and-intellectual gods that the intellectual gods are able to proceed from and revert again to the intelligible gods. For the intelligible-and-intellectual level of reality, by definition, is the emergence of the intellectual from the intelligible and the abiding presence of the intelligible in the intellectual.

²⁶⁵ *In Remp.* I.80.23, 86.1. Festugière's belief that theurgy is inferior to philosophy ("Proclus et la religion traditionnelle," 577) seems to be at work in his consistent translation of θεωρία as "doctrine" even when it is clearly describing an object, that, as the end of a mystical ascent, is beyond the soul's own powers.

²⁶⁶ *In Remp.* I.75.9, 81.7.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I.94.21.

²⁶⁸ The mystagogy that Proclus finds recounted in the *Phaedrus* myth seems to pick up where the mystagogy of inspired poetry leaves off (*Pl.Th.* IV.5-9). Souls and intellectual

superior deities,²⁶⁹ but that union with the noeric deities is the specific end of the awakening of the human soul by daemonic σύμβολα.

This ἔνωσις with the noeric gods is not something that is confined to the soul of the inspired poet. Through hearing the inspired poet recite the myths they are able to experience the same inspiration, the same awakening.²⁷⁰ It is, according to Proclus, as Plato says in the *Ion*. The hearers are filled with the very inspiration that the poet enjoys in the same way as rings of metal are filled with the magnetism of a magnet that they touch.²⁷¹ However, while most any soul is capable of this reception of daemonic σύμβολα in their imagination, there are very few that can benefit from it. These σύμβολα actually

gods that have nourished themselves on such intelligibility as is present at the peak of intellectual reality, which as we have seen, is the end and goal of inspired poetry, they are able to ascend to the intelligible-and-intellectual level of reality (*Pl.Th.* IV.7, 9, Saffrey and Westerink, 24.14-28, 27.7-28.17). After nourishing themselves on the greater intelligibility that is there they are able to ascend at last to the Intelligible realities themselves (*Pl.Th.* IV.8,9, Saffrey and Westerink 26.1-27.4, 28.17-31.16). Finamore is not necessarily wrong in saying that the physical rite that he calls the “Chaldean Sacrament of Immortalization” has this intelligible union as its ultimate end and goal. See “Proclus on Ritual Practice” in *Neoplatonic Religious Philosophy in Being or Good? Metamorphoses of Neoplatonism*, ed. A. Kijewska (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 2004), 134-137. We shall see with increasing clarity that images that are manifest on the same ontological level of reality may ultimately aim at different levels of reality, some higher some lower. On this see Sheppard, “Image and Analogy in Later Neoplatonism” in *Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens : Akten des internationalen Kongresses* 13.17, eds. Theo Kobusch, Michael Erler and Irmgard Männlein-Robert (München: K.G. Saur, 2002), 639-640; *In Tim.* I.265,10-266.23. However, where he must be wrong is that the goal at which that physical sacrament aims can be achieved without the mediation of a rational rite. For, as we have seen, while the physical rite, together with philosophy, is able to purify the imaginary body of materiality, the soul needs a rational rite, such as Proclus finds in Homer, in order to revert to Intellect. Only then will the intelligible-and-intellectual realities become accessible.

²⁶⁹ That this is indeed possible seems to be implied by the fact that inspired poetry is suitable for those who are not only “able to be roused to intellect” but “to every divine kind” (*In Remp.* I.77.1-3).

²⁷⁰ *In Remp.* I.183. 25-26.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, I.182.21-183.22.

damage most souls which receive them, “working in the lives of the many a terrible and unnatural confusion of piety toward the divine.”²⁷² But this is not the fault of the poetic σύμβολα, or the inspired poet, or the god that manifests itself in this manner. Rather, the souls that are thus harmed are harmed because of their own dispositions for, as Proclus says, “knowledge of the divine cannot come to birth in a strange receptacle.”²⁷³ Because the σύμβολα of the gods in the imagination take the form of what is most opposite to the gods they are easily confused with what is truly opposed to them.²⁷⁴ Therefore, any soul that is still driven downwards by its imaginations,²⁷⁵ that has not calmed its unformed impulses,²⁷⁶ will go no farther than the imaginative surface of the σύμβολα of the gods²⁷⁷ and will confuse what is lowest and least like the divine in its own imaginative life with the life of the gods symbolized in them.²⁷⁸ Having thus confused the lowest with the highest, the soul is then driven by its disposition towards a life that is impassioned and without reason.²⁷⁹ It is on account of this danger, Proclus argues, that Plato spoke against Homer and inspired poetry in the *Republic*. The *Republic* is concerned with the education of youths.²⁸⁰ Therefore, relative to this specific concern, Plato speaks against it, because the souls whom he is concerned to teach are still in need of the education that

²⁷² *In Remp.* I.128. 22-23: “δεινὴν καὶ ἄτοπον ἐργάζεται σύγχυσιν ἐν ταῖς τῶν πολλῶν ζωαῖς τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον εὐλαβείας.”

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, I.82.7-9: “ὅλως φὰρ ἐν ἀλλοτρίαις ὑποδοχαῖς ἢ μυστικῇ τῶν θεῶν γνῶσις οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἐγγένοιτο.”

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I.74.24-30.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I.81.1-2.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I.80.23-26.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I.74.26-27.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, I.80.30-81.5.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, I.75.10-16.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, I.85.12-16.

would allow them to use it without harming themselves.²⁸¹ Yet in spite of the dangers that both Plato and the inspired poets find in σύμβολα, by which the gods reveal themselves to the imagination, it remains that for the soul that is naturally well suited (εὐφροεστέρους) to them,²⁸² which has purified its intelligence²⁸³ and made it the guide of its life,²⁸⁴ for the soul that has stripped itself of all youthfulness,²⁸⁵ the σύμβολα of the inspired myths can be the means of union with the noeric gods made visible in them. Such a soul does not need to fear the inspired poets but may participate in “the hidden wonders of such myths” at any time he chooses.²⁸⁶

However, it is not only Plato that is aware of the threat posed by inspired σύμβολα, but also the inspired poets themselves, at least as far as Homer is concerned. For according to Proclus, Homer, as an inspired poet, not only manifests the danger and the possibility that Plato knows such σύμβολα to present, but he also shows examples of the harm that that can be suffered through one’s unworthy reception of them. In particular Proclus draws attention to Zeus’ deception of Agamemnon by a dream,²⁸⁷ and to the instance where Athena incites Pandaros to break the truce he had vowed to keep.²⁸⁸ In either case, it is neither the god or their daemonic representative who is deceptive or a worker of wickedness, but it is on account of the faulty disposition of the receiver that evil resulted for them.²⁸⁹ The gods did not mislead them, but in revealing themselves to

²⁸¹ *In Remp.* I.79.18-23.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, I.85.27.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, I.74.26-27.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, I.80.26.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I.80.23-24: “τῶν ἐν τοῖς τοιοῖσδε μύθοις ἀπτοκεκρυμμένων θεαμάτων.”

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I.80.26-28.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, I.115.4-117.21.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, I.104.7-105.1.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, I.105.9-19.

them, set their characters into motion, so that they might bring upon themselves such punishment as would be salutary for their faults.²⁹⁰ It is, however, in the choice of Paris that this danger is most clearly shown. Because of his mindless appetite (ἀνοίας λαίμαργίας) he fails to see that the true Aphrodite is inseparable from Athena,²⁹¹ and so chooses Aphrodite instead of Athena. In doing so he leaps (ἐπιπηδᾷ)²⁹² upon what was merely Aphrodites' phantom (εἶδωλον) and loses the perfection that belongs to the erotic life.²⁹³

Now it is certainly true that these are not instances in which the symbols of the gods appear to the heroes in question through the mediation of inspired poetry. However, what these examples do show is that any given appearance of the gods to a human soul has a similar structure to those that are mediated specifically by inspired poetry. In each case, the god is present to the imagination of the soul through a daemonic intermediary as it is in poetic inspiration.²⁹⁴ For not just in these instances, but in every case, when the gods appear to humans it is necessarily as a daemon and through the medium of the imagination.²⁹⁵ The lower receives the activity of the higher through the mediation of its

²⁹⁰ *In Remp.* I.105.30-106.10.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, I.108.20-25.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, I.108.28.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, I.108.29-109.1.

²⁹⁴ This follows from that idea that the surface meaning of the σύμβολα of the myth is always taken to be daemonic (*In Remp.* I.79.2-4). However, it must be noted that when Proclus describes the mediation of the divine that occurs in inspired poetry as daemonic (δαμόνιος) he is using it as a catch-all term for what, in the strictest sense, applies to both the angelic and daemonic classes together. See *In Remp.* I.86.7-10, 90.28-91.4, 114.9-26. This is further clarified in his commentary on the *Cratylus* where he explicitly uses the term δαίμων to refer to not only angels and daemons but also heroes (*In Crat.* 75.25-76.19).

²⁹⁵ On the imagination as the means by which the soul receives the apparitions of the gods see Trouillard, "La vie et la pensée de Proclus," 45; *In Remp.* I.39.1-40.5; *In Alc.* 79.17-80.22.

immediate superiors²⁹⁶ and this, in the case of human souls, is the daemonic kind.²⁹⁷ Moreover, it must be through the imagination that the daemon appears because, as we shall see, it is in the active passivity of the imagination that the soul is able to receive the impress of what is higher or lower than itself. Also in each case, the apparition of the daemon, though not lacking truth of itself,²⁹⁸ becomes the means by which the soul deceives itself through its own irrational disposition to seek the punishment appropriate for it. It would seem then that if the means of mediation is the same as that of poetic inspiration, and the result of receiving that mediation unworthily is also a kind of punishment, that we may safely conclude that the benefits will also be similar for the soul that has purified its imagination. This leaves us then to ask if there is indeed any difference between a more general sense of inspiration and poetic inspiration, between the daemonic appearance of the gods to Homeric heroes and the way they appear to poets.

The answer to this seems to lie in the distinction between the active and contemplative lives. On one hand, the inspired poet, as one who is devoted to heroic contemplation, evidently has inspiration as a stable state that is always available to him.²⁹⁹ Moreover, we have seen that when the god moves the poet in this way, that it is for him both a means of ascent to the intellectual and of moving those who hear his

²⁹⁶ *El.Th.* 38 (Dodds, 40.17-26).

²⁹⁷ *In Remp.* I.149.6-9.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.115.8.

²⁹⁹ For Proclus, the poet's inspiration is a 'power' (δύναμιν) that it 'possesses' (ἔχει, *In Remp.* I.183.8-9). Like Ion, in the dialogue that is named after him, he cannot turn apply this power to whatever he pleases because he does not have it as an art (τέχνη). However, the inspiration is always available relative to the things that belong to its content. In the case of Ion this means that he can consistently speak well about Homer, but this does not allow him to speak well about any other poet (*In Remp.* I.183.21-26; cf. *Ion* 531a).

poetry in the same way as he has himself been moved by the gods. On the other hand, the Homeric heroes, as men of action,³⁰⁰ seem only to be visited by the gods sporadically and even when such a visitation seems to be received well, it results in an extraordinary practical rather than a theoretical good for the hero. When a god moves Achilles for example, he is made capable of fighting daemons such as those of Apollo and Xanthus,³⁰¹ but not of ascending to the gods who are visible in the daemons. This distinction also holds relative to the punishments of the heroes who have received the gods unworthily. For they are not, like the unworthy poet, handed over to their evil imaginations, but rather to physical chastisements in the form of death or defeat in battle.³⁰² Thus, while it is evident that Proclus' clarification of the dangers of poetic inspiration by means of those of heroic inspiration is useful, since there is a clear analogy between the structure of each, it remains that they do not have exactly the same character, even though they both stem from the daemoniac appearance of the gods to the imagination. This difference between them indicates that there is some kind of partial, practical education by which the heroic soul is made more receptive to inspiration than common people are, but somewhat less receptive than the soul of the poet which has been educated both practically and

³⁰⁰ *In Remp.* I.119.23-120.3.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, I.147.6-149.13. Herakles' battle with Achelous is also given here as an example of how a human can fight lower-order daemons as equals when inspired.

³⁰² The examples given are Agamemnon (*Ibid.*, I.115.13-117.21), Pandarus (*Ibid.*, I.103.20-104.25) and Paris (*Ibid.*, I.108.3-109.7). However, Paris' chastisement is particularly interesting in that it shows how the physical chastisement that a hero brings on himself through a faulty reception of the σύμβολα of the gods can function, in turn, as analogy of the one who blasphemes, and thus suffers from, the σύμβολα of the gods more profoundly. In this case he is the analogy of the soul that makes a bad choice of the three kinds of lives that are possible for it. In choosing the lower Aphrodite over the Aphrodite who is inseparable from Athena (*In Remp.* I.108.24-25) the soul "leaps upon" (ἐπιπηδᾷ) the mere phantasm (εἰδῶλον) of Aphrodite and becomes enmired in it (*Ibid.*, I.108.28-109.1).

philosophically.³⁰³ However, what the details of this education might be is not spelled out in the *Sixth Essay*.

This leads us to the more exact identity that seems to exist between the state of the poetically inspired soul and that of the disembodied soul in the afterlife in Proclus' account. We saw above that the soul must be purified of the imaginations that lead it downward and in this way be reoriented towards intellect, if it wishes to enjoy the spectacle of the daemonic σύμβολα in safety. To this end it needs a complete education in both morals and philosophy. Although deprived of the body by which it could exercise the life of civic virtue, which is the goal of moral teaching, the disembodied soul must, in the same way, have purified its imagination, of material stains and passionate affections by philosophy³⁰⁴ if it wishes to escape the corrective punishments of the terrifying daemons that live under the earth.³⁰⁵ Yet, in the end, philosophy is not enough to save the soul from being driven to its punishment by the disorders of imagination. Physical religious rituals are also necessary. It is only in conjunction with the “most rare and perfect sacrifices” that the σύμβολα of inspired poetry may safely be used as a means of ascent to Intellect.³⁰⁶ In the same way it is because Herakles was purified by the telestic

³⁰³ *In Remp.* I.80.24-30, 81.6-27, 182.6-9. The word φιλοσοφία is not evoked in the description of the education necessary for the proper reception of poetic σύμβολα. However, his description of it makes no other interpretation possible. The person who is ready to receive them will have, among other things “made intellect the leader of his life” (*Ibid.*, I.80.25-26). Clearly this involves an education superior to the sphere of moral and political life. What this education is, which enables the soul to take intellect as its leader, is found in Proclus' descriptions of education in his commentaries on the *Alcibiades* and *Euclid*. There philosophy is presented as the pinnacle of the educational process, the goal of which is to cleanse the eye of the soul so that it can see intellectual reality (*In Alc.* 193.25-195.2, 235.1-236.18, *In Eucl.* 20.11-21.4).

³⁰⁴ *In Remp.* I.119.10-13.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, I.121.25-122.15.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, I.80.20-23.

art, as well as by philosophy, that his soul was able to ascend to the gods.³⁰⁷ The other heroes, who, as we saw, were capable of being moved by the gods to superhuman practical acts, remain below in the underworld. Achilles practiced theurgical acts and knew the appropriate way to perform them.³⁰⁸ Patroclus was the recipient of a sacrifice of twelve youths, the correct sacrifice for one fallen in war.³⁰⁹ Yet, because they had not been freed by philosophy from their attachment to the providence that they once exerted over their bodies, each has confined himself to a mere imaginative phantasm of his true self.³¹⁰ In contrast to this, Herakles has left his imaginary projection of himself below and returned to the gods.³¹¹ Since the purification of physical ritual is ineffectual to prepare the soul for its ascent on its own, it seems that the work of philosophy appears then to be in some way superior to that of physical ritual. But because philosophy enables the ascent of the soul in conjunction with physical ritual and not on its own, it appears that participation in physical ritual is necessary feature of the practice of philosophy.³¹²

This understanding seems to be echoed by Proclus' presentation of the purification necessary in order to make use of inspired σύμβολον. Both physical ritual

³⁰⁷ *In Remp.* I.120.12-14.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, I.146.17-147.6, 152.7-153.20.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, I.152.7-12, 153.12-14.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I.119.23-120.3, 120.18-22.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, I.120.12-14, 171.12-21.

³¹² Relative to these considerations we see that the character of physical theurgy is fundamentally heroic. In the first place, the heroes seem to have a common association with physical theurgy whether they are philosophical or not. Secondly, physical theurgy appears to perform the function that Proclus prescribes to heroes in the otherworld, albeit more gently. The heroes punish the soul in the underworld until it is cleansed from materiality and thus capable of ascent. See Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils*. eds. and trans. Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 18.1-19.29; *In Crat.* 75.9-77.12. Physical theurgy, we have seen, purifies the soul towards the same end. On some of the ambiguities concerning the ontological status of heroes see O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revisited* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 149-152.

and philosophy are necessary preludes to the proper reception of the inspired σύμβολον,³¹³ but in this regard he pays philosophy considerably more attention than physical ritual. This ordering might seem to be contradicted where he says that without knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) one cannot make use of physical theurgy or the σύμβολα of the myths without impiety.³¹⁴ Ἐπιστήμη is, after all, generally used by Proclus to speak of the scientific knowledge that the soul has as soul. In this sense of the word, the knowledge that philosophy has is an extremely pure form of ἐπιστήμη. If what is signified here is philosophical knowledge it would suggest that philosophical activity is inferior to that of physical theurgy. However, this use of the word simply refers us right back to Achilles. For Proclus also says that Achilles has knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the theurgic rites which allows him to perform them properly³¹⁵ and yet he also makes it clear that Achilles is not freed from sensible attachment³¹⁶ in the way that philosophy brings about.³¹⁷ The knowledge necessary to participate in and even perform physical ritual is necessarily of a lower order.

However, what this does not mean is that philosophy is superior to theurgy in any absolute sense. For, as will be no surprise to us by now, Proclus is quite clear that the proper reception of the daemonic images of inspired poetry by the imagination amounts to a theurgic act and that, relative to this act, philosophy is only a purification.³¹⁸ The inspired σύμβολα, he says, are the traces of a mystagogy³¹⁹ which brings the soul, by

³¹³ *In Remp.* I.80.13-81.10.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I.128.21-23.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.147.1.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I.139.10-14.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.119.12-18, 124.5-11.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.74.26, 80.24-30, 86.3-5, 124.5-11.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I.74.22-23, 80.20-23.

means of the theoretical vision hidden in these traces,³²⁰ to a mystical union with the divine.³²¹ Now we should, of course, be careful. By this point we have seen that most everything in this reality that Proclus describes is the image of everything else. Just because it is appropriate to call something the same name as something else, does not mean it may not, in fact, have some very striking differences. A shared name indicates relation,³²² but the nature of that relation must never be assumed. For Proclus, the most important pieces of evidence for placing inspired poetry relative to the concept of theurgy is one we have already referred to in passing. When Plato says that inspired poetry should only be heard in tandem with the “most august and perfect” sacrifices,³²³ this for Proclus is proof that not only is there a theurgy hidden in the σύμβολα of inspired poetry,³²⁴ that it truly is a priestly invocation (ἱερατικὴν πρόκλησιν),³²⁵ but that it is on the same level as “the most holy initiations and the most perfect mysteries”³²⁶ which as such, are suitable, not for the general participants of physical theurgy, but for the leaders of such rites.³²⁷ For if physical theurgy helped to purify the soul of materiality we have seen that this theurgy is an initiation that elevates the soul to the gods.³²⁸

³²⁰ *In Remp.* I.80.23-30, 81.27-82.2, 82.19-20, 86.1, 192.9-12.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, I.81.10,15, 86.10.

³²² The clearest example of this in the *Sixth Essay* is the way that the hierarchy of divinities that proceed from a god all bear that god’s name (*Ibid.*, I.146.17-177.16). The way that names are related to their creators is put more abstractly at *In Crat.* 18.10-22.

³²³ *In Remp.* I.80.20-21.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, I.80.22-23.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, I.83.28, 84.25-26.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.80.18-19: “ταῖς τε ἀγιωτάταις τῶν καὶ τοῖς τελειοτάτοις τῶν μυστηρίων.” Cf. also I.78.22.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, I.84.26-29.

³²⁸ *Contra* Andrew Smith, *Porphyrus’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 116-117; Sheppard, “Proclus’ Attitude to Theurgy,” *The Classical Quarterly* 32.1 (1982): 217-218, 222-224; R.M. Van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns*, 77, 111. Both Sheppard and Van den Berg follow

Even though the idea of inspired poetry as a theurgy only emerges in the midst of Proclus' more specific concern to conciliate Plato to himself by conciliating him to Homer, we are now able to see that a fairly complete picture of what kind of theurgy it is and how it works can be inferred from the evidence of the *Sixth Essay*. However, a number of important questions remain. We have seen, through the symbolism of opposites, that the soul is able to detach itself from its own activity and receive the impress of a higher and more divine activity. We have also seen that the soul must be purified by philosophy of the forms of its imaginary life which are truly opposed the divine if it is to avoid confusing them with the oppositions through which the gods are manifest to its imagination. Finally, the one who knows the σύμβολα of the gods for what they are must look beyond their seemingly obscene surfaces to discover and ascend to the god that is present to it in the σύμβολα. However, this all remains highly metaphorical. What does it mean metaphysically for philosophy to purify the soul of its material imaginations or for the soul to look beneath the surface of the σύμβολα manifest in it? What is this looking beneath the imaginative surface of the σύμβολον and how does it result in the soul's ascent and unification with the noeric gods? To answer these questions we must first turn to Proclus' work on the structure of the soul's self-knowledge in his *Commentary on Euclid*.

The soul is the middle point between Intellect and the sensible world. It is not immediately filled and unified with itself in its thought as Intellect is.³²⁹ Nor is it satisfied

Smith in seeing the lowest theurgy as a kind of "white magic" rather than a means of the soul's further unification. Cf. Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles* (Dilton Marsh: Prometheus Trust, 2013), 36-37; Cf. Finamore, "Proclus on Religious Ritual," 130 note 15. Cf. also Shaw, "Rituals of Unification," 8-10.

³²⁹ *In Eucl.* 18.10-19.5, 148.16-149.2.

with things other than itself as sense perception is.³³⁰ Rather, it is an intellectual essence that must come to know itself through what is other than itself. Soul innately knows³³¹ the unified plenitude of forms that it is, but it cannot know this knowledge of itself without first becoming exterior to itself. Thus, the soul's desire to know the contents of its self-knowledge moves it to unfurl³³² what is united in it by projecting it into multiplicity and extension.³³³ Such a projection will, of course, require some kind of matter by which it may be received and from which it may receive its multiplicity and extension. This is what it has in its imagination.³³⁴ But imagination is not to be confused with physical matter, which, as such, is suitable only for the reception of sensible form. Rather, it is a form of intellectual activity that is only slightly inferior to that of the soul itself.³³⁵ It passively receives the soul's projection of its contents into it as their substrate, but does this by generating them in itself.³³⁶ It contains the forms that are united and unextended in the soul in a way that is divided and extended, but in such a way that the soul, in seeing those divided and extended forms, is able to recognize and know the

³³⁰ *In Eucl.* 19.2-5.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 52.12-22, 55.4-9. The knowledge of the soul, and even of the imagination, taken on its own, is already γνῶσις before it projects and reflects upon its contents. On this subject see Carlos Steel's excellent treatment in "Breathing Thought: Proclus on the Innate Knowledge of the Soul," in *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed John Cleary (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 298-300.

³³² *In Eucl.* 54.27-55.18.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 52.23-27.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.15-52.3.

³³⁵ Thus it is variously called either "passive intellect" (νοῦν παθητικόν, *In Eucl.* 52.3) or intelligible matter (νοητὴν ὕλην, *In Eucl.* 53.1). On the subject of imagination as the lowest form of intellectual life I am much indebted to Gregory MacIsaac. See "Phantasia between Soul and Body in Proclus' Euclid Commentary," *Dionysius* 19 (2001): 131-135.

³³⁶ *In Eucl.* 52.20-53.05; MacIsaac, "Phantasia between Soul and Body," 128.

simpler unity that they have in itself. In this way, Proclus describes the imagination as a sort of mirror into which the soul looks in order to gaze at its own beauty.³³⁷

That the imaginations by which the soul knows itself are projections from itself rather than abstractions derived from sense-perception is evident from the degree of accuracy and precision that the soul's imaginations can have. Since the sensible world does not itself have this accuracy and precision it is impossible that it should be the source of it in the soul.³³⁸ Moreover, if it derives the unity of ideas that it essentially is from abstractions of sense-perception, this would make the soul inferior to and subject to matter,³³⁹ which would invert the actual order of the causes. The soul's self-understanding is certainly awakened (ἀνεγειρομένη) by sense perception,³⁴⁰ but this awakening is a reversion to a knowledge that is already innate to it,³⁴¹ rather than a reception of something from outside that it only had potentially.³⁴² Rather than some sort of blank slate that is written upon by what is inferior to it, the place of the ideas only in potential, it is the innate place of the ideas, a slate "always having been inscribed and inscribing itself and being inscribed upon by Intellect."³⁴³ It should be no surprise that Proclus indicates here that Intellect, together with the soul itself, is the source of the unity of ideas that the soul is. This follows from the idea that soul is a likeness of Intellect³⁴⁴ and that, as such, its ideas are likenesses and images of intelligible realities that are in

³³⁷ *In Eucl.* 141.2-142.2.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.9-13.26.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.24-14.15.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.10

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 45.11-12.

³⁴² This is a polemic against Aristotle (Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 54). Cf. *De Anima*, 429a27-429b9.

³⁴³ *In Eucl.* 16.9-10: "γεγραμμένον ἀεὶ καὶ γράφον ἑαυτὸ καὶ ὑπὸ νοῦ γραφόμενον."

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.10-16.

Intellect.³⁴⁵ For a likeness is a participation of that which it is a likeness of.³⁴⁶ Therefore, the soul's ideas could not be likenesses of intelligible realities unless they were, in some way, to participate Intellect. However, if the soul's ideas were to come from Intellect alone then soul would no longer be the self-moving mediary between the motionless motion of Intellect and the externally moved character of the sensible, but would, like a sensible object, be impressed upon by Intellect as from the outside.³⁴⁷ Thus, it would seem, that the soul, in knowing and returning to itself through its imaginary self-projections, not only reverts to itself, but in some fashion, insofar as it is a likeness of Intellect, to Intellect itself.³⁴⁸

However, the fact that the soul is able to revert to itself, and in a qualified way, to Intellect, through its projections of itself, does not mean that it will always do so successfully. While the imaginations of the sensible world bring about a necessary awakening of this motion of the soul's self-knowledge, they can also obscure the soul's imaginations of itself, so that it is drawn away from itself to the 'life of feeling' (ἐμαθη βίον) filled with moving shapes (μορφωτικῶν κινήσεων).³⁴⁹ Insofar as the mind is thus lost in its imaginations, moved by exterior things and not by itself, its eye, as it were, is closed, so that it can neither see itself in its own imaginations, nor remember itself through them,³⁵⁰ but rather confuses itself with them.³⁵¹ Only proper education can awaken the soul from this drowsy state of forgetfulness and ignorance, to recollect itself

³⁴⁵ *In Eucl.* 62.22-23.

³⁴⁶ *El.Th.* 29,32 (Dodds, 34.3-11, 36.3-10).

³⁴⁷ *In Eucl.* 15.16-16.8.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.24-149.2.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.4-9.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.17-21.4, 46.3-15.

³⁵¹ We see this in the case of the shades of Achilles and Patroclus (*In Remp.* I.119.3-120.11).

through its imaginations rather than remain ensnared by them.³⁵² The procedure of such an education will be to wean the soul, first from thinking itself through material imaginations, and from there to lead it through imaginations that are progressively less extended and divided and more like the ideas within soul that they mirror back to it. This process culminates in the soul's attainment of "perfect and noeric knowledge" (τελειοτέραν καὶ νοερωτέραν γνῶσιν)³⁵³ in which it is able escape the imagination entirely, to see all the varied figures of itself that it had projected into the imagination as "united" (ἐνοειδῶς) and "without figure" (ἀτυπώτως).³⁵⁴

There are two complementary ways this process of education may be conceived. The first is as a geometrical movement in which one learns to see unextended figure in extended figure³⁵⁵ and each of the figures in each of the other figures until the soul is able to see "all in all and each separately".³⁵⁶ The second is as a mathematical movement from sciences that depends upon received hypotheses to the unhypothetical science of Intellect. In this case, the soul begins with the mathematical sciences that unify and order the soul's imaginations insofar as they are able relative to their own hypothetical starting points.³⁵⁷ The soul then proceeds from them to a more general mathematics which contains the hypothetical starting points of the various mathematical sciences. In doing so it is able to make the imaginations of the mathematical sciences more accurate, by demonstrating their similarities and differences in a way that would have been impossible before a measure by which they could be compared and united with each other had been

³⁵² *In Eucl.* 46.15-47.8.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 55.21-22.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.14-15.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.26-55.6.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.23-56.4: "πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν καὶ ἕκαστον χωρίς."

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.2-20.

established.³⁵⁸ From there the soul moves to dialectic, the capstone of the sciences, which perfects the soul's imaginations by relating them to the unhypothetical knowledge of Intellect.³⁵⁹

Proclus describes elsewhere how dialectic does this by moving from form to form until it reaches the first form and then finally goes beyond Being in reaching the first unity which is implied by Being.³⁶⁰ However, we must remember that insofar as dialectic is a form of the soul's divided mode of thinking, albeit its final and most unified stage, it has not yet attained Intellect that it leads to, much less the super-essential realities. Therefore, its moving past Being to the One by means of the forms cannot not be understood to occur on the level of the forms and the super-essential realities themselves, but it is the soul's reflection on itself through extremely simple and exact imaginations of what it knows about such things in its essence. For all things are contained in the soul, even the gods and the One,³⁶¹ but so long as it is soul, and acts by its own powers, it must know all that it knows by reflecting on itself through its imaginative projections of itself, even at the heights of dialectic.³⁶² It is not until dialectic leads the soul in turn to Intellect itself, that it is able to know all that is contained in the sciences in a way that is

³⁵⁸ *In Eucl.* 44.1-9.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.10-21, 44.9-14.

³⁶⁰ According to Proclus the term *διαλεκτικός* can refer to three different but related activities. It can refer to the preliminary education that precedes, leads to (*In Parm.* 653.4-14) and operates by (*In Eucl.* 42.12-43.10) what he calls dialectic in the *Commentary on Euclid*. It can refer to the process by which a philosopher refutes and purges a sophist of double-falsehood (*In Parm.* 654.3-10). Finally, it can refer the pinnacle of the soul's scientific activity, such as has just been described above (*In Parm.* 653.14-23, 655.9-656.1).

³⁶¹ *In Eucl.* 141.19-142.7.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 16.12-16, 54.27-55.6.

immediate, and free of the division and the extension that is implicit in the imagination and from there, perhaps, move on still higher to other forms of γνώσις.³⁶³

By looking at the theurgic movement described in Proclus' *Sixth Essay* in the light of his description of this epistemological movement we are able to resolve certain difficulties, but in a way that gives rise to others. It is now easier to understand how this education is the necessary means by which the soul is purified of such imaginations as lead it downward. It first habituates the soul to thinking without imaginations of the sensible world and then moves the soul from there to simpler and more exact forms of imagination that are progressively more like to the ideas in the soul, so that through them the soul might in turn know its own likeness to Intellect with more and more clarity. But as we learned, close to the beginning of the chapter, the soul must not only be emptied of the movements of lesser things, but even of its own movement if the impress of divine inspiration is not to be immediately obscured within it. This certainly does not occur in the lower sciences. However, at the height of the soul's education, in the dialectical discovery of the One, we seem to have found just such an emptying of the soul. Because the soul's imagining of the One is its imagination of what is utterly without parts and simple³⁶⁴ it would seem that in discovering the One in its thinking that the soul has achieved a way of imagining itself that is almost entirely free of the division and extension that are implicit in its reflection on itself through its projections, an imagination so simple, that in gazing at it the soul appears almost to reflect on itself through the Imagination itself caught in its nakedness, prior to the multiplications for which it is the potential. In thinking the One it has not reached the One, but thinks itself through a

³⁶³ *In Eucl.* 55.18-23.

³⁶⁴ *In Parm.* 1104.19-1105.25.

projection of itself that makes it empty of its own projections, so that what is superior to itself may reveal itself in it. This, surely is the state of ‘purity’ and ‘tenderness’ that Proclus said the soul must attain in order that it may receive the σύμβολα of the gods in the right way.³⁶⁵

However, an important ambiguity emerges when we consider the role of dialectic in the soul’s education. In the *Sixth Essay*, it appears that philosophy is only significant as a purification that makes it possible to use daemonic σύμβολα of inspired poetry as a means of ascent to the noeric realities of Intellect. Yet in the *Commentary on Euclid* it appears that dialectic, as the highest and purest form of philosophy, is able to reach Intellect of itself. In the one view, the soul is said to ascend to Intellect only through a special form of participation in the divine, which it is naturally capable of, but which is not included in its own natural participation. In the other, it appears to say that the soul ascends to Intellect out of what belongs to its own natural participation in the divine. At first glance, these seem to be irreconcilable positions. How can Hermes be said to be able to save the soul from Calypso by uniting it to Intellect³⁶⁶ if it is only Apollo that can do

³⁶⁵ It is in this sense that, as Trouillard says, the One is “le meilleur symbole de la divinité sur le plan spéculatif” and “le plus incantatoire.” (*La mystatgogie de Proclus*, 99). In saying this Trouillard is not preserving the distinction between likeness (εἰκόν) and symbol (σύμβολον) that he sees as a characteristic of Proclus’ mature thought (*La symbolisme chez Proclus*, 298-299) but is making use of the more general sense of σύμβολον, in which it is merely a synonym of εἰκόν, that is present in his earlier work, such as his commentaries on the *Timaeus* and *Euclid* (*La symbolisme chez Proclus*, 297-298). The One is the best symbol of the divine produced by the soul’s own speculation, and the most incantatory, precisely insofar as it marks the transition from εἰκόν to σύμβολον. It is the most symbolic εἰκόν because it is the εἰκόν in which the soul’s potentiality for the reception of σύμβολα is most completely uncovered.

³⁶⁶ *In Eucl.* 55.18-23.

so?³⁶⁷ However, if we look at this problem in light of the formulations of the *Elements of Theology* we shall see that this is not the case.

In his masterful book *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, Stephen Gersh points out a significant problem that emerges from Proclus' description of the structure of procession and return.³⁶⁸ If something is identical with its cause it will be indistinguishable from it and never proceed into distinction from it.³⁶⁹ If something is utterly other a principle it will have no relation to it at all.³⁷⁰ Therefore, for something to proceed from a principle as the caused from the cause it must do so through a mixture of identity (ταὐτόν) and otherness (ἕτερον), or in other words, likeness (ὁμοιότης).³⁷¹ The character of those things that have a greater degree of identity will remain closer to the cause, those with a greater degree of otherness will proceed farther.³⁷² But whatever their degree of likeness to their cause, it is through a relation of likeness to it that they proceed from it. However, the reversion of entities to their causes is through likeness as well.³⁷³ For everything that proceeds from its cause desires "to be conjoined with it, every part to every part,"³⁷⁴ as to that which is the mediation of the Good to it.³⁷⁵ The problem here, however, is not that it is as a likeness to its principle that an entity reverts to its cause, but how it is able to do so. For if an entity proceeds to the degree that its otherness makes it distinct from its

³⁶⁷ See pages 44-45 of this chapter.

³⁶⁸ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 56. Here Gersh raises the problem without attempting to solve how it is that "the otherness which the effect has acquired in procession is to a certain extent corrected."

³⁶⁹ *El.Th.* 30 (Dodds, 34.20-24).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 (Dodds, 34.17-20).

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29-30 (Dodds, 34.3-27).

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 30, 36 (Dodds, 34.14-15, 38.30-40.6).

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 32 (Dodds 36.3-4).

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 32 (Dodds, 36.5): "πάν πρὸς πάν συνάπτεσθαι".

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 35 (Dodds, 38.16-18).

cause, the power of its otherness will, in some fashion, need to become converted to identity in order to revert. But this cannot be in so in an absolute sense, by a sort of dissolution or destruction of its otherness. Proclus is very clear that each entity remains steadfast in its rank (ἄλυτος κατὰ τὴν τάξιν)³⁷⁶ even in its reversion to its cause, which means that the degree of otherness by which it proceeds to its rank must remain intact. Rather, it seems, that for an entity to revert to its cause it must somehow discover an identity with its cause that it does not have of itself, in the very otherness by which it proceeded from it.

Thus, it is clear that there can be no unqualified sense in which the soul's dialectical activity is enough, of itself, to lead the soul to Intellect. So long as the soul acts according to its own activity, the very best that the soul can do is to purify its imaginations to the point that there is only very little difference between them and the essence that projected them in the first place. For since the imaginations by which the soul knows itself are projected from its own essence, they can provide it with no means of offsetting the degree of otherness that is implicit in its essential likeness to Intellect, and thus no means of attaining union with it. By purifying its imaginations it may rid its self-knowledge of such otherness as obscures the kind of likeness of Intellect that it is, but it will not attain any greater degree of identity with Intellect than it already has of itself.

However, we have seen that in purifying itself through dialectic the soul is not only made as like to Intellect as it can be of itself, but is also made capable of receiving the σύμβολα of the gods within itself and that through these the soul is indeed able to

³⁷⁶ *El.Th.* 34 (Dodds, 38.5-8).

revert to Intellect. That this is so is already well established, but it is only now that why it is so only now begins to become clear. The reason that the σύμβολα of inspired poetry are able to bring about the soul's version on intellect where the soul's own imaginations are not is as follows. Where the soul, of its own power, is only able to minimize its otherness to Intellect as far as its rational essence allows, the divine σύμβολα, in the way we have just learned is necessary to the reversion of any entity to its cause, makes the same otherness by which the soul is made separate from its causes the medium through which the soul discovers its further identity with them. Of itself, the soul must leave behind such imaginations as sunder it most from Intellect as it seeks to conform itself to Intellect, that is, imaginations of a material³⁷⁷ and immoral nature.³⁷⁸ However, once the soul has purified itself of these lower images, poetic inspiration gives them back. But, in doing so, it gives them back to the soul in a form that manifests the soul's causes to it in a way that is superior to how they are manifest to it within its proper nature, just as before, they had manifest only the soul's effects to it and these in a way that is inferior to the manner in which they are manifest to it within its proper nature. It is thus through inspired σύμβολα, that the soul is able to ascend to its causes because it transforms the otherness that keeps the soul below into the actuality of its ascent.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ *In Eucl.* 46.3-9.

³⁷⁸ *In Remp.* I.80.28-30.

³⁷⁹ This seems to be Trouillard's position, although he does not raise it as an answer to the problematic that Gersh develops: "Les dieux de la mythologie sont animés par des passions que ne connaissent pas les raisons mathématiques. Mais Proclus estime que ce caractère même assure au mythe un pouvoir sur l'homme tout entier que n'obtiennent pas les mathématiques. Car le mythe s'étend d'un extrême à l'autre, du divin à la matière, de l'ineffable par excès à l'ineffable par défaut, du 'sanctuaire' à 'abîme'." (Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 49).

It is, of course, only possible for the σύμβολα of inspired poetry to play this role because they are not projected into the imagination by the soul's essence, but by the superior essences that act as its most proximate causes. It follows that the imaginations they project have a greater likeness to the intellectual gods visible in them than those produced by the soul because they are projected from essences that have a greater likeness to the intellectual gods than the soul does. However, this does not in any way represent a break from the soul's natural activity. It is rather an extension of the soul's own self-knowing.³⁸⁰ For in looking at Proclus' *Commentary on Euclid* we have seen that the soul's imaginations are not just objects that it is capable of seeing. The soul in seeing its imaginations reflects on itself and, to some extent, knows itself. The soul does not cease from this activity with the introduction of images in its imagination that it cannot produce from its essence. It is still coming to know itself through the images in its imagination. What has changed are the limits of the soul's self-knowledge. In thinking itself through the mediation of the imaginations that have been projected in it by daemons, it follows that the soul then comes to know and act upon itself, not as it does of itself, but in the manner of the daemons that have projected the images. Its essence remains the same but yet that essence comes to live according to a higher activity that it could generate of itself. It is in this way that the soul's thought of itself begins to pierce through to its divine depths, to the 'one of the intellect' implied in the rational self-knowledge that belongs to it alone,³⁸¹ but which it is unable to see in itself without the more-than-rational

³⁸⁰ See O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revisited*, 153: "we must be careful never to set divine inspiration against self-discovery, a continuity also implied in the fact that the principles that are the objects of self-discovery are psychic images of higher divine principles and thus are already themselves inspirations deriving from above."

³⁸¹ *In Remp.* I.177.14-23, 178.12-16.

means that are given to its rationality in poetic inspiration. In short, there is no ascent of the soul to Intellect apart from Apollo, but that ascent does not enable the soul to leave behind Hermes so much as it grants its Hermetic inspiration the power to bear it aloft.

However, while it is only through the daemonic mediation of such σύμβολα as are present in inspired poetry that the soul may begin its reversion to the intellectual gods, it will need further means to complete this reversion. While daemonic essence and the imaginations projected from daemonic essence have a greater degree of identity with the intellectual gods than the respective essence and imaginations of the human soul, there are many orders of souls between the daemonic kind and the intellectual gods, each with a greater degree of identity with the intellectual gods who are manifest in them than the last. None of these levels of divinity can be bypassed in the soul's ascent because the superior causes of any entity are only ever attained through the mediation of the intermediary causes, beginning with that which is most proximate.³⁸² The soul must accomplish its reversion to Intellect by means of its successive reversions to all the intermediary causes by which it has proceeded from Intellect. Thus, despite the poetic language Proclus uses about that daemon that is visible in the poetic σύμβολον seizing the soul and bearing it up to union with the gods,³⁸³ they can only, in fact, place the soul in contact with their immediate superiors and they with theirs all the way up the line. Yet in every stage of its ascent the soul remains itself.³⁸⁴ For the rule that an entity

³⁸² *El.Th.* 31, 37-38 (Dodds, 34.28-36.2, 40.7-26).

³⁸³ *In Remp.* I.86.7-10.

³⁸⁴ Proclus often refers to the identity that underlies the soul's various transformations and in which they are all unified as its ὑπαρξίς (*In Alc.* 247.7-11) or σύνθεμα (*In Remp.* I. 177.18-23; *In Crat.* 19.13, 31.1-7). On ὑπαρξίς see Stephen Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 32-36. On σύνθεμα see Trouillard, *Le symbolisme de Proclus*, 298. Trouillard's

maintains the peculiar mixture of identity and otherness that give it its own rank even when it is united to its cause applies no less to the higher stages of the soul's ascent than it has to the soul reversion to the daemonic. So long as the soul has not yet transcended the Demiurge, since it is from the Demiurge that it receives its primary imaginative life,³⁸⁵ this will continue to take place as an increasing revelation of the powers superior to the Demiurge in the imagination's otherness relative to them. But upon reaching the Demiurge and thus completing the ascent that may be made by the power of Apollo,³⁸⁶ it may perhaps, ascend to yet higher realities by means of yet higher mysteries³⁸⁷ and leave its perfected imagination, so to speak, behind³⁸⁸

The proof, as it were, that the soul preserves its own identity in all these higher forms of union is most simply evident in the fact that the soul proceeds again from them to the life that belongs to it as soul. For it is only insofar as the soul maintains a stable identity that endures through the soul's changes that it makes any sense to speak of it ascending and descending.³⁸⁹ However, Proclus provides a particularly interesting

recognition that the σύνθεμα of the soul “est si peu un symbole qu'il a lui-même besoin d'un symbole pour se faire reconnaître et devenir pleinement efficace” seems to disprove the theory in which Van den Berg (*Proclus' Hymns*, 79, 126) follows Sheppard, that Proclus uses σύνθεμα and σύμβολον interchangeably (*Studies of the 5th and 6th Essays*, 146).

³⁸⁵ Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 152; Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, 152; *In Tim.* III.236.29-237.1, 237.24-31.

³⁸⁶ *In Crat.* 65.16-66.13.

³⁸⁷ See note 268.

³⁸⁸ It is evident that the soul is always attached to its higher imagination (*El.Th.* 196, 209 [Dodds, 170.18-30, 182.16-34]). Yet there is another sense in which even this is left behind when the soul partakes of the mystagogy that begins with the middle of the Intelligible-and-Intellectual heavens and leads to the Intelligible (*Pl.Th.* IV.9 [Saffrey and Westerink, 31.1-3]). Cf. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Vehicle of the Soul*, 150; *idem*, “Proclus on Ritual Practice,” 132-134.

³⁸⁹ *In El.Th.* 206 (Dodds, 180.15-29). Proclus describes the soul as continually ascending out of and descending into genesis.

example of the way that the soul's own particularly rational character is manifest even at the highest and most simple levels of reality in the fourth fragment of his commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*.³⁹⁰

There we find that it is not the 'flower of the intellect' (νοῦ ἄνθος) but the 'one of the whole soul' (πάσης ψυχῆς ἄνθος) that is able to unite the soul with the One.³⁹¹ While the 'one of the intellect' is the reality in the soul by which it is able to be united with the highest reaches of intelligibility and Being, it cannot unite the soul to what is beyond them. For how is even the highest thinking able to touch that which is past thought itself?³⁹² Moreover, the 'one of the intellect' is only "that which, in our intellectual life, is most like the One."³⁹³ Yet if it does not unite the rest of the soul's various powers and is in fact in some way separate from them, how then can it be understood to unite the soul as a whole with the unity that is presupposed by all unity? However, the 'one of the whole soul' does in fact unite all the powers of the soul and intellect among them,³⁹⁴ showing that it is able to unite the soul to the One where the 'one of the intellect' could not. For how should the soul's union with the One take place for it if not as a unification of everything that is distinct and separate in it?

³⁹⁰ See Christian Guérard's article "l'hyparxis de l'âme et la fleur de l'intellect dans la mystagogie de Proclus" in *Proclus: Lecteur et Interprète des Anciens: actes du colloque international du CRNS Paris: 2-4 octobre 1985*, eds. Jean Pépin and H.D. Saffrey (Paris: CNRS, 1987): 335-349. He shows there that the distinction between the "flower of the intellect" and the "flower of the soul" found in this fragment is the position which is consistent throughout the whole of Proclus' work. See also Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence," 216-217.

³⁹¹ *Ex. Chald.* IV (Des Places, 211.8-12).

³⁹² *Ibid.*, IV (Des Places, 210.12-21).

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, IV (Des Places, 210.30): "ἔστι τῆς νοερᾶς ἡμῶν ζωῆς τὸ ἐνοειδέστατον."

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, IV (Des Places, 211.12).

The crucial thing here is that the soul is still, at least in a manner of speaking, unifying things that are divided. Intellect knows multiplicity, but strictly in a unified form.³⁹⁵ It is particularly the soul's rational form of knowing that makes unities of parts and parts of unities.³⁹⁶ Even though we must be cautious with what is undoubtedly a metaphorical use of language, it is a strong indication of the way that the soul's rational character abides with it that the soul's final mystagogy is best described with the language of composition (σύνθεσις), an activity belongs to, and indeed only properly exists, in an unqualified sense, on the soul's own level of reality.³⁹⁷ This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that many of the powers that the 'one of the whole soul' unites are powers that the soul will have left behind with its imagination as it ascended to the intelligible: discursive thought (διάνοια), opinion (δόξα), attention (προσοχή) and choice (προαίρεσις).³⁹⁸ This implies that even when the soul has been unified with activities far above its own that it is still, in some way, related to the lower activities it has transcended as to parts of the whole that it is. For how could a unification of parts be necessary to an entity's further unification as an entity if its identity did not still, even at this level of simplicity, necessarily involve the interrelation of those parts? Thus, even at the utmost peak of Being, where the soul has transcended even the basic distinction of thinker and thought,³⁹⁹ the powers by which the soul's rational thought is uniquely its own, in some fashion, abide with it. However, to determine how this can be so must wait for the time being.

³⁹⁵ *Ex Chald.* IV (Des Places, 44.14-23); *El.Th.* 171, 176 (Dodds, 150.2-14, 154.5-34).

³⁹⁶ *In Eucl.* 107.19-108.2.

³⁹⁷ *In Eucl.* 43.1-21.

³⁹⁸ *Ex.Chald.* IV (Des Places 211.1-2).

³⁹⁹ *El.Th.* 168 (Dodds, 146.16-23).

Thus we are now able to see that Proclus' understanding of the theurgic aspect of Homer's poetry has a sort of double rationality. Firstly, it is rational in the sense that the soul, in some fashion, preserves its rational, philosophical nature even as it is caught up by the daemonic activities manifest in poetic σύμβολα and from thence by activities that are far more divine than these. Dialectic does not really come to end even in the soul's transcendence of dialectic. Secondly, it is rational in the sense that it not something extraneous to the otherwise rational structure of Proclus' system that has, as such, simply been attached to it because of the superstition of his age with which it is supposed he is infected. Nor is it something which has been made necessary only by his so-called 'proliferation of hypostases'⁴⁰⁰ or even because he has given the soul a humbler status than it has in Plotinus. For we have seen that the rational theurgy that Proclus finds in Homer and other inspired poets, is made necessary, before these more specific considerations, by the very structure of procession and return. Because no entity can produce in itself more identity with its cause than it already has essentially, no entity is able, of its own resources, to unite itself with its cause. Rather, it relies on its cause to manifest itself within it in a way that grants it greater identity with its cause at the same time as preserving the otherness that makes it distinct from it. That is to say, no entity is ever united to its cause except by means of the symbolic manifestation of its cause within it. The ascent is always a mystagogy. Thus we are able to determine that not only is the particular mystagogy that Proclus finds in the inspired poets an integral feature of his rational system, but mystagogy as a whole. Furthermore, it shows decisively that Proclus is not just using figures of speech when he speaks of the various kinds of prayer and

⁴⁰⁰ John M. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Platonism," *Hermes* 92 (1964): 216.

hymnody sung by all the different orders of beings.⁴⁰¹ Theurgy is not only a human matter, but something which every existing thing participates in at every stage of its own conversion. Moreover, since the soul, apart from the σύμβολα that we have seen it receive in its own station through inspired poetry, can only make the stages of its own ascent through its use of the σύμβολα more properly received by the beings both above and below it from their own proximate causes, the soul's own rational prayer may be said to be complete, only through the prayers of all the others.

⁴⁰¹ *De Sac.* 8-10.

CHAPTER FOUR
The Ascent to the Self: Poetic Inspiration as the Soul's
Demiurgic Self-Creation

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it;
and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.
- St. Luke 17.33

It is now evident that the soul's ascent to the gods by means of the σύμβολα of Homeric myth is not an irrational addition to Proclus' otherwise rational philosophical system, but that its necessity belongs to one of the most fundamental features of that system, namely, the structure of procession and return. Moreover, we have seen that this ascent is also rational in the sense that it does not involve an interruption of the soul's characteristic dianoetic activity so much as an intensification and unification of it. Yet a problem remains. If the whole point of such an ascent is to leave one life for another, to transcend as much as possible such activity as the soul is capable of in its own station,⁴⁰² then it would seem that preservation of the soul's character in the ascent has a tragic quality. The retention of its specificity will be the retention of something that limits the soul's ability to attain the union it desires. Rationality, in such a view, would remain, but against the will of the philosopher, who would not, in a sense, believe in reason, but seek always to leave it behind as completely as possible in favour of more divine forms of knowledge. If carried to its logical conclusion, this position, would not only treat all scientific inquiry but indeed all things simply as means to the end of union with the Good and not as having any good of themselves.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² *In Remp.* I.180.30-181.2.

⁴⁰³ While their concerns are more literary than philosophical, this criticism is implicit in Trimpi and Lambertson's frustration with the way that Proclus seems to be always leaving behind the most apparent and rational sense of the text in favour something "beyond" it.

However, such a reading of Proclus would leave us unable to reconcile important features of Proclus' presentation. For the inspired σύμβολον is not only a means of the soul surpassing its own character insofar as its character allows, but as we shall see, it also completes and confirms the soul's own rational content on its own level. In other words, it is not only a way beyond the world of ideas such as it is contained in the soul's essence, but the means by which the soul may fully realize its ideal content through scientific knowledge and true opinion. If this is not simply to be understood as mere contradiction or paradox it must mean that the soul's own good as soul and its ascent to the Good lie in the same direction, even though the soul seems to, in some sense, leave behind its life as soul in its ascent to the Good. Within the *Sixth Essay* the implied reason for this is not spelled out directly.⁴⁰⁴ However, why it is so, and indeed, must be so is easily found in Proclus treatment of self-constitution in the *Elements of Theology*.⁴⁰⁵

According to Proclus there is an intermediary position between that which is only productive and that which is only produced, namely, that which is produced by a superior principle,⁴⁰⁶ but by means of its own self-production.⁴⁰⁷ Everything has an existence that

Trimpi, *Muses of one Mind*, 218, 238-239; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 170, 179, 229, 232.

⁴⁰⁴ See note 177 of Chapter Two.

⁴⁰⁵ On the doctrine of self-constitution in Proclus see Dodds, *El.Th.* 223-227; Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus*, 128-135; *idem*, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 132-137, 305-307; Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 65, 76, 156, 229, 239, 250; *idem*, *L'Une et l'âme selon Proclus*, 86-89, 98-102, 133-141.

⁴⁰⁶ *El.Th.* 9 (Dodds, 10.14-29). The term here and in proposition 10 is "self-sufficient" (αὐτάρκης) rather than "self-constituted" (αὐθυπόστατος), the term that is used more generally in propositions 40-51. However, it is clear that these terms, while different in their emphasis, are used to describe the same reality (Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 305).

⁴⁰⁷ *El.Th.* 40 (Dodds, 40.8-29). Cf. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 239, 250. Cf. also Gersh's comment on Wallis, that he "has correctly pointed out an ambiguity in the

is separable from body,⁴⁰⁸ from the highest intelligible gods, to the lowest human soul, is self-constituted in this way.⁴⁰⁹ The most important thing here is that since the procession of the self-constituted from the Good⁴¹⁰ is also its procession from itself, it follows that its reversion on the Good will also be its reversion on its own particular good.⁴¹¹ It remains that the reversion of such self-constituted principles as the soul, upon the Good, necessarily involves that it, in some sense, transcend what belongs to its own nature as soul. However, what this does mean is that the soul's reversion to the Good is not a flight away from itself. Rather, it is in its very transcendence of itself, in its conversion towards the Good, that the soul reverts most perfectly to its own nature as soul and becomes perfected on its own level.⁴¹²

It is in light then, of this doctrine that we must complete our study of Proclus understanding of the Homeric σύμβολον. In doing so we will not only put ourselves in a position to appreciate the coherence of *Sixth Essay* as a philosophical text, but also the way that Proclus' system is at home, rather than at war, with its own rationality.

Generally, Proclus argues that the purpose of the σύμβολα of Homeric poetry is not to educate, but to inspire the soul with divine madness, in the manner outlined in the previous chapter. Such σύμβολα are for those that are already purified by physical

concept of self-constitution which suggests in different contexts both the independence of a given spiritual principle from its priors and also its dependence upon said principles.” (*From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 133 note 39).

⁴⁰⁸ *El.Th.* 16 (Dodds, 16.31-18.6).

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 42 (Dodds, 44.11-24).

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 (Dodds, 12.8-34).

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42 (Dodds, 42.11-24).

⁴¹² Following Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ*, 133-135, where he cautions against a reading of self-constitution in which the coincidence of a spiritual entity's self-return and the return to its principle collapses the distinction of cause and effect. Cf. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 65, 76, 239.

theurgy, thoroughly educated in morals and philosophy and seek to be united to the gods depicted in them. However, Proclus adds an important qualification to this. While they are certainly not educational for untrained youths, for those who are already mature, and in need of a “more mystical lesson” (μυστικωτέρας ἀκοάσεως)⁴¹³ it is “true education” (παιδείαν ἀληθινήν).⁴¹⁴ In this respect inspired poetry is more educational than any other.⁴¹⁵ It remains, however, that inspired poetry is not educational in the way the philosophy is, because it does not prove what it says through demonstration.⁴¹⁶ Because the inspired poet is possessed, or as the *Timaeus* would say, descended from the gods,⁴¹⁷ the things he says about the gods must be taken to be the truth about the gods.⁴¹⁸ However, it is the philosopher that makes their teaching comprehensible to a wider public.⁴¹⁹ Yet it is somewhat misleading to say that the philosopher merely makes them comprehensible. For the symbols of inspired poetry are the starting points of much of philosophy’s knowledge about the gods.⁴²⁰ According to Proclus, Plato not only sees Homer as irrefutable,⁴²¹ but as the leader (ἡγεμῶν) and master (διδάσκαλος) of the most important dogmas of philosophy.⁴²² Thus he takes Homer’s judgments for his own,⁴²³ and seeks in all things to resemble him.⁴²⁴ Sometimes he speaks of him as of an oracle, sometimes he proves the irrefutability of his own arguments by showing that Homer

⁴¹³ *In Remp.* I.182.8-9

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I.182.3

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.182.10

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I.185.16-17.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.185.15; *Tim.* 40d.

⁴¹⁸ *In Remp.* I.185.27-186.1.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I.159.3-6.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, I.85.8-13, 156.22-157.6, 164.13-169.24.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, I.154.21-22, 155.25

⁴²² *Ibid.*, I.158.14-17.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, I.158.21.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, I.164.13.

agrees with him and sometimes he even indicates that Homer was the cause of the “whole intellectual vision” upon which his argument is based.⁴²⁵

The examples that Proclus gives of Plato’s emulation of Homer’s teaching on the gods are numerous. In the earlier stages of the *Sixth Essay* he is content to show that they are both interpreters of the same intellectual reality.⁴²⁶ The two jars by which Zeus pours out good and bad things correspond to Plato’s understanding of Limit and Unlimit.⁴²⁷ Homeric heroes are driven by their characters toward the choices that they make in the same way as souls in the myth of Er are driven by their characters towards their choice of life.⁴²⁸ But as the essay moves towards its conclusion Proclus becomes more insistent that where Plato and Homer agree, Plato has actually received his doctrine from Homer. Plato inherited his teaching on the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* from Homer’s depiction of Zeus, most notably from Zeus’ two speeches to the lesser gods.⁴²⁹ His idea that the soul transcends the body that it uses as its tool, as expressed in the *Alcibiades*, comes from Homer’s distinction between the ‘true self’ of Herakles the shade that is attached to him and resembles him, but is not him.⁴³⁰ His theory of language in the *Cratylus* has its source in the way that Homer differentiates between human and divine names.⁴³¹ His vision of the sufferings of the underworld, such as it is seen in the *Republic*, the *Phaedo* and the *Gorgias* is copied from Homer’s model.⁴³² The inspiration which moves Socrates’ utterance in the *Phaedrus*, regarding how the gods of the cosmos ascend, under

⁴²⁵ *In Remp.* I.155.21-155.1, 158.20

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.70.4-5

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, I.98.26-100.18.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.104.15-25, 108.3-9.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, I.165.13-166.11.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, I.171.22-172.30.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, I.169.25-170.26.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, I.118.20-119.2, 168.3-169.24.

the direction of Zeus, to banquet upon the nectar and ambrosia of intelligible reality, comes from Homer's own account of how the gods followed Zeus across the ocean to take part in a feast among the Ethiopians.⁴³³ Moreover, it is from Homer that Plato learns⁴³⁴ that the providence of the gods is good and extends to all.⁴³⁵ But, Plato's emulation of Homer is not limited to either to sharing in his inspiration and or to working out the intellectual insights of that inspiration through rational demonstration. There are instances where he even imitates Homer in matters of style.⁴³⁶

This places us in a somewhat perplexing position. Relative to the idea that the σύμβολα of inspired poetry act as a kind of rational theurgy, we have seen that philosophy, among other things, is a necessary preparation. However, now it seems, from another perspective, that the σύμβολα of inspired poetry are the source of some of the most important doctrines of philosophy. If one must be purified by philosophy to approach the σύμβολα of inspired poetry without harm to oneself, how is one to derive its contents from the σύμβολα in the first place, as Proclus claims that Plato does? To answer this we must distinguish more carefully between the kind of philosophy that the soul is capable of according to its own powers and that which is possible to derive only from inspiration.

⁴³³ *In Remp.* I.166.13-167.9.

⁴³⁴ This is taking into account that we established in Chapter 1, that Proclus takes Socrates, Timaeus and Parmenides, among other such "divine men", to authoritatively represent Plato's own position (*Ibid.*, I.110.15-17).

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, I.167.10-168.2.

⁴³⁶ Proclus argues that Plato got his mimetic power from following Homer (*In Remp.* I.163.19-164.7) and that the three repetitions of the *Republic* that are present or implied between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* are in imitation of the three capitulations of the wanderings of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* (*Ibid.*, I.170.27-171.17).

In the previous chapter, we observed how the soul's imaginations are purified through its education in the sciences, how it progresses from imaginations that are coloured by sense perception, through to imaginations that are steadily simpler and more its own until finally it is able to project, and thus reflect upon itself through, an imagination of the One. Furthermore, we saw that in reflecting on itself through this, the most simple of imaginations, that the soul had at last discovered a way of acting that was somehow empty of its own activity, that allowed it to become radically passive relative to superior and more divine activities so that it might receive their inspiration without obscuring it with its own motions. For in knowing itself through the imaginative projection of its idea of the One, the soul comes to know itself through an imagination in which the extension and division that belongs to the soul's self-reflection because of its involvement in imagination, are only present in potential.

This remains true. However, this is not the only significance of the soul's discovery of the idea of the One in itself. For at the same time as this discovery empties the soul of itself relative to superior powers, it is also the very means by which the soul may be truly itself, which is to say, truly active on its own level. Before dialectic lead the soul to this height, the soul was certainly able to reflect on itself through the imaginative projections of its internal ideas that the various sciences provoked it to produce. However, the soul does not actually know what it knows in the sciences, and thus does not really know itself through the knowledge of the sciences, until it knows it learns how to demonstrate that knowledge to itself. But before the soul discovers a way of thinking the One, at the peak of the education that it receives through the sciences, it is not able to truly demonstrate any of its knowledge. For all its knowledge to that point is based on

prior hypotheticals.⁴³⁷ It is only when the soul reaches a principle that doesn't presuppose any others that it may, through a process of deduction from that principle, prove the veracity of the knowledge that lead to it to that principle in the first place.⁴³⁸ Thus, it is only upon the discovery of the principle of the One, the unity that is presupposed in all other forms of unity,⁴³⁹ that the soul's reflection on itself through the sciences is truly able to become knowledge of itself. If then, Proclus also says, in another manner of speaking, that dialectic is able to anchor the soul's hypothetical knowledge, to "show that it is truly knowledge" by relating to the unhypothetical science of Intellect,⁴⁴⁰ it is through learning to reflect on itself through the imaginative projection of its idea of the One, that it is able to do so.

This is worth further consideration. The soul's self-knowledge is not simply something that it does that is somehow exterior to what it is. The soul is, by definition, a kind of knowing that knows itself,⁴⁴¹ and knows its knowing of itself, in the way that Intellect does, but in a divided and extended manner.⁴⁴² We have now seen that this kind of knowledge, this knowledge that is the soul itself, is only possible relative to the discovery of the principle of the One in its own reflection on itself. In consequence, if the form of self-knowledge that is that soul's own self as soul is only possible relative to its reflection on itself through the imaginative projection of its idea of the One, then it follows that its existence depends on and comes from this reflection. In other words, this

⁴³⁷ *In Eucl.* 9.25-14, 32.2-7, 75.5-26.

⁴³⁸ *In Parm.* 655.12-656.2, 696, 1033.28-1034.7.

⁴³⁹ *El.Th.* 1-6 (Dodds, 2.1-6.30).

⁴⁴⁰ *In Eucl.* 9-14: "ἐπιστήμην ὄντως ἀποφαίνει."

⁴⁴¹ See note in Chapter 2.

⁴⁴² *In Eucl.* 16.8-16; *In Parm.* 807.1-809.5. Cf. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 162.

discovery of the One in its self-reflection is nothing less than the cause from which the soul's creation of itself proceeds. By attaining the act of imagination that is presupposed in all its other imaginations as their cause, it achieves the initial self-reflection that is presupposed by the plurality of self-reflections that compose its essence. It is relative to this reflection and only relative to it, that all of the soul's other self-reflections are the unfolding of its self-creation.⁴⁴³

Therefore, it follows that the soul's reflection on itself through its imagination of the One is at once the point at which it, so much as possible, abandons its own activity, in order to act as a receptacle of the activities of superior beings, and the point through which its own essential self-possession of its proper activity emerges, the point at which it both leaves its life for another and comes into its own life. The reason this simultaneity of opposites is possible is that the One is beyond even the basic difference of Limit and Unlimit.⁴⁴⁴ The contradiction between self-creation and self-negation, which is inescapable at any level of unity where contradiction is still, in any respect, possible, can and must be a single unity in the unity that is presupposed by their contradiction. Of course, what we are dealing with here is only the kind of contact with the One that is

⁴⁴³ This seems to be Trouillard's position. The process of negation by which the soul distinguishes the One from what is not the One produces the affirmations which describe the orders of existence that are generated by the One (*In Parm.* 1074.17-1076.1; *idem, La mystagogie de Proclus*, 204). However, since the soul is itself the rational totality of the order described in the resulting onto-theology (*La mystagogie de Proclus*, 197), this rational unfolding of the various forms of self-constitution from the One becomes the unfolding of its own self-constitution: "En somme, la théologie négative, par sa négation de l'être, contruit une ontologie positive. Elle est l'envers de l'acte par lequel le dérivé se donne sa propre loi au cours de sa conversion, elle est identique à l'autoconstitition de l'âme." (*L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, 88-89).

⁴⁴⁴ *In Parm.* 1123.15-1124.28. Even the Henads are not beyond the basic difference of Limit and Unlimit (*El.Th.* 159, Dodds 138.30-140.4); Butler, "The Gods and Being in Proclus", 110-111; Dodds, *El.Th.* 281; R.T.Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, (London: Duckworth, 1972), 148.

possible for the soul as soul.⁴⁴⁵ Yet wherever there is contact with the One, at any level, that level relates to it as to the unity of the contradictions that are implicit in its own form of existence.⁴⁴⁶

It is with reference to these considerations that it is possible to deal with the problem we face in the *Sixth Essay*. How is the philosophy that prepares the soul for the worthy reception of the σύμβολα of inspired poetry to be distinguished from the philosophy that has its source in such σύμβολα? There does not seem to be any simple way that one can distinguish them according to subject matter. For while what Plato learns from Homer seems to be primarily concerned with the gods, we shall see that inspired poetry is also instructive on more mundane concerns as well. Moreover, Proclus' reading of the *Parmenides* shows that while philosophy is primarily concerned with the soul's self-knowledge as such, the emergence of the self-knowledge that it is relative to its discovery of the One in its self-reflection, involves the unfolding of a

⁴⁴⁵ Just as the oppositions of the whole of reality presuppose a unity that is beyond and before them, so the opposition of the simultaneous transcendence and immanence that belong to the soul's self-constitution presuppose a unity that is beyond and before them. This is the "one of the soul", by which, and only by which it is able to touch the One (*In Parm.* 1081.1-1082.12, VII.505.28-506.8, 512.17-29). However, because it is the unity presupposed by the soul's oppositions and not those of the whole of reality, the soul may only know the One in its one as by a certain "image" (εἰκὼν, *In Parm.* 1071.20) or "likeness" (ὁμοιον, *In Parm.* 1081.4-5) of it. Proclus directly states that this "one of the soul" is uncovered by following the dialectical ascent of Parmenides properly (*In Parm.* 1071.7-1072.11), but in this case does not distinguish between the qualified way in which we saw that the ascent to the One is achieved by dialectic in the last chapter, and the way the One is present to the soul as the form of scientific knowledge by which the soul is the scientific knowledge of itself that it is and by which it is made ready the worthy receptacle of divine σύμβολα. On the two ways in which the One is present to any entity see *In Parm.* 707.5-6; Trouillard, *La mystagogie du Proclus*, 133, 230.

⁴⁴⁶ Proclus, *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, eds. Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012), X.63-65; Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 100-101, 106.

science that systematically articulates each level of the hierarchies of divine entities.⁴⁴⁷

For in the purification of its conception of the One, through a process of negation by which it systematically determines what may not be attributed to the One, it

simultaneously unfolds a positive doctrine of the divinities that proceed from the One.

The most simple negations of the One also act as positive definitions of the highest divine orders, the most complex negations as positive definitions of the lowest divine orders.⁴⁴⁸

The fullest extent to which Proclus works out the divine science that results from this process may be found in the two-hundred and eleven propositions of the *Elements of Theology*.

Here we must remember that a certain knowledge of the gods is presupposed in the appropriate use of inspired σύμβολα. It is the contrast between what the worthy viewer of the divine σύμβολον marks between what he knows to be true about the gods and what he sees in the σύμβολον before him that fills him with the fascination that moves him to try and pierce the surface of the σύμβολον so as to discover its divine interior.⁴⁴⁹ Such theology that philosophy is able to deduce from its thinking of the One will then be this knowledge. However, as detailed and as systematic as the soul's own knowledge of the gods is, it is really only a skeleton of the living realities of which it speaks.⁴⁵⁰ The soul knows that it belongs to its nature to revert upon superior principles,

⁴⁴⁷ Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 88-89. For Proclus' summary of the theology that he and his master Syrianus before him derive from the hypotheses of the *Parmenides* see *In Parm.* 1061.25-1065.14. For a helpful summary of Proclus' account of the philosophical history of the theology (*In Parm.* 1053.26-1065.14) see Saffrey and Westerink, *Pl.Th.I.* lxxv-lxxxix.

⁴⁴⁸ *In Parm.* 1086.8-1089.13.

⁴⁴⁹ *In Remp.* I.85.13-26.

⁴⁵⁰ Butler is particularly helpful on the topic of what divinely revealed theology adds to philosophical theology in Proclus. See "The Gods and Being in Proclus," 93-111.

but it does not yet know how to revert upon them. It knows that every reality proceeds from a chain of causality that begins with a particular god,⁴⁵¹ but still knows little of the individual characters (ιδιότης) of the gods that it must seek in the realities that proceed from them.⁴⁵² It knows of the distinction between the soul and the phantasm that links it to the body,⁴⁵³ but does not yet understand how that phantasm is purged by the daemons in Hades.⁴⁵⁴ In short, it has a universal knowledge of the gods, but has yet to clothe its universality in a more particular knowledge of what belongs both to the lives of specific divinities, and to the soul's involvement in realities that are superior to its own.⁴⁵⁵

To attain these things as knowledge, for these revelations to truly be an extension of philosophy, the soul must somehow learn to demonstrate the truth about divine things that it sees in the inspired σύμβολα. That this is possible is seen in Plato's example.⁴⁵⁶ But the fact that the truth that is revealed in this σύμβολα can be demonstrated has some interesting consequences. If the soul is able to demonstrate the truths that it sees in the divine σύμβολα it means that they are truths that it has in its own essential being since the soul's knowledge of an object is, as we have seen, always a knowledge of its own innate ideas. However, in this case, the soul is not able produce the imaginations through which this knowledge of itself is possible without the inspiration of superior powers. We have

⁴⁵¹ *El.Th.* 97, 123 (Dodds, 86.8-26, 108.25-110.13).

⁴⁵² Perhaps the most striking and certainly the most repeated example of this is the Demiurgic Triad. As we see in the *Elements of Theology*, philosophy is able to know without recourse to inspired poetry the general way in which souls proceed from intellects (*El.Th.* 182-183 [Dodds, 160.5-20]), but it is only in inspired poetry that philosophy is able to come to know how the soul is more specifically created by the Demiurgic Triad (*In Remp.* I.156.23-157.7, 164.13-165.12, 193.10-11).

⁴⁵³ *In Remp.* I.193.4-9.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I.156.22-157.6.

⁴⁵⁵ Proclus says directly that it is only through inspired poetry that "mystical perceptions of the gods themselves" are possible (*Ibid.*, I.192.10-11)

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I.159.3-6.

seen that the soul is able of itself, relative to its discovery of the One in its self-thinking, to unfurl the knowledge of itself that constitutes its being, through its various forms of self-reflection. But it appears now that it is not able to unfurl all that belongs to its own nature perfectly and completely without such further means of reflecting on itself as are provided for it by the generation of inspired σύμβολα in its imagination. Thus, it would seem that the soul is in the strange situation of not being able to fully realize what it already is by nature without the help of what is beyond its nature. However, in describing the way that the σύμβολα of inspired poetry become means by which the soul may work-out its self-creation to a further degree that it is capable of itself, we have not yet reached the limit, either of the soul's self-creation, or the degree to which inspired poetry can be a means of that self-creation, for there is more in inspired poetry than σύμβολα.

The symbolic aspect of inspired poetry, of which we have been speaking exclusively up to this point, is only one of the three forms of poetry that are present in inspired poetry.⁴⁵⁷ In it there is also a learned form of poetry that generates imaginative images that are strictly suitable for scientific inquiry⁴⁵⁸ and also an imaginative form of poetry, which produces images that do not point beyond their own appearance in the imagination,⁴⁵⁹ which as such, are appropriate only as a basis for opinion (δόξα).⁴⁶⁰ Of

⁴⁵⁷ For other treatments of Proclus' division of the kinds of poetry in Homer see Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays*, 162-202; Kuisma, *Proclus' Defence of Homer*, 122-132; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 188-197; Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind*, 211-216; Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm*, 107-110; Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns*, 112-141. The division of the kinds of poetry has been brought up late in the discussion because the nature of the divisions between them only becomes properly intelligible in light what we have come to understand about inspired σύμβολα to this point.

⁴⁵⁸ *In Remp.* I.179.2-15, 186.22-29, 192.12-15.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I.179.16-32, 190.2-25, 192.15-19.

course, we have seen that all three are, in a sense, present in symbolic poetry. The inspired σύμβολον has an imaginative appearance, which, as an accurate representation of the deeds of daemons on the plains of Troy operates on the level of true opinion.⁴⁶¹ Through this imaginative appearance the purified soul reverts simultaneously on the intellectual god that is manifest in the imaginative appearance and on itself in its own station through its demonstration of the scientific truth that is manifest in it. It is tempting, in consequence, to conclude that the lesser forms of poetry are distinguished from symbolic poetry simply as parts from a whole. However, there is, in fact, a much more fundamental difference at work here. Each kind of poetry produces its images based on paradigms that are on a different ontological level than the paradigms off of which the images of the others are based.⁴⁶² For example, while we have seen that the imaginative images that are produced by symbolic poetry are a basis for both scientific knowledge and true opinion, as well as intellectual union, we have also seen that they are

⁴⁶⁰ *In Remp.* I.179.16. The intermediary status of “opinion” between the soul’s knowledge of itself and sense perception (αἴσθησις) is shown in how Proclus sometimes groups it with the forms of the soul’s knowledge of itself (*In Eucl.* 35.11-12) and sometimes with sense perception as something that like it has its attention fixed on “external things” (τὰ ἔκτος, *In Eucl.* 18.14-17). This double-sidedness of opinion accounts for the division that we shall see Proclus make in mimetic poetry, between a kind of poetry that tries to appeal to sense perception and is thus illusory, and a kind of poetry that strives to imagine its objects accurately (*In Remp.* I.192.15-193.4). Cf. *In Tim.* II.223.5-31, III.309.7-310.11.

⁴⁶¹ Although opinion is defined as the form of knowledge by which the soul grasps sense perception (*In Tim.* II.250.5-251.18) it is relevant to imaginary objects, such as we have seen that daemonic appearances to humans are, as well (*In Tim.* II.255.12-22). In light of this Proclus’ definition of opinion as that which knows without knowing the cause seems to be the more authoritative, since even reason itself can in some way be its object (*In Tim.* II.257.20-24, 258.2-4). As such, opinion would seem to be the best descriptor of what the mathematical sciences know before they are able to demonstrate their knowledge from the unhypothetical principle.

⁴⁶² Sheppard provides a helpful discussion of the way that images on the same ontological level can be depictions of differing levels of reality in her paper “Image and Analogy in Later Platonism,” 639-640.

fundamentally images of intellectual realities. What makes the lesser forms of poetry lesser is not simply they do not operate in as many registers as symbolic poetry, but that the imaginative images that they produce are images of inferior realities. This means that even when a lesser form of poetry is a source of a same kind of information to that provided by a superior form of poetry it is information about a lower level of existence.

A good example of this principle is seen in the difference between the kind of scientific data which learned poetry provides as opposed to the data provided by symbolic poetry. Since learned poetry is oriented towards a rational, rather than an intellectual paradigm, it provides data regarding things that that the soul can know of its own power. It speaks of the soul's own life, the distinction between the essence of the soul and its imaginary projection of itself, the elements of nature, and of political science.⁴⁶³ If we can take Proclus' discussion of the topic in the *Platonic Theology* to apply here, it also provides information on the realities superior to soul, but only insofar as the analogy of the soul's own likeness to them permits.⁴⁶⁴ In short, it presents to the soul that has yet to receive scientific education, a preliminary grasp, in the form of true opinions, of the kind of knowledge that they may come to truly know through philosophy.⁴⁶⁵ However, symbolic poetry, as we have seen, in its orientation towards intellectual reality, is not limited by the likeness that the soul has to other realities, and so is able to reveal knowledge about realities that are far beyond the soul's own understanding. It speaks of the chains of Hephaestus, the horrors of Hades, the

⁴⁶³ *In Remp.* I.179.3-15, 186..22-29, 192.12-15, 193.4-19.

⁴⁶⁴ *Pl.Th.* I.4. (Saffrey and Westerink, 20.8-15). This is also apparent in the *Sixth Essay* itself where Phemios, who is held up the example of a learned poet is said to be characterized by the knowledge of divine things as well as human, to know the works (ἔργα), of both gods and men (*In Remp.* I.194.13-17).

⁴⁶⁵ *In Remp.* I.81.11-27, 84.2-19, 84.26-85.1.

fornication of Zeus and Hera, the various regions of existence, the battles of the gods, the demiurgic monad and of all the greater life of the gods that lies beyond the soul's own powers of vision.⁴⁶⁶ Yet because it is adapted to teaching the soul what it cannot know of itself, it is not suitable or able to teach the uneducated soul about the things that it may come to understand in philosophy.⁴⁶⁷ As we shall see, Proclus shows that learned poetry has its source in inspired poetry. But there would be few that would be prepared for inspired poetry if learned poetry did not first prepare them for philosophy.

Similarly, the imaginative aspect of symbolic poetry provides different data than that of strictly imaginative poetry. The imaginative images of symbolic poetry are the daemonic appearances of the intellectual gods to Homer's audience and to the heroes of Greece and Troy alike. The daemons may be taken to have done the deeds that Homer ascribes to them, but their greater significance is the way that they make the Intellectual gods they have proceeded from, visible on a human level. The images of imaginative poetry, however, do not point beyond the characters of the heroes that are imitated in them.⁴⁶⁸ There are some few instances where the lives of the heroes do not remain the exclusive domain of imaginative poetry and in which they may be taken to symbolize a divine and mystical reality. However, these instances seem to be limited to those that belong to the traditional interpretation of the *Odyssey* through the Myth of Er in the *Republic*.⁴⁶⁹ In this interpretation the army of the Greeks are souls that have been drawn

⁴⁶⁶ *In Remp.* I.156.22-157.6, 193.10-16.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I.80.5-9, 81.27-82.9.

⁴⁶⁸ Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, 91; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 215-216.

⁴⁶⁹ See Numenius. *The Neoplatonic Writings of Numenius*, ed. and trans. Kenneth Guthrie (Lawrence: Selene Books, 1987), 35b; Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. Robert Lambertson (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1983).

to the material world by sensible beauty, which is symbolized in the person of Helen.⁴⁷⁰ The ten-year battle with the Trojans is the thousand-year struggle that fallen souls have with the powers of the material world before they are able to free themselves from materiality and attempt a return to their home in Intellect. The journey of Odysseus is taken to be a successful example of such a return.⁴⁷¹ But, generally speaking, the portrayal of the heroes in the inspired myths does not symbolize any higher reality, even if the daemonic manifestations of the gods they have dealings with do.

Yet, despite its relative lowliness, imaginary poetry is able to provide a benefit that symbolic poetry does not. Homer's portrayal of the daemons is very far from being appropriate moral instruction. As we have seen, it only those who are able to discern the higher realities that are symbolized in their obscene acts that may safely attend to them at all. Yet, imaginative poetry, so long as exact and correct imitation remains its goal, is able to provide just such moral training to those who are just beginning their education.⁴⁷² This is why it is so important to Proclus to show that the actions of the heroes which imaginative poetry imitates are appropriate to them as heroes. For if Homer's poetry is found to provide a bad moral example precisely in the aspect of his poetry which points to no good that is superior to the moral level, he will be greatly to blame. Thus, we find that Achilles did not err in dragging Hector behind his chariot. In the first place, it is an old Thessalian custom and in the second, he is only punishing

⁴⁷⁰*In Remp.* I.175.16-21.

⁴⁷¹*Ibid.*, I.175.21-176.6. Proclus' understanding of the four bards of Homer's poetry as representative of the four different kinds of poetry practiced by humans is not given here as an example of Homer portraying higher realities through his depiction of heroic lives. This is because the realities that their respective forms of poetic activity point to are not superior to them, but rather are only generalizations of the very same poetic activity that each practices (*Ibid.*, I.193.17-195.12).

⁴⁷²*Ibid.*, I.81.11-27, 84.17, 194.18-27.

Hector with the same treatment that, as Iris revealed to him, Hector had intended for Patroclus.⁴⁷³ Neither is there any fault in Achilles sacrificing the youths. One is entitled to kill prisoners in a time of war.⁴⁷⁴ Moreover, it was the appropriate rite to perform for the soul of one who had fallen in battle.⁴⁷⁵ Tears, such as Priam shed, while not appropriate to a philosopher, are appropriate to men who live in their passions, such as heroes do, and especially those who are barbarians.⁴⁷⁶ It remains that there are some heroes of bad character portrayed by Homer, but he also shows them receiving their appropriate punishment.⁴⁷⁷

However, as useful as such imaginative poetry can be in instilling good habits into the hearers, it becomes dangerous if it ceases have accurate imitation as a goal and begins to concern itself only with pleasing the listeners. For in seeking only to please it will produce whatever illusions are necessary to most bewitch the senses and inflame the passions.⁴⁷⁸ Instead of forming virtue in the soul through exact imitation of the phenomena of the natural order, it deludes the many with images that fit with their own prejudice.⁴⁷⁹ This kind of poetry is not generally found in Homer. The only example that Proclus gives of Homer's imaginary poetry drifting into illusion is a passage where he presents the sun as rising out of a lake, when of course, the sun does not actually ever come out of a lake, but only seems to according to sense.⁴⁸⁰ However, according to Proclus, even Socrates is sometimes at fault in this way, such as when he gives his false

⁴⁷³ *In Remp.* I.150.11-23.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I.151.24-152.6.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I.152.7-153.20.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I.124.1-23.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I.103.1-106.13, 115.4-117.21, 130.1-131.4.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, I.179.19-29.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, I.192.18-21, 195.1-12.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, I.192.21-30.

speech on Eros in the *Phaedrus*.⁴⁸¹ The real problem is that tragic poetry *is*, in fact, characterized by illusionist poetry⁴⁸² and that it derives its illusionist character from the accurate imitations that belong to Homer's imaginative poetry.⁴⁸³ It is insofar as Homer is, in this way, through no fault of his own, the father and source of the tragedians, that the Socrates of the *Republic* speaks directly against him.⁴⁸⁴ But, Proclus argues, if one were to try to make over-much of these criticisms of Homer regarding what has resulted from the very last and lowest of his activities, then one must also censure the Demiurge because of the evil that there is in genesis.⁴⁸⁵

The use of the Demiurge as a point of comparison here is very instructive. Previously we saw Proclus use it to describe the inner workings of the inspired σύμβολον itself. Now he uses it to describe the relationship of the way that the various kinds of poetry that are at work in inspired poetry, symbolic or otherwise, relate to each other. Seeing that Proclus is quite rigorous with his analogies, and is not in the practice of using the same analogy to describe different realities if he does not intend to indicate the presence of a clear similarity in structure between them, this should make us take notice. If the interrelations of the different kinds of poetry which are present in inspired poetry are indeed comparable to both the creative activity of the demiurge and the inner workings of the inspired σύμβολον, it would seem to indicate that as distinct as these kinds of poetry are, that their various purposes are all still are in some way unified by a single purpose, or providence, that is intellectual in character. In addition, it would imply

⁴⁸¹ *In Remp.* I.176.13-177.3.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, I.201.14-18.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.* I.196.4-9.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, I.203.5-10, 204.18-25.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I.205.13-21.

that these various kinds of poetry are not included in the composition of inspired poetry in a way that leaves them exterior to each other like so many marbles in a bag, but that they are connected together in a single chain of causation that, like all causation, proceeds from the most superior element, through to the most inferior.⁴⁸⁶

Some significant evidence, relative to this thesis, is found in the comparison that Proclus draws between the structure of Platonic dialogue and that of inspired poetry. One of the ways that Proclus justifies Homer's use of μίμησις is by drawing attention to Plato's use of it. He argues that Plato does not object to μίμησις so much as poetry which is characterized by no aim higher than μίμησις, since it is when μίμησις is subject to no higher aim that it tends to lapse from its own proper end into illusion.⁴⁸⁷ Plato's dialogues are full of imitations of people doing all kinds of activities, good and bad.⁴⁸⁸ However, in a given dialogue these imitations function as parts of a whole whose overall character is philosophical and as such, they are subordinate (πάρεργον) to its philosophical purpose.⁴⁸⁹ In a similar way, Homer's poetry is, as a whole, characterized by its inspired σύμβολα, but it includes mimetic elements that are subordinate to that inspiration.⁴⁹⁰ But the most interesting thing here is the reason why these lesser elements are there to begin with. For the mimetic elements of Homer's poetry are not simply subordinate to its inspired character, but are the means by which that inspiration can be mediated to the general public in a form that is adapted to their weakness.⁴⁹¹ The form that learned poetry takes in its descent from inspiration is, as we have seen, adapted to the disposition of

⁴⁸⁶ *El.Th.* 7 (Dodds, 8.1-28).

⁴⁸⁷ *In Remp.* I. 197.7-198.8.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, I.199.7-10.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 99.9-10.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, I.190.13-15, 199.10-14.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, I.195.19-20. 196.4-9.

those who are capable of receiving philosophical education, but are not yet capable of mystical knowledge. Likewise, mimetic poetry manifests the scientific data of learned poetry in a form that even the utterly uneducated are able to receive. Thus, the various forms of poetry are not merely parts of an interconnected whole that is, as a whole, characterized by poetic inspiration. They are also declining expressions of the inspiration which characterizes that whole, which in their declension make the inspiration they manifest accessible to every state of the human soul, not matter how lowly.

This idea that the lesser forms of poetry found in inspired poetry are caused by the highest is further supported by Proclus' sense of the historical development through which the various forms of poetry came to be practiced in distinction from inspired poetry. In the *Platonic Theology* Proclus ascribes to Pythagoras the founding of learned poetry as a distinct genre.⁴⁹² It is he, who, among other things, discovered the clearest analogies between the realities of the soul and those of the gods, and in this way was able to show the way that the characters of specific gods were manifest in numbers and geometrical shapes.⁴⁹³ However, he did not do so of his own power, but as an initiate of the mysteries founded by Orpheus,⁴⁹⁴ who, along with Homer is regarded by Proclus as an inspired poet.⁴⁹⁵ Historically then, learned poetry, as a distinct genre, came from inspired poetry.

We see a similar situation regarding mimetic poetry. As was noted in passing above, the tragedians developed distinctly mimetic poetry, from the mimetic aspect of Homer's inspired poetry. However, with the tragedians the mimetic genre of poetry was

⁴⁹² *Pl.Th.* I.4 (Saffrey and Westerink, 20.8-9).

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, I.4 (Saffrey and Westerink, 20.9-12).

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.5 (Saffrey and Westerink, 25.26-26.2).

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.4 (Saffrey and Westerink, 20.6-7); *In Remp.* I.72.1-9.

never properly mimetic and tended towards the illusory rather than towards accurate imitation. It is only with Plato that mimetic poetry regains a properly mimetic form outside of inspired poetry. He, like all tragedians, was a practitioner of the illusory kind of mimetic poetry.⁴⁹⁶ But following his conversion to philosophy from tragedy, a conversion that involved his induction into the mysteries of both Orpheus and Pythagoras,⁴⁹⁷ he came to use it in a way that was properly mimetic, but only through subordinating it to rational ends. And so in this way, illusory mimetic poetry comes directly from inspired poetry. But outside the context of inspired poetry it is only able to become properly mimetic once its own orientation towards inspired poetry has been subjected by philosophy to the rational orientation that learned poetry has towards inspired poetry, so that it receives learned poetry as a kind of secondary cause.

So it appears that intellectual inspiration, as one would expect of an intellectual principle, is the source of two kinds of causation.⁴⁹⁸ The first is its reproduction of exactly the same inspiration as it itself is in such souls as are properly prepared to hear it. However, it is also the cause of a declining series of forms of poetry which are each suitable to a specific level of human receptivity, down to the very lowest. The difference between the way that these lesser forms of poetry are related to the inspiration which they manifest and the way that the imaginative, epistemological aspects of the inspired *σύμβολον* do so is this. The lesser forms of poetry have their participation of intellectual

⁴⁹⁶ *In Remp.* I.205.4-13.

⁴⁹⁷ *Pl.Th.* I.5 (Saffrey and Westerink, 26.2-22).

⁴⁹⁸ Without the help of Gersh on 'horizontal' and 'vertical' forms of Intellectual causation and Hankey on interior and exterior forms of divine procession, it seems unlikely that I would have been able to recognize the following structure. See Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 141-151. See also, Wayne Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 115-142.

inspiration in the form of their own character and the orientation that belongs to that character whereas, in the inspired symbol itself, the epistemological and imaginative elements are both made to transcend their own native character in their participation in that both manifest what they do not have the power to produce in themselves of their own power.

In this we see that even the last ripples of inspiration are characterized by the double-movement of self-constitution. For even the most banal imitation that poetic inspiration produces in the imagination is only there insofar as the imagination is also exalted above its natural activity in the inspired σύμβολον. Of course, for those who are not yet able to look fully upon the inspired σύμβολον this simultaneity of self-transcendence and self-immanence will not be unambiguously manifest since they will not yet have access to the transcendent aspect of that simultaneity. But it is not only the unlearned that experience the imitations of Homer, nor is it only the student that experiences the learned aspect of his poetry. Rather, as we have seen, for these kinds of poetry to be, in any respect, separable from poetic inspiration, they must first be in it, and thus in the vision of the inspired poet.

In the soul of the inspired poet then, his inspiration unfolds the double-movement of his soul's self-constitution in a number of different ways. We have already considered the way that the inspired σύμβολα cause the soul to be caught up far above its own nature among the activities of the gods at the same time as they draw the soul down into itself, to a more perfect reversion on the internal ideas that belong to it as soul. But this actualization of the soul's self-constitution is itself the source of another. For, as we have seen, the soul, of itself, does not have the power to know itself in the way that is

made possible for it through the inspired σύμβολα that come to it from the gods. Yet the inspired σύμβολα also generate images in the imagination that are precisely of the sort that soul is able to produce of itself, the images of learned poetry. Thus the soul in the very act of being lifted by inspiration to a knowledge that is beyond its nature to know, is also lead even more into the knowledge that it is naturally able to know. Finally, on the level of the imagination, the intellectual σύμβολα and scientific images by which the imagination is actualized in a way that is not in its power are also the cause of its generation of the kind of imitative images that *are* in its power. At every level poetic inspiration, in causing each part of the soul to transcend its natural capacity, causes each part to be more itself through giving it its proper orientation to Intellect.

In light of these developments it begins to be clear that those who would want to charge Proclus with irrationality relative to his reading of Homer have very little reason to do so. The fact that the rational self-knowledge that is particular to soul is actualized to a greater degree in its ascent to the intellectual gods through the σύμβολα of Homeric poetry shows that the soul's abiding rationality is not something that the soul is trying to unsuccessfully shake itself free of, but that its ascent to the gods is always also an ascent to its rational self. Moreover, it also shows that Proclus is not, as some argue, imposing reason on realities that are beyond reason.⁴⁹⁹ For how is it that the soul acquires the means from poetic inspiration to know its own internal reasons in a way that it cannot know of itself if it is simply imposing itself on Homer and not genuinely coming into contact with the lives that are beyond its rational grasp? However, the rationality of Proclus' position cannot be firmly established on the merits of the soul's epistemological

⁴⁹⁹ Sheppard, *Studies of the 5th and 6th Essays*, 202.

activity alone. It must also account for the way that the μίμησις of the properly imaginative level of Homer's poetry is involved the kind of self-knowledge that inspired poetry creates in the soul. For it is a common criticism of Proclus to say that he is incapable of appreciating the most apparent meanings of Homer in his haste to discover the meaning that lies behind it.⁵⁰⁰ Yet we have found that this too has no basis. But neither is his appreciation for the "activity of the imitations and the variety of characters and the beauty of the words" which he sees as characteristic of both Homer and Plato⁵⁰¹ a sign that he lacks confidence in the higher meanings he sees manifest in them:⁵⁰² quite the contrary. He is able to affirm the mimetic aspect of Homer simultaneously with the scientific and symbolic because true μίμησις only ever occurs in the context of poetic or philosophical inspiration. In insisting on the relative accuracy and goodness of the apparent sense of Homer, Proclus shows that in the context of the demiurgic power of poetic inspiration, even imitations of the realities that are outside of the soul through privation can be pure opinative projections of the soul's own reasons, rather than in any way leading the soul away from itself to what is outside of it. Thus, Proclus does not then seek to deny or minimize the mimetic power of either Homer or of Plato. Rather, he provides the reason why their mimetic power is superior to poets who do not enjoy the same inspiration. It is superior because it is moved beyond its ability to move itself by intellectual and rational causes to seek its own end through intellectual and rational ends rather than being left to fruitlessly seek its own end in exclusion of them. In the end, then, we see that it is not those that defend rationality that have anything to fear from Proclus'

⁵⁰⁰ Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind*, 238-240; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 170, 232.

⁵⁰¹ *In Remp.* I.171.15-17.

⁵⁰² Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, 8, 110, 117, 114, 124.

understanding of Homer, but those who want spiritual and sensible experience to be means of escape from rationality. However, if we may take Euripides' *Bacchae* to be at all representative, even the tragedies will warn that this is a dangerous position to hold.

CHAPTER FIVE – Conclusion

It seems that we have made some headway in tracing the rational necessity that is at work throughout Proclus' presentation of Homer. In the first place, we saw that Proclus' conciliation of Plato and Homer does not need Proclus' attachment to Homer to account for it, whether one sees that attachment as irrational or otherwise. Rather, it is now evident that, by itself, Proclus' belief in the unity of Plato's works, a position he shares with many modern scholars, is enough to account for why he sees the need for it. Plato must be shown to agree with Homer because Plato must be shown to agree with himself on the subject of Homer as in all things. This is not undermined by the fact that many of Plato's praises of Homer are given in the mode of Socratic irony. For Proclus' understanding of irony has a strong analogy to his understanding of the σύμβολα of inspired poetry. Both speak the truth under the cover of an appearance which will deceive the unwary through their own fault. However, in the case of irony the deception is simply about whether it is Socrates or his interlocutor who really knows. This being the case, Proclus' understanding of Socratic irony demands that he take the opinions that Socrates states ironically as Plato's own opinions. This means that he must take Plato's praises of Homer seriously and thus reconcile them with Plato's criticisms of Homer if he is going to reveal the unity of Plato's philosophy on that subject.

In the course of our preliminary consideration of the symbolic nature of Homer's poetry it became clear that Proclus understands Homer's poetry to be inseparable from its religious dimension. That is to say, he believes that through proper preparation a soul can, in piercing the surface of the σύμβολα of Homer's poetry, commence an ascent

beyond its own natural participation in the life of the intellectual gods, to a kind of unity with them that it cannot have of its own nature. We might have supposed that this is an indication of a different kind of irrationality in Proclus. As rational as the need to reconcile Plato and Homer might be, if the result is to see Homer as a means for the soul moving beyond its own rational nature through monstrous images of the gods, there could well be cause to suspect that his rational reconciliation had produced an irrational result. However, as we came to understand the way that the σύμβολα of inspired poetry became a means of ascent to divine union, it became apparent that this was not an interruption of the soul's rational activity so much as a perfection of it. This hinged on understanding the role of the imagination in the soul's rational activity.

In its essence, the soul is filled with the rational knowledge of all things. However, to know the rational knowledge that it is, the soul has to project its knowledge into the imagination and is only then able to reflect upon itself through the images it has projected in the imagination. Through philosophy the soul may purify its imagination to the point that its knowledge of itself through its imagination has the greatest likeness to the superior powers that is possible for it according to its natural powers. The σύμβολα of inspired poetry, such as Homer's, enable the soul to continue to purify its rational reflection on itself in a way that goes beyond what the soul can do on its own. For in knowing itself through the σύμβολα of inspired poetry, the soul comes to think itself, not through imaginations that came from its own essence, but through those which proceed from divine essences, so that the soul's own rational thinking, while remaining rational thinking, can take the shape of divine thinking.

However, this led us into new difficulties. For if the purpose of the soul's ascent to the gods is to become as much like them as possible, then the abiding rationality of the soul, the perseverance of its relatively lowly character even in its most perfect union with the gods, would appear to be more of a burden than a boon. In this case, Proclus' philosophy would not be irrational in theory but would certainly be irrational in sentiment and in practice. The soul would always be fruitlessly attempting to surpass its own rational self, even though it could never effectively be divested of it. However, this was not the case. For every spiritual being receives itself from the First Cause in the form of its own causing of itself. Since a spiritual being's self-causation coincides with its causation by the First Cause, it follows that its reversion to the First cause will also be a reversion to itself, and that its transcendence of its nature is also a perfecting of its own nature. Therefore, the soul's ascent beyond its own nature is not a flight from its nature but the very means by which it possesses its nature fully. Thus, it became clear that Proclus' understanding of inspired poetry is not guilty of even an irrational *disposition* towards the otherwise rational content of his philosophy, that Proclus is at home with the soul's rationality rather than treating it as a symptom which has to be masked by higher forms of thought as best one can.

But perhaps more importantly, we learned that this logic of self-constitution extends to the imagination as well. The imagination is only able to have itself as its own end, to truly imitate in the way that is proper to its nature, insofar as it transcends its own power to generate images in itself, through its reception of the divine σύμβολα of the gods. It is in light of this that we were able to understand why Proclus emphasizes the importance of the apparent sense of Homer's poetry in the same breath as he says that it

is necessary to go beyond the apparent sense to the more divine meaning that it both manifests and hides. He emphasizes both aspects simultaneously, not as a kind of paradox, but because they necessarily occur together metaphysically. Thus, it seems that in simply attempting to defend Proclus' interpretation of Homer against Dodds' thesis that his whole philosophical approach is marred by irrationality, we have inadvertently found a way of answering the problem we saw posed by previous scholarship in the introduction. Where up until now it has only been possible to clarify on a textual level that the symbolic and mimetic aspect of Proclus' vision of Homer are not set against each other, but somehow appear together, we have now been able to see how Proclus' understanding of self-constitution shows how they can and indeed *must* appear together.

What I hope this thesis has proved indirectly is that the *Sixth Chapter* of Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic* deserves to be made more central to the study of Proclus than it has been to date. It has certainly been recognized as the *locus classicus* for Proclus' doctrine of the σύμβολον. However, the significance that Proclus' treatment of the σύμβολον has for clarifying our understanding of Proclus' concept of theurgy has barely been tapped. Trouillard has, as we have seen, done some excellent work on the subject, but much of this, though indispensable, is itself somewhat symbolic in nature and as such leaves much to be done by way of creating a systematic picture of the data.

Perhaps, the most significant contribution of the *Sixth Essay* to our understanding of theurgy is the distinction we have found in it between rational theurgy and the other forms of theurgy. The fact that such a distinction exists shows that there is indeed *some* truth in the vertical distinctions between 'higher' and 'lower' forms of theurgy that Smith, Sheppard, and Van den Berg find in Proclus. However, our findings also

contradict their theory in important ways. In the first place, we saw that physical theurgy was an important part of the purification that the soul needed in order to approach rational theurgy safely. This directly refutes their theory that the lowest kind of theurgy was merely a sort of magical practice and that the superior form of theurgy which causes the soul to revert on Intellect is physical.

But of much greater significance is what we have discovered about the orientation of the symbols through which theurgy works on any level of reality. Shaw rightfully accuses the scholars mentioned above of making the mistake that Iamblichus finds in Porphyry,⁵⁰³ namely, of differentiating spiritual realities based on the kind of matter that is associated with them.⁵⁰⁴ The ontological level of the divine identity which a given σύμβολον makes visible and has as its goal is not determined by the substratum that the σύμβολον appear in. Just as we saw that the imaginations of the soul can variously have their source in and thus revert to intellectual, rational or imaginative realities, so theurgic σύμβολα that occur on the same ontological level can be aimed, as it were, at union with a divinity on any superior level of reality whatever. It remains that a physical rite whose goal is ἔνωσις with the henads will need to pass through the appropriate rational and intellectual mediations on the way to completing the act that it began physically. The soul can only receive the activity of the god insofar as it has prepared itself as a receptacle. It is in this regard that that status of the substratum is important. The imagination will be able to receive activities that the physical body cannot. The powers Life within an intellect will be able to receive activities that the imagination cannot. However, the completion of a theurgic act does not necessarily

⁵⁰³ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, I.4.

⁵⁰⁴ Shaw, *Theurgy: Rituals of Unification*, 24-26.

occur on the level immediately superior to the ontological level on which the theurgic act began, but on the level of reality where the god lies at which the act is aimed, however many degrees of mediation lie between. We have not been able to do much more than gesture at some possible solutions to these problems. But it is clear that Proclus' description of the rational theurgy that he finds in Homer will be a necessary part of any credible attempt to make sense of Proclus' view of theurgy.

In addition, this text provides yet unexploited means for considering how Proclus' doctrine of the soul influences the way that he understands the different forms of human knowledge to interact. For example, while we have seen that inspired theology helps to complete philosophical theology it never, in any respect, corrects philosophy. However, it is well known that Iamblichus often corrects 'the Platonists' by means of 'the Ancients'.⁵⁰⁵ Such a thing could never happen in Proclus since, as we have seen, for him it is only through philosophy that inspired theology becomes knowable or safely participable. How then is it possible in Iamblichus' case? It is tempting to think that this must be related to the fact that Proclus understands the soul to be fallen only in its activities,⁵⁰⁶ where, in Iamblichus, it has fallen even in its essence.⁵⁰⁷ Is the reason that 'the Ancients' can correct philosophy in Iamblichus and not in Proclus because in Iamblichus it is the activity of a compromised essence whereas in Proclus the essence of the soul is impassible? These are questions for which Proclus' detailed description of the

⁵⁰⁵ Iamblichus, *Iamblichus: "De Anima,"* trans. and comm. John F. Finamore and John M. Dillon (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 42, 44, 48, 51-53. Cf. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 114; John F. Finamore and John M. Dillon, *Iamblichus: "De Anima,"* 182, 194, 197, 201, 208, 213, 224.

⁵⁰⁶ *El.Th.* 106, 191 (Dodds, 94.21-94.31, 166.26-168.10).

⁵⁰⁷ Iamblichus, *Iamblichus: "De Anima,"* 241.7-12). On this and the preceding note see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 100-102.

interaction of the various modes of theology in the *Sixth Essay* promises to reward the diligent inquirer with an answer.

The reason that the *Sixth Essay* has not yet been much attended to seems to be ascribable to the fact that it has generated interest mostly among those who are interested in poetry and for whom philosophy takes a secondary place. Because most of the scholars who have attended to this text are more students of ancient interpretation of poetry than they are of late Platonic philosophy they have tended to be defensive at the first sign of trouble, not realizing that Proclus may indeed have room for the version of Homer that they defend against him. As a result, not many findings have been produced yet that would intrigue a true metaphysician. It is hoped that this thesis has, in some small way, contributed towards bridging that gap.

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