

Emilie KUTASH Mortal, all too Mortal: Proclus and the Problem of a
Neoplatonist Soul which cannot Ascend

Plato's famous expression in *Theatetus* (17 b1f) admonishes us to "become like God to the extent possible." Proclus takes a highly nuanced position on assimilation to the One. The human soul is inescapably mortal and subject to the consequences of its descent into the physical world in creation and the fact that it is endowed with an earthly "vehicle." In the fifth book of the *Commentary on Timaeus*, Proclus carefully distinguishes between mortal and immortal souls and the many distinctions that this bifurcation suggests. For Plotinus the rational part of the soul stays in touch with the beyond. For Proclus on the other hand, the soul descends in its entirety; rational and irrational parts in tandem. The gods, on the other hand possess an 'unknown transcendency.' The possibility of an assimilation that takes the form of unification with the One is precluded by these stipulations. Proclus says (In Tim.I:301, 11-12). "It is not lawful for anything imperfect to touch the all perfect." For these reasons he opposes those, "...who assert that our soul is equal (*isostasion*) with the gods and is of the same essence (*homousion*) with divine souls; and also against those who say that that it becomes intellect itself, the intelligible itself, and the one itself (*to hen*), leaving all and being established according to union". (In Tim.III: 231, 5-10). There is a radical discontinuity between mortal and immortal worlds. The Demiurge directly creates immortal souls but delegates the creation of mortal souls to the lesser gods. Mortal souls descend *in Toto* to their lives in this cosmos and cannot easily transcend the limitations this imposes. By virtue of Proclus' own metaphysical superstructure, the One beyond Being is totally transcendent: radically removed from all other hypostases. Individual souls, then, must suffer a state of existence that precludes their potential assimilation via any means other than theurgic practices. Proclus argues that if the irrational soul did not survive death that the soul would not be punished in terms of its anger and desire in Hades. The union of irrational and rational factors cannot be easily dissolved as the union is "one multiform life (III: 236, 23)."

Proclus claims that ". It is not lawful to consider human things the same as divine things." No intellectual process is equal to the One. Even the negative dialectic that Proclus describes in the *Parmenides Commentary*, aimed at overcoming unlikeness of the mind to its God, is too limited. Proclus suggests that the telestic life, however, "...when it removes through divine fire all the 'defilements' caused by generation,...and all that is alien and irrational that the pneumatic vehicle of the soul has attracted" does hold some potential for the Soul to reach "the paternal Harbor. ." (In Tim. III 300. 13-20)

