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Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* 3.333.28ff.: The Myth of the Winged Charioteer according to Iamblichus and Proclus¹

R. M. van den Berg

In his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* 43c-d,² Proclus Diadochus takes issue with Plotinus on the question of whether or not some part of our soul always remains unaffected (*ἀπαθές*) and always exercises intellection (*ἀεὶ νοοῦν*). As is well-known, Plotinus originated the unorthodox view that some part of our soul always remains in contact with the world above. Because some part of us is also part of the higher realm of Intellect (*Nous*), this physical world can never affect our entire souls, no matter what happens to our bodies. The real sage is Intellect and, always exercising intellection, he enjoys perpetual happiness, even if because of unconsciousness, sickness or magic art, he is not aware that he does so.³ Having just discussed the two circles of the Same and the Other which, according to the *Timaeus*, constitute our soul and the different ways in which the movements of those two circles may be hampered when influenced by the body, Proclus, starting from this discussion, speaks freely against Plotinus and Theodorus. Anyone who wishes to maintain that something in us stays always unaffected and enjoying intellection fails to take into account the fact that Plato employs only two circles to make up the substance of the soul, two circles that may both be affected. His view, he continues, is in accordance with that of Iamblichus: "The divine Iamblichus is quite correct therefore, in attacking those who hold this opinion." As such, this argument would be enough to refute Plotinus. As are all Neoplatonists, Plotinus and Proclus are in agreement that Plato simply cannot be wrong and that a philosopher's task is to

¹ I am indebted to the participants in the conference for their stimulating criticism, especially to J.F. Finamore and C.G. Steel. I also wish to thank P.A. Meijer for his valuable advice.

² *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* 3.333.29ff.

³ *Enneades* 1.4.4-5, cf. e.g., J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge 1967) 139-52, especially 146-52.

clarify Plato's real meaning. One cannot deny that Plato in the *Timaeus* leaves no room for a third, unaffected aspect of the human soul, which means that, according to Neoplatonic standards, Plotinus' view must be wrong. Proclus proceeds, however, to give three more arguments why Plotinus must be wrong: (1) Plotinus cannot explain that we err, if something in us stays free from passions; (2) Plotinus' claim would imply that everybody is happy at this very moment, *quod non*; (3) Plotinus neglects the charioteer myth in Plato's *Phaedrus*, from which we may infer that our soul is not always in the same state. It is commonly agreed that Proclus borrowed these arguments from Iamblichus, probably from his commentary on the *Timaeus*.⁴ This passage is, therefore, considered to be a testimony to Iamblichus' psychology (*In Timaeum*, frg. 87), and a very important one at that, because Iamblichus is often considered to be responsible for the restoration of the more orthodox point of view in Neoplatonism on the soul after the "heresy" of Plotinus. Though the content of this passage is much discussed, the attribution to Iamblichus is easily taken for granted. We are offered no real arguments why it should be from Iamblichus. Only Steel offers some explanation.⁵ According to him, it is apparent from the structure of the text that Proclus adopted the arguments of Iamblichus. Steel does not, however, explain what exactly he means by this. Personally, I do not see any pressing indication in the text in favour of this attribution.⁶

My aim in this paper is to show that much of this fragment is more likely to be attributed to Proclus than to Iamblichus, especially the third argument that rests on an

⁴ Cf. A.J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste III, Les Doctrines de L'Âme* (Paris 1953) 252, note 3; *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentarium Fragmenta*, J.M. Dillon., ed. (Leiden 1973) 382-3 and "Iamblichus of Chalcis (ca. 240-325 A.D.)" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, vol. 2, 36.2 (Berlin and New York 1987) 894, C.G. Steel, *The Changing Self. A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius, and Priscianus* (Brussels 1978) 39, and J.F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chico 1985) 149.

⁵ Steel (above, note 4) 40, note 32.

⁶ During the discussion of this paper three arguments have been put forward:

(1) It has been pointed out to me that the combination of the myth of the winged charioteer from the *Phaedrus* and the two circles of the soul from the *Timaeus* recurs elsewhere in Iamblichus, e.g. in *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* 3, frg. 59. This, however, is no proof that our passage originates from Iamblichus, because from *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* 3.59.6ff. it follows that the connection of the two passages dates at least from Porphyry. Besides, in our text, the images are not combined, but referred to as two independent arguments against Plotinus.

(2) The notion of sin (e.g., frg. 87.12, τὸ ἀμαρτάνων ἐν ἡμῖν) would be typical of Iamblichus. This simply is not true. The verb ἀμαρτάνω and its derivatives occur frequently in Proclus. In *Hymn* 1.35, for example, he prays to be purified of all sin; the notion is used *passim* in the eight doubt of the *Ten Doubts concerning Providence* (the Greek version of Isaac Sebastokrator has ἀμαρτάνω and its derivatives, the Latin version of Moerbeke has *peccare* and derivatives). See also Proclus' allegorical interpretation of Pandaros' violation of the cease-fire in the *Iliad* (*In Platonis Remplicam Commentarii* 1.100-106 *passim*).

(3) Γάρ in line 12 would be an indication of an indirect quotation ("The divine Iamblichus is quite correct, therefore, in attacking those who hold this opinion; for [γάρ] what element in us is that sins . . ."). It may be an indication if what follows is in line with what we know from Iamblichus' psychology. It is, though, not necessarily an indication, certainly not if what follows is not in accordance with Iamblichus' psychology. Γάρ may just introduce three more arguments, taken from other sources than the *Timaeus*, to show that Plotinus is wrong and Proclus and Iamblichus are right.

interpretation of the *Phaedrus* myth of the charioteer. Furthermore, as a result of a critical re-examination of the attribution of the text to Iamblichus, I hope to show that, concerning unaffected souls, Iamblichus holds a middle position between Plotinus and Proclus instead of being completely in agreement with Proclus and totally opposed to Plotinus, as Proclus wants us to believe.

I. The *Phaedrus* Myth

The third argument against Plotinus is based on the myth of the charioteer and his winged horses taken from Plato's *Phaedrus*. P.A. Bielmeier,⁷ followed by B.D. Larsen,⁸ has given Iamblichus the credit of being the first philosopher to have paid proper attention to the *Phaedrus* as a work of philosophy in a separate commentary. Before Iamblichus, the *Phaedrus* would have been considered as an immature work of Plato's youth and therefore rather neglected by philosophers, although it was studied fervently by rhetoricians. This view, though it flatters Iamblichus, seems to be incorrect.⁹ The work was immensely popular in Middle Platonist circles: to Philo, for example, the whole of Plato was contained in the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus* myth,¹⁰ Atticus produced a commentary on it as did his pupil Harpocration.¹¹ Whatever the case may be, Iamblichus' commentary was to have a profound influence on later Neoplatonists. As is so for all commentaries by Iamblichus, his one on the *Phaedrus* has not been preserved as a whole. All we have are some scraps, most of them from Hermeias' commentary on the same work. However, this material, together with supporting evidence from other works by Iamblichus, seems to me to differ on two major points from the interpretation we find here in Proclus and which is ascribed to Iamblichus. It runs thus:

(A) τίς δὲ ὁ ἡνίοχος τῆς ψυχῆς; ἀρ' οὐ τὸ χαριέστατον ἡμῶν καὶ ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις κεφαλαιωδέστατον; καὶ πῶς οὐ τοῦτο ῥητέον, εἴπερ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πάσαν ἡμῶν διακυβερνῶν τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τῇ ἑαυτοῦ κεφαλῇ τὸν ὑπερουράνιον τόπον ὁρῶν καὶ πρὸς τὸν "μέγαν ἡγέμονα" τῶν θεῶν ὁμοιούμενος. "ἄρμα πτηνὸν ἐλαύνοντα" καὶ "πρῶτον" ἡνίοχον "ἐν οὐρανῷ πορευόμενον" εἰ δὲ τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν ἀκρότατον ὁ ἡνίοχος, οὗτος δέ, ὡς ἐν Φαίδρῳ λέγεται, ποτὲ μὲν μετέωρος φέρεται <καὶ> αἶρει "τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰς τὸν ἕξω τόπον" ποτὲ δὲ δύνει καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ χωλείας καὶ πτερορρητίσεως <ἀναπίμπλησι ξυνωρίδα>, δηλοῦν τὸ ἐκ τούτων συμβαῖνον, ὅτι τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν ἀκρότατον ἄλλοτε ἔχειν ἀναγκαῖον.

(Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* 3.334.15ff.)

⁷ *Die Neuplatonische Phaidrosinterpretation* (Paderborn 1930) 7.

⁸ *Jamblique de Chalcis. Philosophe et Exégète*, vols. 2 (Aarhus 1972) 361–2.

⁹ I owe this point to Prof. D.T. Runia.

¹⁰ D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden 1986) 374.

¹¹ H. Dörrie and M. Baltes, *Der Platonismus im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt 1993) 197–8.

(A) And what is the charioteer of the soul? Is it not the most attractive, and, one might say, consummate part of us? And how can we avoid this conclusion, if indeed this is what directs our whole being and with its own head views the supracellular sphere and is assimilated to the "great leader" of the gods, who "drives a winged chariot" and "journeys through the heaven as a first" charioteer? And if the charioteer is the highest element in us, and he, as is said in the *Phaedrus*, sometimes is carried up aloft and raises "his head into the region outside," while at other times he descends and (fills his pair) with lameness and moulting, it plainly follows that the highest element in us experiences different states at different times.¹²

One might paraphrase the argument thus: if the human soul is to be compared to a charioteer and his two horses, and if the charioteer, sometimes even raising his head into the region outside, is the most important part of this combination, he must be analogous to the highest part of the soul. If the charioteer, his head included, sometimes crashes into the world of becoming, thus not able to look into the region outside and to contemplate the Ideas anymore, this means that the whole soul, its best part included, descends into the world of becoming, losing contact with the realm above. Obviously, even our best part is not unaffected (*ἀπαθής*), but in different states at different times. If Plotinus claims that part of us always partakes of *Nous*, he is at odds with Plato and must, therefore, be wrong. Though this interpretation of the myth seems to make sense, it does not seem to me to be fully in harmony with Iamblichus' views on two points: (1) Iamblichus does not consider the charioteer, nor his head, as the highest part of the human soul; (2) to Iamblichus, the downfall of the charioteer and his horses does not necessarily indicate a change in the state of the soul.

To start with the first point: according to Hermeias, Iamblichus holds the helmsman to be the highest part of the soul, not the charioteer:

(B) Ὁ θεῖος Ἰάμβλιχος κυβερνήτην τὸ ἐν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀκούει ἡμίochον δὲ τὸν νοῦν αὐτῆς· τὸ δὲ "θεατῆ" οὐχ ὅτι καθ' ἑτερότητα ἐπιβάλλει τούτῳ τῷ νοητῷ ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐνοῦται αὐτῷ καὶ οὕτως αὐτῆς ἀπολαύει· τοῦτο γὰρ δηλοῖ τὸν κυβερνήτην τελειότερόν τι τοῦ ἡμίochου καὶ τῶν ἵππων· τὸ γὰρ ἐν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνοῦσθαι τοῖς θεοῖς πέφυκεν.
(In *Phaedrum*, frg. 6 = Hermeias, In *Phaedrum* 150.33ff.)

(B) The divine Iamblichus takes the "helmsman" as being the one of the soul; its intellect is the charioteer; the expression "visible" is used not to signify that it directs its gaze on the object of intellection as being other than it, but that it is united with it and appreciates it on that level; for this shows that the "helmsman" is a more perfect entity than the charioteer and the horses; for it is the essential nature of the one of the soul to be united with the gods.¹³

Hermeias is commenting on Plato's *Phaedrus* 247c7 here. Plato's text is somewhat problematic at this point and so is the question of what text of this passage Iamblichus had before him. Modern editions of Plato read: "true being, visible for the helmsman of the soul, the *Nous*, only" (οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα, ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῆ νῶ). The codices, however, read θεατῆ, a dative of θεατῆς "spectator," instead of

12 Dillon, trans. (above, note 4) 201.

13 *Ibid.*, 97.

θεατή, a nominative of θεατός, “to be seen,” “visible.” A dative “spectator” is very hard to explain in this sentence and this is the reason why the nominative “visible” is preferred. Nevertheless, Dillon recognising this problem, defends the reading of θεατή, because Hermeias quotes it twice that way.¹⁴ This argument, though, does not bear much weight. The only difference between the dative and the nominative is the iota. At this time this iota *mutum* was not pronounced and consequently not written anymore in most cases.¹⁵ On the other hand, hypercorrect scribes sometimes wrote iotas even when this should not be done. What is more, of the two instances referred to by Dillon, one seems to require the verbal adjective “visible” instead of the dative “spectator.” After this the text said about the truly highest objects of intellection “visible to the helmsman of the soul only” (ἐνταῦθα δὲ ἐπειδὴ περὶ τῶν κυρίως ἀκροτάτων νοητῶν ὁ λόγος ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῇ εἶπε, Iamblichus, *In Platonis Phaedrum Commentarii* 152.7–8). If we read “spectator,” it would be strange to say that it tells something about the objects of intellection, it would say something about the helmsman. Furthermore, Proclus, who studied the *Phaedrus* together with Hermeias under Syrianus, quotes the text with the verbal adjective “visible.”¹⁶ Dillon is without doubt right to reject νῶ as a later gloss. It is, of course, out of the question that it was in Iamblichus’ text, because it would have ruined his interpretation of the helmsman as the one of the soul. Besides, it is found neither in Hermeias’ quotation of the text, nor in Proclus, though it would be in favour of his interpretation. Anyway, this interpretation of the helmsman as the one of the soul seems to be different from the one found in Proclus.

Because both text (A) and (B) are supposed to be by Iamblichus, attempts have been made to reconcile both views. Finamore suggests that we consider the soul’s one as the charioteer’s “head,” *i.e.* as the rational soul’s highest part.¹⁷ However, this solution, I am afraid, will not do. It is very clearly implied in text (A) that the whole charioteer as such is the top part of our soul: it is called “the most attractive, and consummate part of us,” and we are told that “the charioteer is the highest element in us.”¹⁸ In text (B) the helmsman, as highest part of the soul, is of course supposed to steer the soul, but in text (A) it is the charioteer who steers the horses: the soul is “this that directs (διακυβερνῶν) our whole being.” It seems, then,

14 *Ibid.*, 253.

15 Cf. Strabo (14.1.41) and E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik*, vol. 1 (München 1939) 202 (8).

16 Below, note 30.

17 Above, note 4, 148.

18 Finamore has informed me he himself is now also willing to reject this interpretation on the following consideration: “The soul’s One must be a higher entity specifically introduced to allow the human soul to “see” entities higher than those in the intelligible realm. Thus, the soul’s One does not enable it to “see” the Forms; the soul’s intellect does that. Hence, the soul’s One must be a part of the soul that is thrust up into the Intelligible. The One of the soul in other words, must still be attached to the intellect, but performing a higher function. So, what does the helmsman “see”? Hermeias reports that it is united τοῖς θεοῖς, but these must surely be the noetic gods, not the visible ones. They might even be the henads themselves. But that’s another matter.”

as if the distinction so carefully made between the helmsman and the charioteer in text (B), is completely ignored in text (A).¹⁹

This is not the only disagreement between text (A) and Iamblichus' interpretation of the *Phaedrus*. There is another, perhaps less obvious at first sight, but surely no less important one. According to text (A), the fact that the charioteer "is sometimes carried up aloft and raises his head into the region outside, while at other times he descends" proves plainly "that the highest element in us experiences different states at different times." Iamblichus, though, seems to think that neither the elevation nor the descent necessarily implies a change in the condition of the soul. This is clearly brought out in a testimony from Olympiodorus. It reads:

(C) Πῶς ὁ Ἰάμβλιχος τὸ ἐναντίον φησὶ περὶ τῶν τελέως ἀποκαθισταμένων; ἢ τὰ ἀντίστροφα πάντα ἐροῦμενον, οὐδέποτε κατιέναι αὐτάς, ἢ κατὰ τινα περίου καθόδων αἰτίαν οὐκ ἔχουσαν ἀναγκαίαν, ἢ ὅσον γε ἐπὶ τῇ οικείᾳ ζωῇ μὴ ῥεπούση πρὸς γένεσιν, ἢ τὸ τρίτον κατὰ τὸ εἶδος τῆς ζωῆς ἀγένητον ποιουμένης τὴν κάθοδον καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἐκεῖ ἀδιάκοπον, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἐπιστολαῖς γράφει, ὑπὲρ τοῦ οικείου λόγου ἀπολογούμενος τὸν τρίτον ῥηθέντα τρόπον.

(In *Phaedonem* page 203, 26ff. = Iamblichus, In *Phaedonem* [frg. 5])

(C) How does Iamblichus say the opposite about those who are restored to a state of perfection?²⁰ Shall we say just the converse about them, that they never descend, either during a certain period in which there is no compelling necessity for descents, or because their essential life does not incline towards the realm of generation, or thirdly, by reason of the form of their life which creates a descent which does not involve generation and which never breaks its connexion with the higher realm, as he himself writes also in his *Letters*, explaining his own theory along the third line of argument above-mentioned?²¹

¹⁹ Reading his paper at the conference, Finamore suggested that in *De Mysteriis* 1.15 (46.13ff.) (text discussed at page 171) Iamblichus does not keep to these distinctions, indeed seems to say that these distinctions are not at all important when compared to the overall philosophical view. I fail to see this confusion of entities. The text reads: Τὸ γὰρ θεῖον ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ νοερὸν καὶ ἔν, ἢ εἰ νοητὸν αὐτὸ καλεῖν ἐθέλοις, ἐγείρεται τότε ἐναργῶς ἐν ταῖς εὐχαῖς. Prayer arouses the divine in us, which is said to consist of a noetic part and the one of the soul/a noetic part (two times a defining καί). Note the θεῖον ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ νοερὸν καὶ ἔν may also be called νοητόν. Νοητόν is only an equivalent for the one in us. This is consistent with text (B) in which is explained that the expression "visible" is used not to signify that the one of the soul directs its gaze on the object of intellection (τούτῳ τῷ νοητῷ) as being other than it, but that is united with it and appreciates it on that level. If the one of the soul and the νοητόν are not different, they must be the same.

²⁰ Dillon (above, note 4) 89 translates: "who have been restored to a state of perfection," but this is not possible, because the Greek has ἀποκαθισταμένων a *praesens*, thus "are restored." Maybe Dillon has been misled by his own comparison of these special Iamblichean souls to the bodhisatvas in Buddhism. The latter have gone through a series of lives and are about to enter the nirvana, the perfection of human existence. Instead of entering it, they return to earth to help man. The Iamblichean souls may already be perfect before their first descent, cf. text (D), contrary to "those completely filled with desires and full of passions who encounter the first time the bodies with passions" (*De Anima* 380.279). The pure souls are once again restored to their original existence after their descent to earth.

²¹ Dillon, trans. (above, note 4) 89.

The souls under discussion here are no ordinary ones. In a moment their special nature will be discussed in greater detail. At present, we should stress the fact that such a soul “never breaks its connexion with the higher realm” (πρὸς τὰ ἐκεῖ ἀδιάκοπον). Dillon thinks this to be in conflict with the *Phaedrus* myth, but in accordance with Plato’s *Republic*.²² There the philosopher has to return from the sun into the cave. The difference between Iamblichus and Plato, however, is that for Iamblichus the duty of returning to help mankind does not stop after the philosopher’s life on earth. But is this text really inconsistent with the *Phaedrus* myth? This may be so in the case of Plato’s intended meaning of that myth (the question being, of course, whether we can ever determine what that is). It is certainly inconsistent with the interpretation of the myth offered in text (A). There the descent of the soul seems to imply a loss of contact with the upperworld, thus changing the state of the soul, proving that it is not always *apathes*. The fact that the souls in text (C) maintain connexion with the world above is likely to imply that they never stop exercising intellection, a consequence brought out more clearly in some other texts to be referred to later, something Proclus, as pointed out above, strongly denied. However, it will appear that Iamblichus does not see any tensions between the fate of these souls and the *Phaedrus* myth, thus casting further doubt on the question of whether or not text (A) is Iamblichean.

From Stobaeus’ *Anthology* stems an interesting passage from Iamblichus’ *De Anima* (1.379–80, frg. 40). It deals with the different causes of the soul’s descent. Some, perfect, souls descend in a pure way for the preservation, purification and perfection of the things here. Other souls return for the sake of exercising and correcting their own characters. They are not so perfect as the first group, because they are not completely impassible (ἀπαθεῖς) nor do they enjoy their own independence. A third category of souls is made to descend by means of violence for punishment here.²³ Iamblichus pays special attention to the souls who make an undefiled descent. This is the equivalent of the expression “a descent which does not involve generation” from text (C). This material world is also called the world of generation. A descent that does not involve generation means a descent in which the material world does not affect the soul, that the soul remains pure. About these souls he remarks:

(D) Οἱ τε γὰρ νεοτελεῖς καὶ πολυθεάμονες τῶν ὄντων, οἱ τε συνοπαδοὶ καὶ συγγενεῖς τῶν θεῶν, οἱ τε παντελεῖς καὶ ὀλόκληρα τὰ εἶδη τῆς ψυχῆς περιέχοντες, πάντες ἀπαθεῖς καὶ ἀκῆρατοι ἐμφύονται πρῶτως εἰς τὰ σώματα (Iamblichus, *De Anima* 380.23–26)

(D) For those newly initiated and who have seen much of true being, those accompanying and akin to the gods, and those completely perfect ones embracing the whole forms of the soul are all first planted in the body unaffected and undefiled.²⁴

22 *Ibid.*, 243.

23 Cf. Finamore (above, note 4) 101ff.

24 *Ibid.*, 107.

As has been noted by several scholars, the passage is replete with reminiscences of the *Phaedrus* myth.²⁵ They are called “newly initiated and who have seen much of true being” (νεοτελεῖς καὶ πολυθεάμονες τῶν ὄντων), which may be compared to *Phaedrus* 251a2 (ὁ δὲ ἀρτιτελής, ὁ τῶν πολυθεάμων), while νεοτελής may be found in *Phaedrus* 250e1. The expression “accompanying the gods” (συνοπαδοί . . . τῶν θεῶν) is an echo of *Phaedrus* 248c3 (ψυχὴ, θεῶ ξυνοπαδὸς γενόμενη). Iamblichus, then, takes the *Phaedrus* as his source of inspiration for a doctrine thought by Dillon to be inconsistent with that same Platonic dialogue! Their implantation into bodies is described as an unaffected (ἀπαθὲς) and undefiled one. According to text (A) this process would, on the contrary, affect the soul. The fact that these souls are not affected in any way is once again made clear by another statement from the same fragment:

(E) Ἐτι γε μὴν αἱ καθαραὶ ψυχαὶ καὶ τέλειαι καθαρῶς εἰσοικίζονται εἰς τὰ σώματα ἄνευ παθημάτων καὶ τῆς στερήσεως τοῦ νοεῖν.
(Iamblichus, *De Anima* 379.22–24)

(E) Pure and perfect souls enter into the bodies purely without passions and without being deprived of intellection.²⁶

The perfect souls do not suffer any passions/affections (ἄνευ παθημάτων) when they enter the body. Because nothing changes for these souls, they go on exercising intelligence without being disturbed (ἄνευ τῆς στερήσεως τοῦ νοεῖν). This comes remarkably close to what Plotinus grants to all souls, something for which he is criticized by Proclus. The latter refers to the *Phaedrus* myth to prove his point, while Iamblichus uses it to formulate an almost opposite claim.

One may argue that using the language of the *Phaedrus* does not necessarily mean that this was how Iamblichus interpreted it. At least one testimony of Iamblichus' commentary of the *Phaedrus*, however, shows us that this was how he did read it:

(F) Ἡ δὲ ἐξήγησις τοῦ θεοῦ Ἰαμβλίχου ρηθήσεται νῦν· ἀνθρώπους λέγει τὰς ψυχὰς τὰς ἐν τῷ νοητῷ διατριψάσας· αἱ γὰρ ψυχαί, πρὶν τὸν θνητὸν βίον διαζήσωσιν, ἄνω εἰσὶν ἐν τῷ νοητῷ, αὐτὰ τὰ εἶδη θεωροῦσαι, ἅμα τοῖς θεοῖς τοῖς ὑπερκοσμίοις οὔσαι· . . . καὶ ἄτε δὴ νεοτελεῖς οὔσαι καὶ μνήμην ἔχουσαι τῶν ἐκεῖ, ἀπόστροφοὶ ἦσαν τῆς γενέσεως καὶ οὐκ ἤθελον οὐδὲ φαγεῖν οὐδὲ πλεῖν, τουτέστι μεταλαβεῖν αἰσθητῆς δόξης οὐκ ἠβούλουτο; εἶχον γὰρ τὴν νοητὴν τροφήν· διὸ ὑπὸ λιμοῦ τῶν ἐνταῦθα ἀπέθανον, ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀνήχησαν.
(Hermeias, *In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia* 215.12ff. = Iamblichus, *In Phaedrum*, frg. 7)

(F) We will now turn to the interpretation of the divine Iamblichus. He understands by the “men” of the text souls who have spent time in the intelligible realm; for souls, before they live their mortal lives, are above in the intelligible realm, having a vision of the Forms in their true nature, and consorting with the supracosmic gods. . . . And inasmuch as they were newly-

²⁵ Festugière (above, note 4) 223, note 1, Dillon (above, note 4) 255f., Finamore (above, note 4) 107ff.

²⁶ Finamore, trans. (above, note 4) 103.

initiated, and still retained a memory of the other realm, they turned away from the realm of generation and refused to eat or drink, that is to say, they did not wish to have any share in sense-perception; for they had their intellectual nourishment. For this reason they perished from starvation of things of this realm, which means that they were raised up again to their former level.²⁷

Iamblichus is commenting here upon the tale of the men who turned into cicadas (*Phaedrus* 249b5–d7). Plato does not link this with the myth of the charioteer, but Iamblichus does so by declaring that these are the newly initiated souls, who used to have a vision of the forms in their true nature while consorting with the supracosmic gods. Even descending into this world, they avoid partaking of “the realm of generation,” just as do the souls in text (C) whose descent did not involve generation. At the end of their existence on earth, they are lifted to the intelligible realm once again, just as are the souls in text (C) which are said to be restored to a state of perfection.

Iamblichus had probably *Phaedrus* 259c1ff. in mind when he interpreted the story about the cicadas thus. In that passage we are told that only philosophers deserve to be feathered again because they cling to their memories of the Ideas as firmly as possible (compare the souls in text [F]) which are said to retain a memory of the other realm). Using these memories in the right manner, they are initiated over and over again in the perfect mysteries in order to obtain perfection, just as the souls in text (F) are called newly initiated and said to be raised up in the end to their former level. In this process, according to Plato, the philosophers turn themselves away from human affairs, not unlike Iamblichus’ souls which wish to have no share in this world. The philosopher, Plato concludes, is therefore considered by the *hoi polloi* to be out of his senses, while in fact he is inspired by the gods.

Against the argument that has been developed above to dispute the attribution of text (A) to Iamblichus, one may argue that there does not need to be a contradiction between text (A) and texts (D) (E) and (F). Perhaps we should take into account that the souls discussed in the latter texts are of a special kind, while the souls in text (A), to whom are referred as “us,” are the souls of ordinary human beings. The myth of the fall of the winged charioteer would then only apply to our souls, not to these unaffected souls. This would solve the contradiction between the texts. However, I think this to be highly unlikely. According to Plato even the soul of the philosopher was not able to follow the gods all the time, and consequently lost his feathers and fell down.²⁸ The souls of the philosophers are the newly initiated ones that have seen much of true being. Iamblichus, as we have seen, equates these souls with his unaffected, undefiled ones. Although Neoplatonist interpretations can do strange things to Plato’s texts, it seems to me not very convincing to assume that Iamblichus would deny that the unaffected souls are also fallen charioteers, when he takes them to be Plato’s philosopher-souls and admits that they too have descended into the world of becoming.

If one is to accept the discussion of texts (D), (E) and (F) by Finamore in his paper in the present volume, the road would be open to yet another counter argument.

27 Dillon, trans. (above, note 4) 99.

28 *Phaedrus* 248c2ff.

He claims that the pure souls that make a pure descent into this realm are theurgists (Finamore [below, page 169]). Theurgists, in his opinion, use their intellect regularly, but not permanently (below, page 171). As he formulated it in a communication to me: "Theurgists, however, do intellectualize sometimes, and sometimes do not. When they do, it is because they have re-ascended via an out-of-body experience. Thus, (D), (E) and (F) do not contradict (A)." I do not agree with him on this identification of pure souls with theurgists. Theurgists do not make a pure descent into this world. From *De Mysteriis* 5.18 (referred to by Finamore [below, page 169]) we gather that initially the theurgists were in the bounds of nature but succeeded in escaping by turning themselves towards Intellect (*De Mysteriis* 223.16: "A few, then, using some kind of natural power of Intellect, withdraw from nature . . .", ὀλίγοι δέ τινες ὑπερφυεῖ δὴ τιμὴν δυνάμει τοῦ νοῦ χρώμενοι, τῆς φύσεως μὲν ἀφιστάνονται, κτλ.; *De Mysteriis* 225.1ff.: "Those living according to Intellect and the life of Intellect only, after they have been freed from the bounds of nature . . .", οἱ δὲ κατὰ νοῦν μόνον καὶ τὴν τοῦ νοῦ ζωὴν τὸν βίον διάγοντες, τῶν δὲ τῆς φύσεως δεσμῶν ἀπολυθέντες, κτλ.) Iamblichus even distinguishes an intermediate group of theurgists-to-be who have not yet reached this state of perfection (*De Mysteriis* 224.1–6, cf. Finamore [below, page 170]). The souls mentioned in texts (D) (E) and (F), on the other hand, are not in need of perfection and purification. They are pure and perfect from the very beginning (see texts (D) and (E)). In Finamore's reading of them, the special souls indeed undergo some sort of improvement. They attain union with the gods and the Intelligible (Finamore [below, page 169]) and then "return to the realm of nature not for punishment but as an instrument of the gods." In fact, they do not return to this world. "Returning" would mean that they had been around here before. This, however, is impossible because we are dealing here with the *first* descent into the body (see text [D]) "first planted into the body"). The predicate νεοτελεῖς "newly initiated" in text (D), thus, cannot refer to the initiation in theurgical practise the student theurgists of the *De Mysteriis* go through. The perfect souls do not, then, attain union with the gods, they remain united with the gods (see text [C]). The theurgist may intellectualize regularly, the pure soul does so one hundred percent of the time, as becomes clear in case of the cicada-men.²⁹

II. Proclus on the *Phaedrus* Myth

Both the difference in anatomy of the soul in text (A) and text (B) and the fact that, according to text (A), descent does imply a change in the condition of the soul, whereas Iamblichus seems to deny this happening to at least a certain class of souls, make it very dubious that text (A) is recording the views of Iamblichus. Could it, then, be by Proclus? Unfortunately, Proclus' own commentary on the *Phaedrus* has been lost, but we have several passages in his surviving work dealing with the myth.

Proclus clearly does not follow the Iamblichean interpretation of the helmsman as the highest part of the soul. In text (A) the activity of the charioteer is described as διακυβερνῶν, an activity more suitable to a κυβερνήτης, helmsman, than

²⁹ One may wonder who these special souls are if they are no ordinary theurgists. I imagine they are people like Homer, Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato.

to a charioteer. If the two become more or less identical and if the charioteer represents the *nous* of the soul, then the helmsman is likely also to be understood as the *nous*. This identification recurs, indeed, in Proclus' commentary on the *First Alcibiades* 77.10–13: “Therefore, Plato calls the *nous* the helmsman of the soul (“because only visible to the helmsman of the soul,” he says), Διὸ καὶ ὁ Πλάτων τὸν μὲν νοῦν ψυχῆς κυβερνήτην ἀποκαλεῖ (ψυχῆς γάρ, φησί, κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῇ).”³⁰ If the helmsman is the *nous* of the soul, this means that, according to Proclus, it cannot be the one of the soul or the flower of *nous*, as Proclus likes to call it, because to Proclus that part of the soul comes before the *nous*.³¹ Later on in the same commentary, Proclus once again attacks Plotinus, now without naming him but describing him and his supporters as “those who say our soul is a part of the divine essence” (*In Alcibiadem* 227.3ff.).³² The charioteer is once again called the most important part of our soul, this time without any reference to his head at all (*In Alcibiadem* 227.19–20: καίτοι τί σεμνότερόν ἐστιν ἐν ἡμῖν τῆς ἡνιοχητικῆς δυνάμεως;). This identification of the helmsman with the *nous* instead of the one may also be found in Proclus' *Theologia Platonica* 4.13, 43, 16–7 (νοῦ ὁ κυβερνήτης τῆς ψυχῆς). Perhaps we should regard this as an innovation by Proclus. According to Hermeias, the helmsman is the one of the soul: “After this, the text said about the truly highest objects of intellection ‘visible³³ to the helmsman of the soul only’” (Hermeias, *In Phaedrum* 152.7–9). Hermeias' commentary is a set of lecture notes of Syrianus' course on the *Phaedrus*. From Hermeias himself we know that Proclus also attended this course, possibly given just for the two of them.³⁴ This would mean that Proclus was taught the Iamblichean interpretation of this passage (Hermeias shows himself aware that this was the interpretation by Iamblichus, see text [B]), but later on changed his mind.

According to the *In Platonis Alcibiadem*, the downfall of the soul is taken to mean that our soul is not always in the same condition (Proclus quotes *Phaedrus* 248b2–3 here): sometimes it is imperfect, sometimes it is perfected, depending on whether or not it has recently suffered oblivion (*In Platonis Alcibiadem* 228.1ff.: Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν καὶ ἀτελής ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ ποτε καὶ αὐθις τελειοῦται καὶ λήθην ἴσχει τῶν θείων καὶ αὐθις ἀναμνησκεται, δῆλον δὲ ὅτι καὶ ὁ χρόνος συντελεῖ πρὸς τὴν τελείωσιν αὐτῆς.). From *De Malorum Subsistentia* 21, we learn that this corruption involved in the fall of the soul even includes the class of souls which Iamblichus allowed to remain unaffected and always thinking. Both Proclus and Iamblichus agree that these souls descend for the salvation of others. Proclus is also willing to call these souls pure (*immaculatas*, *De Malorum*

30 Note that Proclus reads θεατῇ instead of θεατῆ (cf. *Théologie Platonicienne*, H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, eds. and trans., vol. 4 [Paris 1981] 147, note 1).

31 Cf. Rist (above, note 3) 215ff.

32 Cf. Steel (above, note 4) 46–7, A.Ph. Segonds, *Proclus, sur le Premier Alcibiade de Platon*, vol. 2 (Paris 1986) 412, note 278.

33 Reading θεατῆ, see discussion above.

34 See *Théologie Platonicienne* (above, note 30) xxxi.

Subsistentia 21.31). However, all souls, including this class, must drink from Lethe and thus suffer amnesia. The divine souls do not forget their true nature, as other souls do, but their functioning is, as it were, put to sleep. They are not capable of maintaining the way of life they used to have in the transcendent world, though they are unaffected by the troubles of becoming.³⁵ So, to some extent they may be called *apatheis*, but their coming to be means that they at least partially forget about the Ideas and that they do not continue thinking as does the Iamblichean divine soul.

It should also be noted that no Proclean (human) soul seems to be perfect all the time as appears from the passage from the *In Platonis Alcibiadem* referred to above. After all, imperfection is caused by drinking from river Lethe, something both the pure and ordinary souls have to do. The Iamblichean pure souls, however, seem to deserve the predicate "perfect" permanently (see texts [D] and [E]). Amnesia may seem a terrible evil, but Proclus hastens to explain that the providence of the gods is at work here. Which soul, he asks rhetorically, would care for the body if it did remember the celestial world it came from (*In Platonis Rempublicam Commentarii* 2.349.27ff.)? Iamblichus' special souls, on the other hand, maintain a clear recollection of their place of origin. We may expect them to neglect this world and so they do, as appeared from text (F) (Iamblichus' interpretation of the myth of the cicadas).

The Iamblichean pure souls seem to me to represent a stage in the development in Neoplatonist psychology from Plotinus towards Proclus. Proclus' souls, all of them, lose contact with the gods, contrary to Iamblichus' perfect souls (text [C]: πρὸς τὰ ἐκεῖ ἀδιάκοπον, cf. Plotinus' position that we have *Nous* inside of us). The functioning of all Proclean souls suffers from the descent, while Iamblichus' pure souls continue exercising intellection (text [E]: ἄνευ τῆς στερήσεως τοῦ νοεῖν. Compare this with the characterisation of the Plotinian soul as ἀεὶ νοοῦν in text [A]).

Against this proposition, it has been argued that in the fragments of his *De Anima*, Iamblichus posits against Plotinus and others that the soul is an entity separate from others.³⁶ It does not, as Iamblichus' predecessors had argued, include them in itself. Iamblichus' opinion was to be accepted by other Neoplatonists like Proclus. In this respect, Plotinus on the one side and Iamblichus and Proclus on the other, do, of course, differ immensely. But there is also an important difference between the consequences that Iamblichus and Proclus were willing to draw from this assumption. To Proclus it seems to entail that if Soul is a separable entity from *Nous*, it always *is* separated from it whence the individual soul has made its descent. Iamblichus, on the other hand, holds that it *may* be separated, which is not the case when it comes to the perfect souls. The consequence is that there is virtually no

³⁵ *Mensuram enim quamdam poculi oblivionis necessarium omnem animam facere, ut ait qui in Politeia Socrates; quod autem oblivionis aliud in aliis, alicubi quidem et habitu perditio, alicubi autem operatione solum sepulta. Hanc itaque operationis quietem, habitu manente intus velut lumine extra procedere propter adiacentem caliginem impotente, oblivionem, si vis, et malitiam, si vis, illarum animarum. Haec autem, siquidem impassibiles sint ab ea quae in generatione turbatione circa animal facta . . .*

³⁶ *Apud Stobaeus* 1.365.7ff., see also Steel (above, note 4) 23–33 and Dillon, *Iamblichus of Chalcis* (ca. 240–325 A.D.), (above, note 4) 893–4.

difference between the functioning of the Iamblichean pure soul and the Plotinian ordinary one, as we have seen, notwithstanding the fact that the structures of both types of souls are unlike each other. Proclus differs from Iamblichus in that he draws the consequences far more firmly than Iamblichus, with drastic consequences for the pure souls. This all fits well into the general picture of an increasingly pessimistic view about the human soul in Neoplatonism.

III. Conclusions

It has been generally accepted that the three arguments brought in by Proclus against Plotinus in *In Timaeum* 3.334.4ff. are adapted from Iamblichus. There are, however, I think, good reasons to debate the ascription of at least the third argument to Iamblichus. If so, one might wonder whether we are still justified in attributing the other two arguments to him as well. The only thing, then, we can safely infer from frg. 87 is that, according to Proclus, Iamblichus stands in opposition to philosophers like Plotinus and Theodorus who assert that something in us stays always unaffected and enjoying intellection. As we have seen, there is some truth in this. There are souls who are already affected even before their descent. Furthermore, from his *De Anima*, we know that Iamblichus argued against Plotinus and others who held that we have the whole intelligible universe inside us, reason for Plotinus to assert that we always have part of *Nous*. In his opinion, soul is a separate entity, an intermediate between the intelligible and sensible world, not a part of the first.³⁷

The loss of what has been described as "a most important passage for Iamblichus' psychology,"³⁸ however, should not be overly lamented: something good has also come from it. To start with, Iamblichus is now cleared from the charge of inconsistency brought against him by Dillon: Iamblichus' theory that some souls make their descent into the world of becoming unaffected, without their thinking being disrupted, was said to be incompatible with the *Phaedrus* myth of the winged charioteer. If text (A) were to be by Iamblichus, this would indeed be the case. A closer study of Iamblichus' interpretation, though, has revealed that Iamblichus interpreted the myth in a way consistent with his doctrine. One may still accuse Iamblichus of a wrong interpretation of Plato according to modern standards, but then to how many Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato's dialogue could we give full approval?

In addition, by studying the *Phaedrus* interpretation, we have attained a better picture of the descent of the pure souls according to Iamblichus. Proclus rejected most completely Plotinus' theory that human souls have an ever-thinking, unaffected part. Because he quotes Iamblichus in support of his view, we are, in conjunction with Iamblichus' own doctrine about the human soul as an independent intermediary between the intelligible and sensible, prone to ascribe to Iamblichus the same absolute

³⁷ See, Steel (above, note 4) 23–33, Dillon, *Iamblichus of Chalcis* (ca. 240–325 A.D.) (above, note 4) 893–4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 382.

position, even giving him credit for being the first to fight off the Plotinian heresy.³⁹ As has appeared, especially from text (E), Iamblichus is willing to allow to the pure souls a state Plotinus grants and Proclus denies to all souls. Thus, the position of Plotinus was not abandoned instantly in one big stride, but by one step at a time. Regardless of whether or not Proclus believed it himself when he wrote,⁴⁰ discussing a passage from the *Phaedrus*, that he did not introduce anything new in Neoplatonist theology, but that he was just following Plato and the divinely inspired Iamblichus, we should not accept this as an article of faith. Sometimes, Neoplatonists are just less conservative and more original than they are willing to admit.

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³⁹ *The Divine Iamblichus: Philosopher and Man of Gods*, H.J. Blumenthal and E.G. Clark, eds. (Bristol 1993) 3.

⁴⁰ *Théologie Platonicienne* (above, note 30) 23.68.23ff.