

Neoplatonic Virtue: Five Kinds of Knowledge | Reading Proclus' On Providence - Transcript

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Shiur Overview

Argument Flow Summary: Proclus on the Modes of Knowledge (Commentary on the Myth of Er)

Context and Setup

This lecture continues a series on **three preliminary distinctions** made by Proclus in his commentary on Plato's **Republic** (specifically the myth of Er). The first two distinctions—**(1) fate vs. providence** and **(2) the separate vs. the immanent soul**—were covered previously. The focus now turns to the **third distinction: the different modes of knowledge**, beginning at **paragraph 27** of Proclus's text.

I. Why the Distinction Among Modes of Knowledge Matters (§27)

Failing to distinguish the modes of knowledge leads to errors both about **reality itself** and about **the doctrines of Plato**. For Proclus, these two are generally the same thing—getting Plato right **is** getting the world right.

[Side Digression: Proclus on Plato's Planetary Order]

A notable exception: Proclus acknowledges that **Plato got the order of the planets wrong** (Moon, Sun, Mercury, Venus... vs. the corrected order: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun...). Proclus excuses this by saying Plato was working with the best science available at the time. This is a surprisingly modest defense—a more zealous Platonist might have allegorized the discrepancy away ("Plato was referring to the **meaning** of the Moon," etc.). This is a rare case where Proclus does not fully identify Plato's text with reality.

II. The First Mode of Knowledge: Opinion (Doxa)

Proclus begins with the kind of knowledge that **grasps the truth of a fact without its cause**—called **opinion (doxa)**.

Proclus's Neutral View of Doxa

Some Platonists treat doxa as **inherently false or deficient** (tied to the realm of becoming). Proclus's view is more neutral: doxa simply **asserts that something is the case** (or is not) **without explaining why**. It can be correct or incorrect—it is not **necessarily** wrong. Doxa is broader than perception: it is the capacity that **synthesizes sense data into judgments** (e.g., "this is an apple" rather than just "this is red" and "this is sweet").

[Side Reference: Christoph Helmig's **Forms and Concepts**]

Helmig's scholarly work discusses this point about doxa's synthetic function in detail.

Doxa as the Starting Point of Purification

Proclus assigns doxa as the **first knowledge** for souls undergoing purification, in **two domains**:

- **(a) Practical/political matters** (those being educated in virtue)
- **(b) Intellectual/contemplative matters** (those already freed from human affairs and occupied with beings)

The argument for why doxa is the starting point proceeds through the **stages of virtue** in Neoplatonic ethics:

1. **Education is purification** — moving from immoderation of passions → moderation → eventual **absence of passions (apatheia)**.

2. Doxa is **already rational** in the sense that it makes propositional claims that **can be examined and corrected by reason**. Raw feelings cannot be worked on directly; they must first be articulated as beliefs/claims.

[Illustrative Analogy: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy]

A parallel to CBT: a therapist first helps the patient **identify the beliefs (doxai) underlying their problematic feelings**. Only once feelings are expressed as propositions can they be examined and corrected. Vague feelings alone are not amenable to rational correction.

How Doxa Enables Progression Through Virtue

At the level of doxa, **opinions can contradict each other** (e.g., "ice cream is good" vs. "ice cream is bad" after overindulgence). These contradictions give **reason something to work on**—dialectic can begin. Through dialectic, one can move from the opinion that passions should be **moderated** to the stronger conclusion that passions **bring no genuine content about good and evil** and should be transcended entirely (the purificatory stage of apatheia).

[Side Digression / Cross-Reference: Aristotle's Starting Point in Ethics]

Aristotle says moral philosophy addresses those who are **already well-raised**—people who already possess the "facts" (i.e., correct opinions about virtue) from upbringing. This corresponds to the Neoplatonic level of **ethical virtues** (below the political virtues): virtues acquired through obedience to parents/tutors, without understanding **why** they are virtues. These are precisely **doxai**—received opinions, not yet internalized through rational understanding. **Moral education proper** begins when one moves from merely obeying authority to **understanding the causes** behind virtuous behavior, thereby internalizing virtue. This transition is the move **from doxa toward higher modes of knowledge**.

III. The Second Mode of Knowledge: Mathematical/Scientific Knowledge (§28)

Proclus (quoting from what appears to be a Platonist source—possibly Syrianus or another figure from the "same school") introduces a **second form of knowledge** that "leads upwards":

- **Starts from principles taken as suppositions (hypotheses)**, not from bare facts
- **Knows causes and draws necessary conclusions** — unlike opinion, which has only probable or no real conclusions

at all

- **Arithmetic and geometry** are paradigm cases, since they argue from necessary premises (axioms)

- This form **takes precedence over mere opinion** because of its necessity and causal structure

The Critical Limitation

This form of knowledge **stops at its own principles** — it does not investigate or justify the axioms/hypotheses themselves. The principles remain at the level of mere assertion or supposition — they are useful because reasoning from them works, but their truth is not itself demonstrated. Therefore, it **falls short of the most perfect knowledge**.

[Side Digression: The Status of First Principles]

In other texts (Proclus following Aristotle), first principles are said to be given by **nous** (intellectual intuition) — the mathematician's definitions come from a kind of direct intellectual grasp. Proclus has a theory of **innate concepts**; Aristotle's account leaves the origin of first principles somewhat mysterious. **Plato disagrees** that intuitive grasp is sufficient: even if you intuitively see a principle is true, you don't know **why** it's true, so it's not perfect knowledge. Self-evident truths remain **propositions** — they are stated but not grounded.

[Side Digression: Lincoln, Euclid, and Self-Evident Truths]

An anecdote about Lincoln: the Declaration of Independence calls certain truths "self-evident," but Lincoln, having read Euclid, calls equality a **proposition** — recognizing that self-evident things are still unproven propositions. (Reference to Leo Strauss's analysis.)

Consequences of the Limitation

Whatever **follows from** the admitted principles is **evident**. Whatever **concerns the principles themselves** is left aside as **unclear/unknown** — not necessarily obscure, but unproven, without knowledge of their causes. The practitioners (e.g., geometers) are **not concerned with developing a concept of what their subject matter truly is** (e.g., what space really is) — that is a philosophical question, not a mathematical one. One could have non-Euclidean geometry; the question of which geometry applies to the world requires a deeper theory. **The goal of dialectic** would be to arrive at a first principle from which geometry (and other sciences) could be **deduced**.

IV. The Third Mode of Knowledge: Dialectic / Ascent to the Unconditional Principle (§29)

Proclus introduces the **third and highest form of knowledge** (at this stage of the argument):

- It **ascends through all the forms** toward the **one and unconditional (unhypothetical) principle**

- This paraphrases Plato's **Republic** (the Divided Line and the dialectical ascent)

- "Forms" here = the axioms/hypotheses of the sciences; dialectic moves **through and beyond** them

- Plato describes dialectic as going **from form to form**, ascending to what is no longer hypothetical

[Side Digression: Theodore's Background]

Proclus is writing to Theodore, who despite being an engineer caught up in a deterministic worldview, apparently has enough

Platonic-Aristotelian training to recognize these philosophical references — an interesting biographical detail about the intended audience.

[Side Note: Mixing Plato and Aristotle]

The source text treats Plato and Aristotle as belonging to "**the same school**" — reflecting the late ancient Neoplatonic tendency to harmonize the two philosophers (Aristotle as a student of Plato).

Dialectical Methods: Division and Analysis

A distinction is drawn between **dividing** and **analyzing**:

- **Division**: moving downward—breaking a genus into its species.

- **Analysis**: moving upward—going from something to its principles.

- "Making the one multiple and the multiple one" corresponds to these two operations respectively.

Dialectic as the Coping Stone of the Sciences

Socrates in the *Republic* defines dialectic as the **coping stone** (capstone) of the mathematical sciences. The Stranger in the *Epinomis* calls it the **interconnection of the sciences**—the nexus that holds all sciences together.

Proclus's elaboration: Proclus identifies **four dialectical methods**—analysis, division, synthesis (descending from principles to conclusions), and definition. In his *Parmenides* commentary, he argues these methods **originally belong to dialectic** and are then borrowed by the other sciences. He makes similar arguments in his *Euclid* commentary.

[Side Digression: The Epinomis's Authority]

Proclus quotes the *Epinomis* despite knowing it was not written by Plato. He still treats it as carrying some authority.

V. Each Science Has Its Own Simple Principle

Dialectic draws knowledge of each science's own principles by **connecting the many undivided principles with the one principle of all things**. Just as the One is the principle of all beings:

- **Geometry** starts from the **point**

- **Arithmetic** starts from the **unit**

- Each science has its own "most simple" starting element (its own monad)

[Extended Digression: What Is the Simple Starting Point of Physics?]

Proclus treats the *Timaeus* as physics conducted in a **Euclidean mode**. Timaeus's introductory distinctions (eternal vs. changing things, causation, the demiurge looking at models) function as **axioms** analogous to Euclid's. In his *Timaeus* commentary, Proclus derives the rest of physics from these starting points.

The simplest starting point for physics turns out not to be something like "basic change" but rather higher principles—the **demiurge**, the **living being itself**, perhaps the **definition of image**. Physics thus has multiple starting points, which is why it is not the ultimate knowledge (dialectic is).

[Side Digression: Skepticism About the Point as Geometry's Principle]

There is a tradition (attributed to "H"—likely a Heronian or similar definition) where a **line is a moving point**, a

surface is a moving line, a volume is a moving surface—but the nature of "motion" here is obscure. A point could have infinite dimensions; nothing intrinsic to it indicates three-dimensionality. The unit as arithmetic's principle seems more plausible than the point as geometry's.

VI. The Problem of Multiple Principles: Aristotle, Speusippus, and Proclus

Aristotle's critique of Speusippus: Speusippus held that there are **different unities/principles for different kinds of beings**. Aristotle mocks this as resembling a "bad tragedy" (like **Prometheus Bound**)—at each stage, a new character appears and acts independently, with no real unity.

Proclus's middle position: Proclus holds that there are **henads** (unities) at the principle of each domain of being. When he does physics starting from the demiurge and the living being itself, he is starting from henads. The henads are:

- **Simple** in themselves
- In some obscure sense, they all **derive from the One**
- Yet in another sense, each henad is **primary and independent**—serving as an independent principle for its domain of being

The Epistemological Role of the One and the Henads

The One **in us** allows us to **analyze our intuitions**. For example, we may intuitively grasp that the perceptual world is merely an image of something else, that it cannot sustain itself. The One then allows us to **ground** this intuitive truth in a henad—a unity—which lets us **posit** (or "deposit") the demiurge as a principle. The same procedure could apply to mathematics and other domains. The resulting picture is **not** one where a single proposition at the beginning generates everything deductively, but rather one with multiple principles, each grounded through the One, each serving as the starting point for its respective science.

VII. The Good as Ground for Knowledge

The unhypothetical principle allows us to ground intuitions in **values or goods**. A "good" is the kind of thing that can ground a norm (noûs) or even a form, because understanding what a form **is** requires knowing what it is **good for**—there must be some good it measures against.

Knowing the unhypothetical principle constitutes a **third kind of knowledge**, distinct from the previous two.

[Side Digression: Aristotle's Objections to This Framework]

No cause for existence as such: Aristotle does not think you can give a **cause for existence full stop**. He holds that causes can only be given for things expressible as **predications**—i.e., a matter receiving a certain qualification. Once you derive the **unmoved movers**, they lack the complexity that would allow a first principle from which everything else's existence could be derived. So Aristotle **abandons** the idea of a single first principle grounding all existence.

The problem of too many principles (henads): Proclus's henads would seem suspicious to Aristotle because there are **too many** of them, and there's no satisfactory explanation of their dependence on the first principle. However, Aristotle faces a **parallel problem**: he has no explanation of how the other unmoved movers derive from the

first one. He says the first unmoved mover is like a general and is the good of the world, but offers no mechanism of derivation.

Why the **Liber de Causis was attributed to Aristotle:** The **Elements of Theology** (via the **Liber de Causis**) was historically attributed to Aristotle because it appeared to **fill a gap** in Aristotle's system by providing a theory of how one principle generates another.

Unity vs. Being: Aristotle would also object to the claim that **unities are prior to beings**. For Aristotle, unity is always a **measure** of a specific kind of thing, not a substance in itself.

[Side Digression: Hierarchy of Sciences and Principles]

A question arises about whether this framework leads to **too many principles**, since sciences never contain their own principles but require a higher science to ground them, creating a chain (e.g., physics grounded in geometry, metaphysics as "principles of principles"). This is a **later development** (possibly originating with **Alexander of Aphrodisias**), not neatly laid out in Aristotle himself. In Proclus, there is a hierarchy of sciences, but the **henads** introduce **non-hierarchical elements**, which leads into all the difficulties of understanding henads.

[Side Digression: Medieval Reception — Avicenna vs. Averroes]

The question of how Neoplatonized unmoved movers become a **generative hierarchy** (each generating the next) leads to the question of whether something sits on top that is a **different kind** of unmoved mover.

- **Avicenna's position:** The first principle is **not** an unmoved mover but something beyond—some kind of "One."
- **Averroes's position:** This is **nonsense**.

This debate mirrors the Republic's unhypothetical principle that isn't part of the system but only grounds it. There would be **one such unhypothetical principle for every science**, because being a unit is different from being a point, and you cannot fully reduce one to another. This is Proclus's considered position, though Porphyry presents a summarized version.

VIII. The Unhypothetical Principle — One for All and One for Each

There is a **One for everything** (the principle of all beings in an absolute sense) and a **One for each science** (the particular unhypothetical principle of each domain). The supreme science ascends to the absolute One.

IX. The Fourth Mode of Knowledge: Simple Intuition / Nous (§30)

The fourth kind of knowledge is **even simpler** than the third. It **no longer uses methods** such as:

- **Analysis** — going from something back to its principles
- **Synthesis** — going from principles to effects
- **Division** — dividing a genus into species
- **Demonstration** — deriving species from genera (Aristotelian syllogistic demonstration)

Instead, it **contemplates beings through simple intuitions**—"immediate vision." The distinction from the third kind: the third kind **arrives at** the first principle

analytically; the fourth kind **simply sees it** directly, without the process of arrival (or after having arrived).

[Note: Departure from the Republic]

In the Republic, dialectic already knows through **noesis** (simple insights), but here that function is being **separated out** and assigned to the **fourth kind** of knowledge.

Nous as the Culmination Beyond Discursive Science

An example from Proclus's Euclid commentary: after working through all of geometry discursively, one can achieve a single holistic insight into what a triangle **is**—an insight that contains within it everything that was proved step by step. Those who attain this kind of activity call it **nous** (intellect) with reverence, distinguishing it from **episteme** (science). There is a qualitative leap: nous is praised as something higher than science.

Aristotle's Support for the Primacy of Nous

Aristotle (from the **Posterior Analytics**) says that intellect is superior to all science and that it is "that by which we know the terms" (i.e., definitions). The Neoplatonists appropriate this claim to argue that nous must furnish the foundational terms and definitions that science works with.

[Interpretive Note]

In Aristotle's own framework, this means something like understanding what a point is, what motion is—grasping the basic terms. The Neoplatonists read it more strongly as a capacity for knowing the Forms themselves. This is one reading among others, but it is the Neoplatonist appropriation that matters here.

Plato's Timaeus: Intellect and Science as Two Modes of the Soul's Knowledge of Being

Plato declares that both intellect and science are forms of knowledge the soul has concerning being. The key distinction:

- **Episteme/dianoia** belongs to the soul insofar as the soul **is** knowledge—i.e., the soul exercising its own native capacities, being itself.

- **Nous** belongs to the soul insofar as the soul is an **image of what truly is intellect** (i.e., separate/transcendent nous). When the soul has noetic insights, it is **participating in something beyond itself**, incorporating a totally present knowledge that is nous proper.

The Nature of Noetic Cognition: Identity, Intuition, and Contact

Nous "sees the intelligible forms or rather **is** those forms in one intuition and contact with the objects known." This language of **contact** and **identity** traces back through Plotinus to Aristotle (the intellect becoming the same as the form of the thing known).

Key Platonic difference from Aristotle: For the Platonists, the form exists in itself and **makes itself known**—it "shines" and stimulates our knowing. What is **truly** intellect is the Forms themselves. The nous in us is an image that participates in this.

The Self-Reflexive Character of Nous

Nous contemplates both:

- **Itself as thinking** (its own activity)

- **The forms as existing in itself**

This is illustrated with a **sun analogy**: when we see the sun, we don't just perceive its shape (the disc); we also grasp from that perception **what shining is**, **what it is to see**. In one

perception, we have both the form/object and the nature of the cognitive act itself. Nous similarly delivers both its content and an awareness of its own character as nous.

[Side Digression: Whether Dianoia Can Know Itself Similarly]

Dianoia itself isn't a specific form in the same way. However, there's an analogous point—by contemplating what we do in dialectic, we could see what dialectic **is**. And someone who hasn't done the practice (e.g., "counted in the form") cannot really imagine what noetic contemplation is or why it differs from dialectical reasoning.

The Self-Validating Character of Intuition (Nous)

A crucial epistemological argument: **intuition must be known intuitively**, because if you only arrive at the existence of intuition through reasoning, then you know it through reasoning, not intuition. Nous must therefore be **self-validating**.

[Side Digression: The Brazilian Philosopher Lobato on Light as Epistemic Standard]

Lobato argues that **seeing the source of light** is the standard for all knowledge, because in one perception you are aware of:

1. The object
2. Your own active perception
3. The **cause** of your act of perception (since the light source makes itself seen)

This yields a special **certainty**: the knowledge and the cause of the knowledge are contained within the knowledge itself. By analogy, noetic insight is self-certifying because the insight shows itself as produced by the Form.

The Question of External Verification

Nous does not require external verification—and external verification cannot really reach it (or if it did, it would itself presuppose the same kind of noetic grasp).

X. The Soul Becoming Intellect

By imitating the intellect as far as possible, the soul itself **becomes** intellect. This means it **transcends science (epistēmē/dianoia)** and abandons the many discursive procedures through which it was originally "embellished."

[Side Digression: The Meaning of "Embellished"]

The sciences and virtues are what originally make the soul beautiful (connecting to the Platonic "ladder of beauty" from the **Symposium**). The sciences adorn/order the soul. But at this stage, the soul sets aside discursive knowledge (dianoia) in favor of direct intellectual knowing (noûs).

[Side Digression: Translation Problems]

Sentences like these are essentially meaningless in translation without a key explaining the technical terms (science = dianoia, intellect = noûs, etc.). The English words carry no inherent meaning without the philosophical framework.

The Soul's Mode of Contact vs. the Intellect's Mode

The soul, raising its eye toward beings, **thinks the Forms by coming into contact with them** — in the same way the intellect does. However, there is a crucial **asymmetry**:

- **The Intellect (Noûs):** Comes into contact with **all Forms simultaneously**. Each Form, when it makes itself known, makes **everything** known from its own perspective (e.g., the

Form of Horse implies the entire structure of reality viewed from the perspective of "horseness").

- **The Soul:** Comes into contact with Forms **one at a time**, sequentially. When the soul intuits the Form of Horse, it knows *horse* — but not everything else simultaneously. It must move on to another object to know that.

[Side Digression: Source of the Quotation]

The text attributes to "the father" the fate that the soul is always partial. This could be a fragment from the **Chaldean Oracles**, especially given the mention of "the father."

The Soul's Structural Limitation

Two distinct limitations of the soul are identified:

1. **Temporal limitation:** The soul doesn't always think; its knowledge occurs **in time**, only when it is actively in a state of contemplation.

2. **Perspectival limitation:** Even when contemplating, the soul's insight is always **partial** — it grasps the whole from the perspective of one Form. If it tries to grasp something maximally general (like "Being" or "Form of Forms"), it would lose access to the particular Forms in that same intuition. You could grasp what Being means, but that doesn't simultaneously tell you what Horse means.

In the Intellect itself, these two things (universal and particular knowledge) **come together somehow** — but for the soul, they cannot coincide in a single act of knowing.

Important Clarification: This Limitation Applies Even to Divine Souls

Even the **World Soul** and divine souls who are **always contemplating** cannot overcome this limitation. Their insights are never complete in the way the Intellect's are. The difference between divine souls and human souls is that divine souls are **always** contemplating (never ceasing), but they still face the same structural incompleteness.

Connection to the Virtues Framework

The soul's becoming intellect corresponds to the **contemplative virtues** — the stage where one identifies with the intellect. This is noted but deferred, as the text will return to the course of virtues later.

XI. The Fifth Mode of Knowledge: Beyond Intellect — The One and Divine Madness (§31)

After establishing the four levels, the text introduces a **fifth meaning of knowledge** that goes **beyond intellectual activity (noûs)**.

Aristotle's Limitation

Aristotle only leads up to intellectual activity as the highest form of knowing and "suggests nothing beyond it." **Plato** and the **theologians before Plato** (i.e., the Orphic/mystery tradition) point to something higher.

[Side Digression: Aristotle on Madness/Initiation]

Aristotle has a **fragment** (from an unknown work) about initiations, where he acknowledges they create a "strong impression" on people — but he likely regarded this as merely **emotional**, not as genuine knowledge. In the **Eudemian Ethics**, Aristotle discusses people with "moral luck" who somehow know the right thing to do without proper habituation — but even this Aristotle explains as a kind of **noûs** (intuition skipping inferential steps, grasping conclusions without middle terms). Aristotle never embraced

the Platonic **divine madresses** as a distinct, supra-intellectual mode of knowing. For Neoplatonists following Plato, the madresses represent something Aristotle's framework cannot accommodate.

Plato and the Pre-Platonic Theologians on Supra-Intellectual Knowledge

Plato and earlier theologians praise a **knowledge beyond the intellect**, commonly called **truly divine madness**. This madness **arouses the "one of the soul"** — activating the deepest unity within us. This is no longer about our intellectual faculty but about **connecting the one in us with the One itself**.

The Principle "Like Knows Like" — Epistemological Hierarchy

A foundational principle is invoked: **things are known by what is similar to them**.

- Sensible objects → known by sense perception

- Scientific objects → known by science

- Intelligible objects → known by intellect

- **The One** → **known by what is like the One (i.e., the one in us)**

Thinking (Nous) vs. Supra-Intellectual Contact

At the level of thinking (nous): the soul knows both itself and its objects through a kind of "touch" — nous knows by nous (self-reflexive knowledge).

When transcending thinking: the soul knows **neither itself nor that toward which it directs its own one**, because this is **not knowledge** in the ordinary sense. The soul must become **quiet, speechless, silent** — putting to sleep all internal "chatter." It must **become one** in order to "see" the One — but not truly "see," because seeing implies an intelligible object, and the One is **beyond intellect**.

Connection to Plotinus

This doctrine traces back to **Plotinus**: you know the One by **becoming one yourself**. There is nothing you "know" as a distinct content; you become **totally simple**. You recognize that **everything in your life follows one single principle, one single good**.

Concrete Illustration: The Ethical and Contemplative Ascent

The stages unfold phenomenologically:

1. **Ethical accomplishment:** You no longer treat passions (pain/pleasure) as guides to good and evil.

2. **Symbolic understanding:** You see the world not in terms of appearances or scientific descriptions but as **symbols of the Forms**.

3. **Remaining division:** There is still a split between your contingent circumstances (body, suffering) and your universal knowledge.

4. **Final unification:** You come to see that even your contingent circumstances — diseases, privations, evils — are all **products of a single divine principle** (e.g., "the style of a single god").

- Example: Everything is explained through Dionysus; "only Dionysus exists."

- At the extreme: divine madness leads one to declare **"I am Dionysus."**

The Nature of This Highest Knowledge

At this summit, **you know it because you are it** — a kind of **natural, immediate knowledge**. You can answer any question from that principle's perspective, but you **do not know it as an object distinct from yourself** (because that would be a falsification/descent). The "I am Dionysus" figure can respond to questions about Dionysus, demonstrating knowledge, yet **without having Dionysus before them as an object**.

[Side Digression: Comparison with the Stoic Sage]

The **Stoic sage** is compared: the Stoics did not posit Aristotelian/Platonic deductive science from first principles. They compared the sage's mind to a **taut drum** — all axioms and presuppositions mutually support each other; anything that strikes the drum bounces off (i.e., the sage can handle any problem). The sage **can solve any problem and answer any question**, but does not possess a science he can lay out before his mind or explain to others. This is analogous to the supra-intellectual knower: competence without articulable, objectified knowledge.

[Side Digression: Socrates' Critique of Poets and Craftsmen]

Inspired poets cannot explain their activity — paralleling Socrates' criticism. **Key rebuttal:** At the very height, **there is nothing to explain because you are at the ultimate explainer** — explanations cannot regress infinitely. No poet apparently thought to answer Socrates by asking: "Do you think explanations go on forever?"

Return to Core Thesis: Immediate Knowledge and the Henads

Our **certainty about our own unity** ("I am one," "I want to be one") is the paradigm case of this immediate knowledge. This unity/individuality is known **simply by wanting it** — not by having it as an object, not even as a distinct reality appearing within us (that would be nous-level knowledge). It is known **because I am it**. **Falsification** occurs when you treat yourself as a mere object of study, refusing to take responsibility for yourself.

XII. Proclus vs. Mysticism: What's the Difference?

The Question

Does Proclus's supra-rational "knowledge beyond knowledge" ultimately collapse into the same thing as mystical traditions (repetitive mantras, rituals, dances, poetry)? Proclus proceeds philosophically—with precision and argumentation—up to a certain point, and then seems to arrive at something that sounds mystical anyway.

Proclus Is Distinct from Mysticism in Several Key Ways

1. **Proclus provides arguments for why reason must point beyond itself.** He doesn't simply assert the need for supra-rational knowledge; he demonstrates through philosophical reasoning that reason gestures toward its own limits. This creates a **justified space** for the beyond-rational, rather than simply positing it.

2. **Proclus can criticize mystical discourse.** Because he has a conceptual framework, he can evaluate and correct mystical language. For example, when a mystic keeps saying "the One, the One, the One," Proclus can point out that the One is not some alien entity in space—it plays a specific explanatory role in accounting for everything. The mystic may retroactively agree ("that's what I always meant"), but this is unclear without the conceptual apparatus.

3. **Translatability and conceptual freedom.** A crucial advantage: **it can be translated**. The same ideas can be expressed in different words. This is what it means to grasp concepts for yourself rather than being attached to specific formulations. This avoids **fetishization of words and practices**—the tendency in mystical traditions to treat specific terminology as sacred incantations rather than tools for understanding.

4. **Integration with the rest of life.** Conceptual articulation allows mystical insights to be **united with everything else one knows and does**, rather than remaining a totally separate, disconnected domain. It also means there is a **path** leading toward the ultimate insight—not just an arbitrary "you either get it or you don't." There may be a leap at the end, but the path is rationally structured.

XIII. The Limit Case: Plotinus at One with the One

When Plotinus achieves union with the One (which Porphyry reports happened four times during his time with Plotinus), is Plotinus at that moment indistinguishable from a mystic (in the negative sense—someone who claims ineffable knowledge without philosophical grounding)?

[Side Digression: Types of Mystical Claims and Prophecy]

An important distinction between **types of mystical claims:**

- **Abstract/general mystical claims:** "Beyond everything there is the One, which you can only sense in internal silence"—claims that make no difference to anything practical beyond the practice of unification itself.

- **Particular/prophetic claims:** "I am possessed by the One, and I tell you to marry this person"—claims that the mystical experience yields specific, actionable knowledge about particular things.

This connects to **Plato's Divine Madness**, which seems to encompass both types.

The Problem of Particular Knowledge from the One

At the level of the One (the fifth level of knowledge), the One is beyond universals and particulars, and therefore in some sense "is" all things, including particular facts (like who should marry whom). **But:** the human being who claims access to the One does **not** thereby possess that particular knowledge. To formulate a proposition like "because of my access to the One, I know who you should marry" is to **conflate** supra-rational unity with one of the lower, propositional kinds of knowledge.

Counter-argument: "It's not the human speaking—it's divine possession; the God is acting through me." This is acknowledged but left as deeply problematic.

Socrates' Critique of Mystics (Applied Here)

You can be a mystic, but you cannot claim to be one, because claiming mystical knowledge turns it into a proposition—which is precisely what supra-rational knowledge is **not**. Socrates has no problem with anyone who doesn't claim to have knowledge. He only objects when someone (e.g., an Oracle) claims knowledge **on the basis of** their oracular/mystical access. His response: "You're an Oracle, but you don't **have** knowledge, because what you access is **beyond** knowledge."

Practical Implications

Several practical effects are noted:

1. **Theurgic effects:** The person prays and rain comes—there are real-world consequences, even if they can't be articulated propositionally.

2. **Proclus's own case:** Proclus does use cognitive vocabulary ("knowledge of the One") even when it technically breaks down. This can be justified **dialectically**—he's trying to explain to the reader/student, so he must use terms from the whole cognitive framework, even when discussing what exceeds that framework.

3. **Creative/paradigmatic products:** Plato didn't just "know"—he *produced* the dialogues, which serve as **objects of contemplation**. Similarly, inspired poets produce scripture where even the order and choice of words carry contemplative significance. The text itself becomes a kind of embodied contemplation.

XIV. Concluding Remarks: The Sage as Paradigm and the Integration of Mystical Knowledge

The Sage as More Than a Model for Imitation

The person who has achieved union with the One doesn't merely *understand* the truth—even the **order and choice of their words** becomes paradigmatic. They become a **model**, but not simply one to be imitated or interpreted; they embody the truth in a deeper, more direct sense (paradigmatic virtue in its fullest expression).

Key Advantage of the Proclean Model: The "I" as Already the One of the Soul

Proclus's framework allows a striking claim: every time a person says "I," "I want," "I believe," they are already referring to the **one of the soul** (the henadic center). This means mystical reality is not confined to rare ecstatic moments but is **already implicated in ordinary self-reference and everyday experience**.

Integration as the Central Payoff

This Proclean move achieves a **fourfold integration**:

- Mystic practice and mystic experience integrated into **the rest of one's life**

- The mystic integrated into **the rest of society**

- Mysticism as a goal integrated into **ethical progress**

This is presented as a distinctive advantage over purely philosophical (e.g., strictly Plotinian) accounts, which may treat mystical union as radically discontinuous with ordinary life.

XV. Overall Structure: The Five Modes of Knowledge

The five forms of knowledge form an **ascending hierarchy** (extending Plato's Divided Line):

1. **Opinion (Doxa)** — facts without causes, no necessity; the starting point of purification

2. **Mathematical/Scientific Knowledge (Dianoia/Epistēmē)** — necessary reasoning from hypothetical principles, but principles themselves unjustified

3. **Dialectic** — ascent through forms to an unconditional, unhypothetical first principle; uses analysis, synthesis, division, definition

4. **Intellect (Noûs)** — simple intuition; direct contact with and identity with the Forms; self-validating; but in the soul, always partial and sequential

5. **Supra-Intellectual Unity** — the one of the soul connecting with the One itself; knowledge by identity; beyond propositions, beyond subject-object distinction

[Administrative Note]

Paragraph 32 of the text still needs to be covered. The next session will return to the question of **our knowledge of the One** and to what degree it qualifies as knowledge, as well as the **solution to the problems raised by Theodore**. Next meeting: the 28th.

| Full Transcript

Proclus on the Modes of Knowledge: From Opinion to Dialectic

Introduction: The Third Preliminary Distinction

Instructor: Okay, so last time, so we're going still through the three preliminary distinctions that Proclus makes. We first saw between fate and providence, and then between the separate and the immanent soul. Now we go through the different modes of knowledge, starting at paragraph 27.

Student: Mm-hmm.

Instructor: Okay, 27: "**But let us next proceed to the third discussion and give an account of the different modes of knowledge.**" Okay, that's the third thing of preliminary things. "**If we do not distinguish them, we shall not notice our errors both in regard to reality**"—we don't understand reality—"and to the doctrines of the **divine Plato**"—which is not the same thing as reality, or rather they are. That's why we get both of them all together.

Student: Yeah.

A Rare Exception: Proclus on Plato's Planetary Order

Instructor: Okay. Or actually, actually, you know, there's—recently I was studying Proclus's commentary on the myth of Er, and there was one thing where he said that Plato got wrong, which is—he says because Plato has a different order of the planets, right? And so Plato thought that the order of the planets was Moon, Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, whereas later, you know, philosophers, astronomers, astronomers and astrologers put the Sun in the middle, right? So they do Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. And then he says something like, "Oh, but Plato was just working with the best science at the time."

Student: Okay.

Instructor: So that's it. But yeah, generally getting Plato right is getting the world right.

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: Someone better would have said like, "Plato was referring to the meaning of the Moon or something."

Student: Okay. I mean, I guess the second thing—

Instructor: Okay. Well, anyways.

The First Mode of Knowledge: Opinion (Doxa)

Instructor: Well then, **"among the many kinds of knowledge discussed by Aristotle and also by Plato"**—all right, Aristotle has like five kinds of knowledge in the Nicomachean Ethics, in the, what's it called—**"we shall consider first the knowledge that only grasps the truth of the fact without its cause, which they call opinion."** That's one kind of—

Student: Okay.

Proclus's Neutral View of Opinion

Instructor: Yeah, and this is kind of important, that you know, you could—some Platonists have this more negative view of **doxa**, right, where opinion is necessarily, necessarily in some way false or something like that, whereas here you see that Proclus's view of opinion is more neutral. It's just that it just says that this is true or that that is false, but it doesn't tell you why, right?

Student: I mean, yeah, I guess it could be wrong, but it's not necessarily—

Instructor: It's thoroughly wrong. Exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

Student: Although Plato does say that it's like always about becoming things and so on.

Instructor: Precisely. It seems that for Proclus it's not that, that's not the case. So for instance, you're still using opinion when you say, when you state a mathematical theorem or something, right? Because you're just—me, whenever you make a claim, you're using opinion. And so for him it's a broader capacity, and it's also for him things like what allows us to say "this is an apple," right, instead of "this is a red thing, this is a sweet thing," and so on. So it's opinion that, as it were, joins all the—that, you know, takes on the what the common sense perception perceives and makes a judgment out of it.

Christoph Helmig discusses this in his **Forms and Concepts** book.

Student: Mm-hmm.

Opinion as the Starting Point of Purification

Instructor: Okay, so that's the first kind, or like the lowest kind of knowledge, right?

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: **"They usually assign it as first knowledge to the souls in the process of purification, both to those being educated in regards to practical matters and to those already set free from human affairs and occupied with beings."** So both like political virtue, basically, or and intellectual will have—will begin from **doxa**.

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: And then we will—a reason for this. Okay. **"For education is a purification of the immoderation and the passions, and far more, a path from moderation of the passions towards the absence of passions"**—that's that would be the the second level, right, the purificatory virtues—**"at least when reason no longer desires to suffer together with passion, albeit in moderation, but shakes off the whole scenery of the passions."** Right.

So this is interesting. So why should this explain why you start off with opinion, with **doxa**, with making claims? Presumably because making claims—so **doxa**, it is already rational in the sense that it is, you know, it's it makes statements and it can be corrected by reason, and therefore

you have to start off from it instead of just your—instead of just directly the passions.

Analogy: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Instructor: So for instance, if you go—you can think about this in the case—so like if you go to a therapist, there's a cognitive behavioral one, they will first get you to, you know, try to figure out what beliefs or what claims are behind the feelings that are getting in the way of, you know, you behaving the way you want to. And, you know, only when you have those claims—on the model, once you've like expressed that in the form of a **doxa**—then you can like do something about it. But you know, you can't convince yourself otherwise as long as it's just this vague feeling.

And so that might be a reason why you start off from **doxa** when you're purifying the passions. And so both for you to like get the passions under control, and also for you to eventually understand that the passions don't bring any content of their own, and they're not they're not witnesses to good and evil, and therefore you in the—at the purificatory stage of **apatheia** [absence of passions]—

Student: There would be something like the—like the opinion that that that we should moderate our passions, is that—

Instructor: Like there's an opinion that says that some passions are good, but there's also like a received opinion—like you get educated to be told like, "One shouldn't immoderately follow their passions," and then Plato could somehow from that do dialectic and say, "Well then, you're just switching one passion for another, so therefore you should deny passions whatsoever," and so on, right? Or, you know, it doesn't even need to be that there's a received opinion they shouldn't immoderately follow their passions, but just that once you're in the level of opinions, opinions can contradict each other, right? And you can see that if you follow your passions, like if you eat too much ice cream and then you feel bad, and then you'll find out that you think both that ice cream is good and ice cream is bad, and—

Student: Right, you have contradictions—

Instructor: Reason can get to work, right?

Connection to Aristotle on Moral Education

Student: Now, because I was thinking like there is the Aristotelian thing that moral philosophy or education—like he's only speaking to people who are readily educated.

Instructor: Well, because that gives you the facts, like that he's going to philosophize on.

Student: Yeah, and that's kind of like opinions, like you get taught that these and these are the good—the virtues—and then philosopher could make them better somehow, or teach you the causes of it, to the extent that there are causes of specific virtues and so on.

Instructor: Yeah, and that makes sense in the—so far as the so-called ethical virtues, right? This is the level of virtue below the political, so below having moderate passions—

Student: For the—video greatness?

Instructor: And that's basically what you get from from being well raised, right? But you don't yet know why that's the case. So precisely, you just have **doxa**. Especially because, like, yeah, you've learned these things, but basically because you've just been obeying your tutor or your parents, right? And then so you've alienated, as it were, reason to them. And then

when you start the task of, you know, moral education proper, then you start to understand why this is the case and you start to internalize it.

The Ladder of Knowledge: From Opinion to Mathematical Science to Dialectic

The Second Form of Knowledge: Mathematical and Scientific Knowledge (Section 28)

Instructor: I've transmitted to us another form of knowledge leading upwards. Namely, **that which proceeds from principles taken as suppositions, and which knows causes, and draws necessary conclusions in all cases.** So this would be the **dianoia** [διάνοια: discursive reasoning], right? And so he's like also going up the ladder, like the ladder in the divided line in the Republic. So this other form of knowledge, it doesn't start from the facts but starts from principles or hypothetic—

Student: Right, hypotheses.

Instructor: And also knows causes. I guess those hypotheses would be the causes, really. And also has necessary conclusions, whereas opinion has only like probable conclusions and things like that.

Student: Opinion doesn't even have conclusions, or—

Instructor: Oh, it's just like facts. It's not reasoning at all.

Student: Right, yeah, yeah.

Instructor: Okay. Yeah, so because this is, of course, this is the criticism of the Republic, you know, is that this faculty, it still hasn't proved, you know, doesn't have an unhypothetical starting point. So in some sense, the principles it uses are still hypothetical, right? They're still just suppositions. But there is a kind of necessity here now that when you think of A, you have to think of B, right?

Student: Right.

Instructor: **They found out that arithmetic and geometry are such a kind of knowledge.** So just numbers and spaces.

Student: Like, yeah, their shapes.

Instructor: Because, hmm, **these sciences argue and conclude from necessary premises**—necessary meaning like—

Student: So like axioms, things like that.

Instructor: **They take precedence over knowledge based purely on opinion,** right. **But because they stop at their own principles and leave above them the principles of these without bothering about them, they show that they fall short of the most perfect knowledge.** It's better than the opinion which doesn't have necessary conclusions and doesn't know causes. It's just like, "this is this way," or "I think this is this way," or "I was told this is this way," or something like that. But does not have—does not bother about the principles itself. It stops at their own principles. So it doesn't really know—in some sense, regarding the principles, it's like worse, because those principles are the things that—

Student: They're only like opinions.

Instructor: Yeah, precisely. Those principles stay at the level of mere assertion. It's like it's only useful because the reasoning from it works.

Student: Exactly.

The Status of First Principles in Mathematical Sciences

Instructor: And of course, the reasoning from it already puts a limit to opinion because then you're constrained by non-contradiction and things like that. And, yeah, and it's interesting that it puts it this way. Of course, in other texts, both Proclus—of course he's following Aristotle—they will say that these first principles are given by **nous** [νοῦς: intellect/intellectual intuition], right? **Nous** can see the truth of the first principles of sciences. So like that's where the mathematician gets his definitions and things like that, right?

Student: But like, the—like, didn't they call them like "first intelligibles" or something like—

Instructor: Uh, just you're just born with that or something, according to Aristotle. Nobody knows where it comes from, right?

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: Of course, and for Proclus he has the theory about innate concepts, right. But Plato does disagree. Like Plato thinks that that's not enough. In any case, even if that's the case, precisely because even if you have like this intuitive grasp—"aha, I know this is true"—you just don't know **why** it's true. And so it's not perfect knowledge, right? These self-evident truths are still not—are still propositions.

Student: Yeah, hence—yeah, because I saw someone saying that in the Declaration of Independence it says there are self-evident truths, and then Lincoln quotes it in his Gettysburg Address. He says "the proposition that all men are created equal," because he read Euclid and he saw, "wait, self-evident things are just propositions anyway."

Instructor: Yeah, that's like a Leo Strauss chapter on it, anyways.

The Limitation of Mathematical Knowledge

Instructor: **Hence, whatever follows from the principles admitted in these sciences will be evident, but whatever concerns the principles themselves will be left aside as being unclear and unknown.** Not very unclear, but like unknown in sense of unproven, or like if knowledge means knowing causes, then you don't know the cause of this.

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: And it's also like unclear in the sense like, well, you ask the geometer, "but what really is space?" or "what is," you know, they won't really have much to tell you.

Student: Right, you could have like non-Euclidean space if you want.

Instructor: Right, for sure. Or at least then you would need a theory for like, "why does the world work this way?" or "does it?" and things like that.

Student: Okay.

Instructor: Yeah, but I was more like they're not concerned with actually developing a concept of what space is. If you read the philosophical works of Kant and Leibniz and their discussions about what space is, you won't advance into geometrical knowledge.

Student: Right, but you theoretically would try to arrive at like a first principle that will allow you to deduce geometry from it, eventually.

Instructor: That's the goal of dialectic, yeah.

The Third Form of Knowledge: Dialectic and the Ascent to the Unconditional Principle (Section 29)

Instructor: Let's go to third. So 29: **Ascending higher, "allow me to speak of a third" form of knowledge of the human soul, that which ascends "through all" the forms, so to say, towards the One and "unconditional" principle.** The forms being these like—axioms would be forms?

Student: Are, um—

Instructor: So this is—right, so he's paraphrasing the Republic. It occurs to me that with all these quotes that he's using—so he's quoting Aristotle, he's dropping these quotes from Plato from "the same school"—"allow me to speak of a third"—so Theodore, although he's, you know, and he's writing this to Theodore, although Theodore is like this engineer who's gotten himself into this deterministic worldview, Proclus seems to think that, you know, he's someone who can reliably recognize these references. So that's interesting, right? Theodore has some Platonic-Aristotelian training.

Student: Mm.

Instructor: Now, well, about **that which ascends through all the forms**—yeah, Plato describes dialectic as going from form to form.

Dialectical Methods and the Principles of the Sciences

Dialectic as the Ascent Beyond Mathematics

Instructor: Okay. Like theoretically, something like attempts to logicize mathematics would be trying to do that. Also, yeah, there'd also be steps in that direction. Yeah. And then once you get to being, and then once you get to being, then you're at the beginning of the first hypothesis of the Parmenides, and then you can go to the one.

Distinguishing Division from Analysis

Student: Okay. Dividing some, so some of the forms, right? Analyzing objects. That's the same thing as dividing and analyzing, or isn't that?

Instructor: No. Dividing, you go down. Dividing you, like breaking up a genre into its species. Analysis, you go from something to its principles.

Student: Okay.

Instructor: Making the one multiple and the multiple one. Those are dividing and analyzing.

Dialectic as the Coping Stone of the Sciences

Instructor: This knowledge, where am I? Socrates defines in the Republic as **the coping stone of the mathematical sciences** and the stranger in the Epinomis calls it **the interconnection of the sciences**. Yeah, so this is, say, the coping stone's like the final stone that makes the whole thing hold and like the nexus of all the sciences.

So Proclus is big on this. So for instance he talks about, so these methods that we mentioned here of analysis and division, and they also go together with synthesis which is, you know, going down from principles to conclusions, and also definition. So these four dialectical methods in the Parmenides commentary he's keen to show that they're all used in dialectic and that they originally belong to dialectic and then they're used in the other sciences. And in his Euclid commentary he talks about these passages from the Republic and the Epinomis as well.

It's interesting that he's quoting the Epinomis because he knew that the Epinomis wasn't by Plato, right? He mentions this at one point. Even though it's not by Plato, it has some authority for it.

Each Science Has Its Own Simple Principle

Instructor: **It is from this science that the geometry and each of the other science[s] will draw knowledge of their own principles because it connects the many undivided principles with the one principle of all things. For what this principle is in all beings, this is in geometry the point—not sure—in arithmetic the unit, and in each of the other [sciences] that which is the most simple.**

Like, I don't know, like the monad of everything. Just like every science has its own like one.

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: And geometry starts from the point and arithmetic the unit. Like, I don't know, like movement or something from physics or something like that, that change.

The Case of Physics: Starting Points in the Timaeus

Instructor: Yeah, for physics change or—well, he actually thinks that the, you know, he thinks that the Plato, that the Timaeus is physics and he thinks it's physics on a Euclidean mode. So that introduction that Timaeus does where he sets out, "Oh, there's the, there are eternal things and there are changing things and everything that changes has to have a cause and the cause will make good things if it looks at a beautiful thing and a bad thing looks at an unbeautiful thing"—he thinks those are like Euclidean axioms. He thinks like that's like—and so that's what he does in his Timaeus commentary, one of the many things he does is—and of course there the simple, like what is the simple starting point? So it seems like physics has a few simple starting points. That's why it's not, you know, dialectics, it's not the ultimate knowledge. But actually physics doesn't start so much from the something like a basic change, a simple change. You might think it was something like that, but it starts from things like the demiurge and the—well, I guess I guess maybe like the simplest thing would be just this definition a bit. The definition of image, maybe? I don't know, but it would start from up there. You know, those are the things that you derive everything from.

Student: Right.

Instructor: Like, geometry turns out to be the model for all sciences. Or, yeah, we'll hear geometry and arithmetic.

Skepticism About the Point as Geometry's Principle

Student: I think it's actually more plausible that the unit is the principle for arithmetic of the point for geometry.

Instructor: Right, because the point doesn't generate a lot of things. You still need like—

Student: Well, I mean, it does, but what does it mean?

Instructor: There's this H definition of the line is the moving point and the surface is the moving line and the volume is the moving surface. But what, what is motion there? It's like it's obscure. And a point, a point like can have infinite dimensions and it doesn't seem to be anything in the point that indicates three dimensions. But in any, yeah.

The Problem of Multiple Principles: Aristotle, Speusippus, and Proclus

Instructor: So it's interesting, this idea, **what this principle is in all beings**. So Aristotle actually criticizes Speusippus for the idea that there are like different unities, there are different principles for different kinds of beings, and then he says this is like a bad tragedy because it's like Prometheus Bound. So at each stage of the system, a new character comes in and like does things.

And it is interesting to think about like—and Proclus has like a middle position because he does think in some sense that you have like these henads [Greek: henades, unities] at the principle of each thing. And it's like, yeah, so when he does physics starting from the demiurge of the living being itself, he is like starting from henads, especially from the—and of course the, I mean, the henads are simple. And in some sense, you know, some obscure sense, they all come from the one. But in another sense, each of them is primary. And so they are like these independent principles for each kind of being, for each principle of being.

The Epistemological Role of the One and the Henads

Instructor: And in my account, at least like the way that the first principle lets you know these things, beings, is kind of like the first principle lets you analyze your intuitions about it. So like maybe intuitively we know that, I don't know, maybe intuitively we can grasp that this, that the perceptual world is just an image of something else and things like that, it can't sustain itself. But then what the one is, the one in us allows us to do is to say, "Well actually this truth that this world is an image needs to be grounded in a henad, in a unity." And then that allows us to deposit the demiurge. And I guess you could do the same thing for mathematics and so on.

That's the—and so it just, it does kind of give you this specific vibe of different—it's not so much that you have like one proposition at the beginning from which you derive—

[End of chunk 3]

Knowledge, Principles, and the Hierarchy of Sciences: Aristotle's Objections to Neoplatonic First Principles

Aristotle's Fundamental Objections to the Neoplatonic Framework

The Problem of Causation for Existence

Instructor: Someone like Aristotle would not like that kind of idea because it seems to—well, Aristotle has a few problems with this. Aristotle, for one, he doesn't think that you can give a cause for existence, full stop. So he thinks you can only give causes for things that you can express as a predication, right? And so you can give causes for things that come to be because then you say—you know, that thing coming to be means like a matter receiving a certain qualification, right?

And but there is—it's impossible for them to have like a first, once you derive the unmoved movers, right? Because they don't have that kind of complexity. And so he abandons this idea that they have like a first principle from which you could derive the existence of everything else.

The Problem of Too Many Principles (Henads)

Instructor: And furthermore, you know, Proclus's specific view—all these hennads [divine units/gods] will sound a bit suspicious to him because there would be too many of them. There wouldn't be a satisfactory explanation of how they're all dependent on the first principle. He, of course, has the same

problem in the sense that he has no explanation of how the other movers come from the first one. He says the first unmoved mover is like a general and things, and it's the good of the world, but he doesn't have any mechanism.

Which is partially why people thought that the *Elements of Theology* was Aristotle, right? Why the *Liber* [*Liber de Causis*] was associated—ah, here is the theory, here is the theory about how you get one of them from another. And so this fills a gap in Aristotle that, you know, would be necessary to fill.

Unity Prior to Being

Instructor: And also, of course, Aristotle would have issues with the whole thing about saying that unities are prior to beings, right? So that's—he doesn't think that you can talk about a unity in itself. A unity for him, since it is a measure, is always going to be a specific kind of thing. And so it's not a substance.

The Hierarchy of Sciences and Principles

The Problem of Multiple Principles

Student: So I'm just trying to see how the—like becoming, ending up with too many principles—because there would be a hierarchy, right? Like, I know from Aristotelians would say things like sciences never have their principles in themselves. You need to have a different science that would give the principle for that science. And then you end up with like a chain. Something like physics would have principles in geometry or something, or the opposite—I don't know. And that like metaphysics is the principles for principles, right?

Instructor: Yeah, this is a—from what I understand, this is a later development. It's not so neatly laid out in Aristotle that way. I think Alexander [of Aphrodisias] is the first one to take this view about how the sciences all unfold. But yeah.

So whereas in Proclus, the hierarchy issue is a bit—I mean, there is a hierarchy of sciences, certainly for Proclus. But at the same time, there are these kind of non-hierarchical elements, which are the hennads. And this goes into all the difficulties of understanding hennads. But, yeah.

The Medieval Reception: Neoplatonized Unmoved Movers

Student: Yeah. Right. So I guess—yeah, I'm just trying to think. Because, like, one—I guess the later, like, since the neoplatonized Aristotle—I don't know—unmoved movers turns into, like, turns them into a hierarchy, like each generates the next, somehow. And then you end up with the question if there's something on top, which is a different kind of unmoved mover.

There's the Avicenna position, which is the first principle is not an unmoved mover, something beyond that, some kind of one or something. Averroes always thinks that that's nonsense. It's like a whole discussion.

The Unhypothetical Principle for Each Science

Student: Like, does that—that does end up with like the one, like in the Republic, like the one hypothetical thing that isn't part of the system and only grounds the thing and so on. But here I want to say that there would be one like that, like some kind of one like that for every science, because like being a unit is a different kind of thing from being a point, and you can't like reduce one to another in the full way.

Instructor: Exactly. That's Proclus's considered position, but here Porphyry [the instructor appears to mean Porphyry is

presenting this] is presenting a rather summarized version of it. But yeah.

Different Faculties in the Soul

Student: Okay. Let me go to the knowledge thing back. Okay. And this would be a third kind of knowledge, and also there would be—all these knowledges are different faculties in the soul or something, right?

Instructor: Yeah, yeah. So, or you know, this—the second and the third, they're kind of both **dianoia** [discursive reasoning]. But dialectic is like a higher form of **dianoia**. So this is something different from the Republic. The Republic already says that dialectic knows through **noesis** [intellectual intuition]—so these, you know, simple insights—but that's going to be what the fourth kind of knowledge is.

So he's separating it a little more.

The Third Kind of Knowledge: Dialectic and the Unhypothetical Principle

The Principle of All Beings vs. Particular Principles

Instructor: So let me—where am I? **"But each of these principles is called and is a particular principle, whereas the principle of all beings is a principle in an absolute sense and it is to this that the supreme science ascends."**

So there would be a one for everything and a one for each science, and that's the unhypothetical principle of each.

The Fourth Kind of Knowledge: Simple Intuition

Beyond Discursive Methods

Instructor: Now, [section] 30: **"The fourth kind of knowledge you need to understand is even simpler than the latter, as it no longer uses methods such as analysis or synthesis or division or demonstration, but contemplates beings by means of simple intuitions, as it were with immediate vision."**

Analysis being—I forgot already. Going from something back to its principles. Synthesis going from the principles to the effects. Division, division of a form into sub-forms, of a genre—of a genus into species. Demonstration, right? Aristotelian demonstration, so—

Demonstration is the other way around, really. Like deriving species from forms, or from genres, basically. Aristotelian syllogisms.

The Distinction: Arriving vs. Seeing

Instructor: But **"contemplates beings by means of simple intuitions, as it were with immediate vision."**

Now those capable—right, the previous—the point is that the previous thing is like the arrival at the analytical first principle, but now you can just see it, sort of, without arriving at it, or after arriving at it.

The Nature of Nous: Self-Validating Intuition and the Limits of Discursive Knowledge

Aristotle on Nous as Knowledge of Terms

Instructor: That's something that Aristotle says somewhere.

Student: Yeah. **Posterior Analytics**.

Instructor: And this is often used by the Neoplatonists by saying, yeah, so nous has to give us the terms, the definitions. And so he thought, you know, he agrees that you need like this capacity to know of knowing the forms, of course. Of course, there are other ways to read that, but that's what the

Neoplatonists did with it. In Aristotle's sense, it means something like understanding what a definition is, something like the terms.

Student: Yeah, understanding what a point is, understanding what motion is.

Plato's Timaeus: Two Modes of Knowledge in the Soul

Instructor: And Plato, in the **Timaeus**, declares that **intellect and science are forms of knowledge of the soul concerning being**, right?

Student: Right, that's in that first division.

Instructor: Her sign seems to belong to the soul insofar as the soul is knowledge, whereas the intellect belongs to it insofar as the soul is an image of what truly is intellect.

Student: Knowledge meaning **dianoia** [διάνοια: discursive reasoning], right? The lower kind of knowledge.

Instructor: Yeah, yeah. And intellect is, or nous is the, because the soul is an image of the like separate nous or something.

Student: Yeah, so I guess the difference is something like that. When the soul exercises the **dianoia** and arrives at **episteme** [ἐπιστήμη: scientific knowledge], it is acting just with its own capacities, it's being itself. Whereas when it has these kinds of insights, it is participating in something beyond it.

Instructor: Right. And so it's like incorporating this totally present knowledge that is nous.

Nous as Identity with the Forms

Student: This is because the latter, the nous, sees the intelligible forms or rather is those forms in one intent intuition, as someone says, I don't know, and contact with the objects known, right?

Instructor: Someone could very well be Plotinus. And of course this metaphor of contact is already there in like touching them, not touching the objects, is already in Aristotle. I think we came across it in another one of these text that we read. What was this metaphor of touching on the surface? I forgot which one though.

Student: Right, Aristotle would say something the form of your intellect becoming the same as the form of the thing known or something like that.

Instructor: Exactly. Whereas here the Platonist view is that it's like the form exists itself and it makes itself, it shines, right? And it stimulates our knowing, right?

Student: Right. He is, but there is identity here, is those forms.

Instructor: Yeah. But is in a secondary way, like is an image really.

Student: Well now what is truly in, well was truly indicate intellect is, is the forms really. Those forms make themselves not.

Instructor: Okay, right, right. But it does say **the latter meaning the nous in us, the intellect**—oh no, the latter is what is truly intellect, right? **It sees the intelligible forms or rather is those forms in one intuition and content**, right? It has like an intuition or like a seeing and a contact.

Student: Okay.

The Self-Reflexive Character of Nous: The Sun Analogy

Instructor: Thus it contemplates both itself as thinking and the forms as existing in itself, right? So the content that it makes known is not like just the form that it is, also its character as a nous, right? So when we, analogy with the Sun would be when we see the Sun, the sight of the sun, we don't just see its shape, the disc, so to speak. We also, from looking at the sun, we know what shining is, right? And so the sun both, you know, and so in one perception, we have both the form, the shape of the sun, and also we have this, we grasp from perception what it is just like what it is to see, right? Like the form of formless or something like that or the kind of thing it is.

Student: There's something similar in things where something like, I mean maybe this would be more separate, but something like if we have *dianoia* we somehow by that know what *dianoia* is, but would be like another derivation maybe.

Instructor: Sure, I guess the difference might be that like *dianoia* itself isn't a specific form.

Student: Hence, but there is something like what I'm thinking of is like here we're describing like kinds of knowledge and that's like a meta point to the knowledges that you're talking about, right?

Instructor: I'd be something like by contemplating like what we're doing when we're doing dialectic we could sort of see what dialectic is or like what that kind of ability or form is, right? And same thing by something like someone would say something if you haven't done the practice, like if you haven't counted in the form then you also can't really imagine what that kind of contemplation would be and why that would be a different kind of knowledge than what you do in dialectic.

The Self-Validating Character of Intuition

Student: Sure. Yeah, there's also this part of the idea is kind of like that. Yeah, like, so there's an argument that like intuition is something that you have to know that exists intuitively because otherwise, you know, if you just arrive at the idea that there exists intuition at the end of a reasoning, well then you know through a reasoning, right? And so intuition has to be somehow self-validating.

Lobato's Argument: Light as the Standard of Knowledge

Instructor: And return to the example of light, who really liked this was this Brazilian philosopher Lobato [referring to the Brazilian philosopher who used this argument]. And he argued that like the seeing of source of light was the standard for all knowledge because you see the source of light and so like in one perception you're aware of the object, you're aware of your own active perception, and you're aware of the cause of the cause of your act of perception, right? Because that thing is making itself seen to you, right? And so there's something, there's a certainty here since you have both the knowledge and the cause of the knowledge contained in the knowledge. And so also like when you have an insight you're also certain of it because the insight shows itself as something that's being produced by the form.

Student: Right. Okay. Like there isn't like verification external to it.

Instructor: Yeah, it doesn't require that. But what also means something like that verification can't reach it or could reach it but then it would still be something like the previous point, like we could sort of, I mean I guess there can be like

verification in the sense that since he thinks there are many forms...

The Soul's Ascent to Intellect and the Fifth Mode of Knowledge

The Soul Becoming Intellect

Instructor: Imitating this intellect as far as possible, the soul itself also becomes intellect. **Transcending science and abandoning the many procedures in the course of which it was first embellished.** Right, so this is, let me see what the "first embellished" is in the Greek. I mean, that's at least in the retro version. So this is in the features. Originally, I guess the idea is, of course, that the sciences are kind of beauty, right? If you're good with the ladder of beauty [from Plato's *Symposium*], the sciences are there. And so that's one thing that makes the soul beautiful—the fact that it's an ordered mind by the sciences and the virtues. And so it's setting that aside when it is knowing now no longer through *dianoia* [διάνοια: discursive reasoning] but through *nous* [νοῦς: intellect].

Student: Okay.

The Problem of Translation

Student: This is like the exact kind of sentence that you would say the translation is meaningless for unless you have the key—like "science" means this and "intellect" means exactly...

Instructor: Yeah, I think this is the kind of thing that I try to avoid. And like, you might as well just—it might as well—you might as well just write "A" and "B" and write a key on the side that says "A means this," because the words don't mean anything.

Student: Exactly. Yeah.

The Soul's Contact with Forms vs. the Intellect's Contact

Instructor: **And raising its eye only toward beings, it thinks the things by coming into touch with them in the same way as the intellect.** So the soul, right—the soul raising its eye only towards beings, thinks or knows, I guess, the things—so the Forms—where they, the intellect, by contact, in the same way that the *nous* itself is those things.

Student: Yes.

Instructor: So it will, you know, continue.

Student: Right, right.

Instructor: **But the soul comes into touch with different objects at different times, whereas the intellect comes into touch with them all at the same time. For the father of all things, he says—he being Plato, I guess—bestowed this fate upon it—the fate that the soul is partial, always sees different parts or different things at different times, and the intellect itself would always be all of them.**

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: We don't know where actually—where the—who said this. It could be like a fragment of a Chaldean Oracle or something, especially because this mention of "the father."

Student: Yeah.

How the Intellect Knows All Things Simultaneously

Instructor: So, whereas, for instance, the Form of Horse, when it makes itself known, it makes everything known from the point of view of horseness. And because, I mean, for horses

to exist, there has to be the whole—the entire rest of the physical world. And then I know everything that the physical world exposes—so all of reality. So the Form of Horse, it makes known everything from the perspective of horse. But the soul, when it intuits the Form of Horse, it's just going to know horse, right? And then at another point, you know, then it can move on to a different object and know that. But it won't actually have the knowledge of all things in one single intuition.

Student: And right, and this—you know, the soul becoming intellect would correspond, right, in some sense to the contemplative virtues when you identify with the *talaṣ* [contemplative identification]?

Instructor: Yeah, but he'll get to the course of the [virtues].

Student: Okay.

The Soul's Structural Limitations

Student: But there would be a kind of—like, is there any way for the soul to know the—like, one—like the, not the One, but like the *nous* who has all the Forms at once? Or is—well, necessarily by it—

Instructor: Well, that would be the *nous* of being, and then it would just know being. So the problem would be something like you wouldn't know the particular things in the same time.

Student: Exactly. There's no—the soul doesn't have access to an intuition where it knows all—where it intuits all things at the same time.

Student: Okay.

Instructor: Because there's two things. Like, there's the fact—there's the one thing that the soul sometimes doesn't think, right? Sometimes doesn't know, right? So its knowledge is in time—like it's only in contact when it's in the state of contemplation. And also that its contemplation would always be incomplete, or it would be the all from perspective of one Form. And if you have like a general knowledge, like the Form of Forms or like Form of Being, then you would not be able to—like in the same—in the same intuition, right? Like in the same insight—see the, maybe, the individual Forms, because you would be like something like very general. You could grasp like what being means, but that doesn't tell you in the same time what a horse means.

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: While it does—itsself those things come together somehow. We are talking about it, so we know what we're talking about or are doing.

Student: Yeah.

This Limitation Applies Even to Divine Souls

Instructor: And this limitation goes even for divine souls, right? So even the soul of the world can't get over this limitation that its insights will never be complete, right? And like divine souls who are always contemplating—

Student: Yeah. Yeah.

Instructor: And they're always contemplating, right? Yeah, that would be their difference from us.

Student: Right. I see. Okay.

Section 31: The Fifth Meaning of Knowledge Beyond Intellect

Instructor: Okay. Now 31. **After all of these, I want you to accept even a fifth meaning of knowledge, even**

though you trusted in Aristotle who only leads you [up to] intellectual activity but suggests nothing beyond it—it's only as *nous* as like the final highest thing. But I want you to follow Plato—just asking him nicely—and the theologians before Plato, who are accustomed

Aristotle's Rejection of Divine Madness

Instructor: Aristotle never thought—like talked about this—like madness thing, didn't like it. I don't know that there's a frag—I think—well, problems that we have like only fragments, right? Some things he has a fragment from—I forget which work of his—which is about initiations. And then he says that they create a strong impression on people. So he did have, you know, he did discuss these initiations that are like the model for the Platonic madresses. But I think he thought, yeah, it's just an emotional thing. It's not knowledge.

Oh, there is in the *Eudemean Ethics* he discusses somehow people who have moral luck, right? People who somehow, you know, just know the right thing to do even though they don't have like the proper habits and things. And but even then, I think it's like some kind of *nous*, right? Something's hitting on something. Like Aristotle would say something like intuition is like somehow skipping steps—like knowing the conclusions without the middle terms and so on.

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: But yeah, but even then there's a—it's like it's a—it's kind of like it's a *nous* anyway. It's not the kind of thing that—okay, the madresses are for the Platonists.

Knowledge Beyond Intellect: The One and Divine Madness

The Transition from Intellectual Knowledge to Union with the One

That was the definition of madness that we had before. And no longer our intellectual faculty, from Hermias, right, or some practice, and no longer our intellectual faculty and to connect it with the One itself. Okay, so in other words, the one in us—which is what is accessed by now by madness, like this kind of divine madness—is activating the one in us is connected with the One itself.

The Principle of "Like Knows Like"

For "**all things are known by something similar to them: the sensible by sense perception,**" this is like same knows same, right, big principle, "**the scientific object by science, the intelligible by the intellect, and the One by what is like the One.**"

So then "**when thinking, the soul knows both itself and what it thinks through 'touch,' as we said**"—again, that's thinking, right, the *nous* [Greek: intellect/mind]. But when—and so it knows itself because it has to do with the same principle, right, because *nous* knows by *nous*. We already said that really.

But "**when it's transcending thinking, it knows neither itself nor that towards which it directed its own 'one,' because it's not knowledge.**" So yeah, that's the issue with this.

Read to the end of the paragraph: "**knows neither itself**"—it loves then "**to be quiet,**" quiet of thoughts, right. "**Having closed its eyes to thoughts that go downward,**" that's obvious, "**having become speechless and silent in**

internal silence. For how else could it attach itself to the most ineffable of all things than by putting to sleep the chatter in it? Let it therefore become one, so that it may see the One, or rather not see the One," of course. **"For by seeing, the soul will see an intelligible object and not what is beyond intellect, and it will think something that is one, but not the One itself,"** right.

The Plotinian Doctrine: Knowing by Becoming

So here we're—as you said, well, this is not knowledge. And indeed, it seems to be in first—this is like goes back to Plotinus. Now, you know the One by becoming one yourself, right? And so you don't have—there's nothing that you actually know. You become totally simple. And so you put to rest all the chatter in you. And in some sense, like, you manage to see that everything in your life follows this one single principle, one single good.

A Concrete Illustration: The Stages of Ascent

And just to like color this—color this: so for instance, let's say you are already accomplished ethically. You are already, you know—you have a—you don't consider the passions as guides to good and evil. Like pain and pleasure, who cares? And not only that, but you also have, as it were, a habit of like going through the world and understanding things not in terms of how they look or even what the sciences say about them, but like how they're symbols of the Forms, right?

And but there is still this division in you, say, between the—like your circumstances, your body, your contingent circumstances—and this universal knowledge you have. But you can then—so there's something better than that, which is understanding that even your contingent circumstances and even the privations, the evils that you suffer and so on, these are all products of—like, this is all the style of a single god, right?

So like even your disease you suffer, even the problems you have, this is the kind of thing that, let's say, Dionysus sends to those who follow him. And so then you see that, you know, everything in the world is explained through Dionysus. Only Dionysus exists. And then you've completely simplified your life. Sometimes you even have divine madness and you go around and say, "I am Dionysus."

This kind of thing. So this would be this highest kind of knowledge. But it's, you know, at that point you know it because you are it. So it's a—it's just a kind of natural knowledge. You'll be able to like answer any questions from that thing's perspective, but you won't be able to—but you won't know it as a different object than yourself, because that would be wrong.

The "I Am Dionysus" Example

So, you know, the person who says "I am Dionysus," you can go and ask them questions about what does Dionysus think about A, B, and C, and they answer. But because they are not—but, and so that shows a kind of knowledge of Dionysus, even though they don't have him before them as an object.

Comparison with the Stoic Sage

You can like compare this to the Stoic view, just to give like more comparison. So like the Stoic view—they didn't think that you had that there was like this Aristotelian science or Platonic science starting from our first principle that you demonstrate everything, right? They compared the mind of the

sage to like a taut drum, right? So all the different axioms and presuppositions, they support each other. And then anything that hits the drum bounces. So they get the Stoic sage—it's not that he has deductive science of everything, but rather he's in a position to solve any problem, right? You ask him any question, he gives you an answer. But that doesn't mean that he has, as it were, a science that he can put before his mind and explain to other people.

Student Question: Socrates' Critique of Poets

Student: So it sounds like the—like Socrates liked to criticize the like poets and say, well, maybe they're—or like general crafts—like they don't know how to explain what they're doing.

Instructor: Yeah, of course he says this, especially about—yeah, poets who are inspired don't know how to explain what they're doing. And yeah, but I guess, of course, the idea is that like at the very height there is nothing to explain because you're at the ultimate explainer. So like even, you know, no poet apparently had this—had the idea to answer to Socrates and say, "Well, do you think that explanations go on forever?" That's the idea.

Student: Like another way of thinking about—

Instructor: Yeah, I'd have to think about it. I mean, yeah, I always—we always have to think more about this. It's not clear.

Immediate Knowledge and the Unity of the Self

But it is this kind of, you know, immediate knowledge. I already brought this in earlier when we were talking about dialectic, right, and all these kind of henads [Greek: divine units/principles] and how it's our certainty about our own unity—that I am one, that I want to be one—and so this drive of ours to be one. That, so, you know, my own unity, individuality—this is something that I know simply by wanting it. It's not that I know it by having it as an object objective for myself, right, or even as a distinct reality that appears in me. So like that would be like a *nous*. Rather, it's something that I know because I am it.

And that is what allows me to—and so that's the kind of knowledge that he's talking about. And of course, you falsify it when you—you know, think of yourself as like—when you don't take responsibility for yourself, anything of yourself is just like an object outside yourself, like an object they can study.

Socrates' Philosophical Project

So, and of course, in some sense what Socrates is doing is that he wants people to be—

Proclus vs. Mysticism: Philosophical Argumentation and the Limits of Knowledge

The Question: Does Proclus Collapse Into Mysticism?

Student: And they have all kinds of practices, or just repeat it a thousand times until it starts making sense or something like this, kind of beyond knowledge, knowledge, or all kinds of things like that. And I guess, yeah, do you think it ends up being the same kind of thing? The main difference is that people practice or philosophers up to that point. They're not writing, just giving rituals and I don't know, dances and poetry, but yeah, seems to try to be very precise and philosophical way and then you end up saying well no—

Instructor: Well I think the difference is that he gives arguments for saying well you need this kind of knowledge where you just give up, right? And so there's these arguments

about how reason points beyond itself, right? And so there's space for these things.

And I also think that Proclus can criticize—Proclus can criticize many of the ways that Mystics talk, right? Where there will be, if you take it literally how the mystic talks, then you know Proclus will say well it seems like they're not explaining themselves right. I don't know, this person keeps saying "the one, the one, the one," but you know the one is not something outside you. It plays this role in explaining everything and so you can understand why he's not just talking about an alien in space that you can't see. Of course the Mystic will say well that's what I always meant, but unclear, right?

Key Distinction: Translatability and Conceptual Freedom

So one thing that concepts lets us do is that it actually—so this is something that Proclus lets us do and that the mystic has a very hard time with. Proclus can be translated. Proclus, you can say the same things in different words, right? And so that's part of the idea of getting to concepts for yourselves from this specific formulation. And whereas it avoids the fetishization of the words and the practices. So I think that's something that is different, certainly.

And that's actually something that when I translate Proclus, I want to help people who aren't mystics to free themselves from, you know, just repeating "hypercosmic" and "noetic," "noeric" without really understanding this.

Integration With the Rest of Life

The use of concepts also allows to unite all the mystic insights, all the things that the mystics say, into the rest of your life and it's not just this thing that's totally separate, has nothing to do with anything. And then therefore it's not something that oh you either get it or you don't, because there's a path there. And at the end maybe there's a leap, but yeah, so but there's some kind of path there. I think that's also something that would—

The Limit Case: Plotinus United With the One

But when we get to, and so then when we get to the final issue—okay, when Plotinus is at one with the one, which Porphyry says he did four times when I was with him, is Plotinus indistinguishable from a mystic at that point? A mystic in the negative sense, in the negative sense.

Well, no, I mean, I think we've kind of vitiated the question once or so, but mystic in the negative sense of course we're not going—

Student: Yeah I guess, well one thing you'd be worried—do you agree to something like this? One thing you would be worried about is the particular things. Here there's—one difference between interesting—one kind of mystic and another is to the extent to which they prophesy about actual things or less actual things, if you say, right?

So if you just go around saying well beyond everything there is the one which you can only sense in internal silence blah blah blah, but that makes no difference to anything besides for this practice, let's say, of unifying with the one or something, that's one thing. And it's another thing—but Plato's Divine Madness is talking about another thing, right? It's another thing to say, and now I am possessed by the one, and I tell you to marry this person or something.

Although Plato seems to believe in both of them. But there seems to be an issue, which goes back to something we said

before. Although at this fifth level, it shouldn't have this issue. But you do have this issue of past—probably the one by its oneness somehow knows or doesn't know whatever, but is all things including who we should marry, because it's beyond universals and particulars and therefore and so on. But you do not have that kind of knowledge and if you make a proposition out of it, you're—because of my access to the one I know who you should marry—that seems to be conflating that with one of the prior kinds of things and it might also be beyond human actual capability seems to do that. But then the answer well no it's not the human, it's I'm possessed right, it's the God acting or something and then yeah I guess—

Socrates' Critique: You Can Be a Mystic But Cannot Claim to Be One

Instructor: Yeah I guess Socrates' criticism of the Mystics would be something like you could be a Mystic but you can't claim to be one because that would be making it into a proposition. If you don't claim to have knowledge, he doesn't have a problem with anyone that doesn't claim to have knowledge. He only has a problem if you claim to have knowledge because you're an Oracle. He says, well, you're an Oracle, but you don't have knowledge because you're beyond knowledge.

But then I guess you still end up with a question of practically, does that mean anything?

Practical Effects and Dialectical Justification

Right. We can bring in things that we've mentioned before. So one thing is, of course, yeah there will be practical effects, there will be theurgic effects, right? So this person, you know, they pray and rain comes, right?

And but it's also, yeah there will be this—they won't say that they know. I guess that's maybe a distinction. Of course Proclus here is saying that he knows when he went away—that knowledge of the one is a kind of knowledge, although that's maybe, you know, even to that we can justify this dialectically because he's trying to convince this engineer and so how does he understand—he has to explain, put the one in terms that hold the whole grasp, so he uses this cognitive vocabulary even when it breaks down.

Paradigmatic Virtue: Becoming the Model

And also this thing that I mentioned—that Plato, you know, he just—he didn't just know but rather the things that he did, the things that he produced, the dialogues are things that we can use as objects of contemplation, right? And also you know the poets when they write inspired scripture and then every—they've written something that is itself in some sense a kind of contemplation. It's not just that you understand it but even the order of the words, you know, and the choice of the words and things like that.

So it's in that sense they—you know that sounds like paradigmatic virtue. You become the model.

The Proclean Model of Mystical Knowledge: Integration of Mysticism with Ordinary Life

The Sage as Paradigmatic Model

Instructor: And the point is that the person who has achieved union with the One doesn't merely understand the truth—even the order and choice of their words becomes paradigmatic. They become a model, but not simply one to be imitated or interpreted; they embody the truth in a deeper,

more direct sense. This is paradigmatic virtue in its fullest expression.

The Key Advantage of the Proclean Model: The "I" as the One of the Soul

Instructor: Now, here's the key advantage of the Proclean model: Proclus's framework allows a striking claim—every time a person says "I," "I want," "I believe," they are already referring to the one of the soul, the henadic center we discussed in prior chunks. This means mystical reality is not confined to rare ecstatic moments but is already implicated in ordinary self-reference and everyday experience.

Integration as the Central Payoff

Instructor: This Proclean move achieves a fourfold integration. First, mystic practice and mystic experience are

integrated into the rest of one's life. Second, the mystic is integrated into the rest of society. Third, mysticism as a goal is integrated into ethical progress. This is presented as a distinctive advantage over purely philosophical accounts—for example, strictly Plotinian accounts—which may treat mystical union as radically discontinuous with ordinary life.

Administrative Note

Instructor: Now, I should note that paragraph 32 of the text still needs to be covered. The next session will return to the question of our knowledge of the One and to what degree it qualifies as knowledge, and the solution to the problems raised by Theodore that we referenced in earlier discussion. Next meeting is confirmed for the 28th.

Instructor: Bye-bye.