

Antonio Vargas

CAN THE WILL GROUND SCIENCE?

What is the ultimate ground of knowledge? Is it something like a self-evident proposition or a group of propositions that could be the basis for a *more geometrico* treatise? In this chapter, I show that Proclus answers that no, knowledge is not ultimately grounded in anything like a self-evident proposition. For the Neoplatonist, the science concerned with ultimate grounding is dialectic, and specifically the dialectic of Plato's *Parmenides*, and Proclus' *more geometrico* metaphysics, the *Elements of Theology*, cannot be considered an instance of this science. Some have speculated that it might be so considered because the *Elements* lacks an initial list of axioms and definitions, but I argue that this absence must be understood within the larger context of the *Elements'* many deficiencies vis-a-vis the geometric ideal. The absence of such a list of starting points is thus not especially significant. Furthermore, the *Elements* makes no use of what Proclus, in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, identifies as our access to an unhypothetical first principle – namely, the so-called «one of the soul» (*hen tes psyches*), which on the basis of the *De Providentia* can also be identified with the will¹. I therefore complement

1. *Voluntas* in Moerbeke's Latin, *bouleusis* in Strobel's 2014 retroversion. I favor the term «the will» in this context to bring out its non-cognitive character and thus to highlight the strangeness of Proclus' position. I also find it fitting given its connection to (i) *to agathon*, which I translate here, following convention as «the Good», though it clearly carries something more sinister in Proclus (see Vargas 2020) – a nuance that justifies a more neutral reading such as «the will» rather than, say, «love»; and (ii) its connection to the self (see section IV below). I would like to thank Anne Shepard for pushing me on this terminological issue.

the denial of the *Elements*' status as dialectic with a positive argument on how the will in Proclus can serve as a ground for knowledge. This will is a ground for analysing our simple intuition of Being (which Proclus thinks Parmenides' Way of Truth describes) into Being itself and the Unity of Being. It thus institutes a tension between, on the one hand, the unity of Being and Unity, which is intuited by *nous* and, on the other hand, the transcendence of Unity itself, which is indicated by the will. Such a tension then forms the basis for the derivation of the orders of the gods in Proclus' interpretation of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*.

On the Hypothetical Character of the Elements of Theology

One reason why readers have thought that the *Elements* might embody dialectic is that it does not begin with a list of axioms and definitions – a feature that would seem to correspond to an unhypothetical science². But this is clearly insufficient. The puzzle regarding the lack of a list of starting points in the *Elements* is, in fact, an illusion created by the spell of its mathematical form: the reader sees how relatively didactic the text is when compared to other ancient metaphysical treatises and correctly attributes this, in part, to its organization into propositions and demonstrations³. They then reason that clarity has been achieved – that the work is complete – and thus begin to wonder why it does not conform more closely to Euclid. Indeed, if everything in this text were formally perfect, and the lack of axioms and definitions at the beginning were the texts' only blemish, I would concede that there might be some significance to this fact. But once we snap out of this enchantment cast by its mathematical form, we realise that Proclus' text is incomplete in

2. As in Opsomer 2021, 156 and Opsomer 2022, 32, but proposed earlier in e.g. O'Meara 1989, 197. Opsomer's suggestion that the lack of a list of starting points is due to reliance on common notions perplexes me: if these common notions were readily available to Proclus and his readers, he could just as well have written them down.

3. The logical organization of Proclus' concepts is certainly the primary source of the text's clarity.

many respects and that the absence of a list is merely one among many such deficiencies⁴:

1. There are passages written in a more elaborate or baroque style than is typical for a text modeled on mathematics. See propositions 52, 71, 75, 86, 93, 98, 129, 145, and 209.

2. Some propositions fail to draw upon earlier propositions for their arguments when it would obviously be appropriate to do so, as in prop. 115.

3. Certain propositions contain incomplete arguments, such as prop. 91⁵, or require extensive supplementation to be valid, as in prop. 6.

4. Some propositions seem misplaced, especially propositions 104–107 on perpetuity and immortality, which would fit better alongside propositions 50–55 in the subsection on time and *aion*.

5. There is some inconsistency as to when a proposition is enunciated as a compound statement (as in prop. 21) or when two propositions are proved separately (as in props. 84 and 85).

6. Some corollaries are treated as propositions (prop. 109, prop. 111). In other cases, enunciations are missing (e.g. props. 71 and 209, where what is taken as the enunciation is far too complex a statement) and many demonstrations lack explicit conclusions.

7. The text ends abruptly at prop. 211, with an attack on Plotinus' theory of the soul – an odd place to conclude an introduction to theology⁶.

8. And, last but not least, it appears that a final section on the natures of bodies is missing.

Several features of the text suggest this:

8.1 In the corollaries of prop. 21 and prop. 62, and also in prop. 20, the three orders – henads, *noes*, and souls – are pre-

4. I expand here slightly on the list of deficiencies given in my translation of the *Elements*, Vargas 2024, 29–30, which can be consulted for the arguments concerning individual propositions.

5. I suspect that prop. 91 and 92 were originally intended to form a single proposition, since the enunciation of prop. 92 appears to be expand upon the second, undemonstrated half of 91.

6. We probably tend to exaggerate the distance between Plotinus and Proclus on this issue, given that Proclus held that Plotinus (and others like him) possessed something that remained «up there», namely their divine *daimon* (see Procl. *In Alc.* 72.16–73.8).

sented alongside the order of natures. Thus, if the *Elements of Theology*, in its second part, aims to present a metaphysics of all orders of being, it would also need a section dedicated to natures.

8.2 If, on the other hand, we emphasise the theological character of the investigation in the *Elements of Theology*, we find that Proclus repeatedly highlights the presence of gods in the world (props. 139, 140, 144, 145, 165).

8.3 In sections of the book devoted to henads, *noes*, and souls, each one addresses not only its respective order but also the principle of the order that follows. Thus, the section on the gods concerns not only the gods but also real being (see prop. 138); the section on *noes* concerns not only *noes* but also the forms known by souls; and, finally, the section on souls concerns not only souls but also their «vehicles», the primary bodies in the world.

These are all reasons indicating that the *Elements* is incomplete, and therefore that we should not read too much into its lack of a list of axioms. Indeed, it is plausible that elaborating such a list would be the very last thing the author of a work entitled *Elements* would do: only after establishing all the claims he seeks to ground, and exhausting attempts to derive those claims from simpler ones, would an «elementarizer» finally settle on a group of basic claims and terms. Thus, when faced with a text that is deficient in many respects, we should even expect it to lack the crowning glory of any such endeavor: a minute list of basic definitions and assumptions from which, astonishingly, the principles of an entire science can be derived.

On the Starting Point of Dialectic

An even more important point to be made here is that dialectic in Proclus could never take the form of an *Elements* – not even that of a completed *Elements* with perfectly valid proofs and self-evident definitions and axioms. For there can be no self-evident grasp of the unhypothetical first principle, Unity or *to hen*, which is «more ineffable than all silence and more unknowable than all individual existence» (*Theol. Plat.* II 11.65.13–14). As I will discuss below, human beings «know» unity, if at all, not by *nous*, not in the clarity of *noesis*, but through our constitutive will

for the Good, which Proclus also calls the unity or one of the soul, *hen tes psyches*. It is only this immediately present unity within us that can serve as an unhypothetical starting point. By definition, any unity discovered through an argument for a first principle is hypothetical, insofar as it depends on the premises and starting points of that argument. It is true that Proclus, in propositions 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, and 20 of the *Elements*, argues about the first principle, demonstrating its existence (5, 8, 11), the identity of its notions (12 and 13), and its superiority to the principles of change (20). Yet in these arguments he presupposes certain premises as conceded or self-evident, relies on definitions, and builds on earlier propositions. Thus, although the first principle is discussed and indeed present in the *Elements*, it does not appear *qua* an unhypothetical first principle. Some have been tempted to see in the first few propositions (1–5 or 1–13) an ascent to the One, which would then be followed by a descent⁷. But although there may be some thematic truth to this interpretation, it is certainly not logically true: later propositions often introduce premises and concepts that simply cannot be derived from 1–13 alone (for instance, the necessary existence of change presupposed by prop. 14). There is therefore no logical sense in which prop. 1–13 brings us to the principles for the rest of the book.

There are certainly affinities between the *Elements of Theology* and dialectic. In the first place, it is unmistakably a theological text – not only because of its title, but because it treats all things as dependent on the first principle⁸. All readers of the text seem to agree that it falls into two parts: a first, more general part on the first principle and causality in general, and a second part dealing with the various specific orders of existence. It thus seems clear that the work is intended, at least ideally, to encompass all kinds of being⁹. Dialectic too is supposed to show how all things depend upon the unhypothetical first principle, ascending to it and then descending again, proving those hypotheses that other sciences simply take for granted.

7. E.g. Opsomer 2021, 157, and Opsomer 2022, 28–30.

8. See *In Prm.* I 640.13–643.4, and also Steel 2005.

9. On the division of the text, see Ruz 2024, 113–15. As noted in Section I, a concluding set of theorems on natures and bodies appears to be missing.

Furthermore, Proclus tells us that dialectic makes ample use of the methods of division, definition, demonstration, and analysis – and indeed, it is in dialectic that these methods properly have their home (*In Prm.* 1003.6–7 *In Eucl.* 42.13–43.1). Starting from Proclus’ claims to this effect, many researchers have shown how these methods are present in dialectic and employed in the *Elements*¹⁰. However, this is not sufficient to show that the *Elements* is dialectic, for the key feature that distinguishes dialectic from all other sciences is its relation to the unhypothetical first principle *qua* unhypothetical. The analyses in propositions 5, 8, 11, and 20, for instance, which argue for the existence of a first principle, all depend on some definition or hypothesis; thus, they do not provide the absolute starting point of dialectic, but something that depends on other starting points.

Opsomer (2021) and Kiosoglou (2023) have observed in this regard that certain propositions which are accompanied by proofs in the *Elements* are mentioned elsewhere in Proclus’ works as axioms to be accepted without proof. This raises the interesting possibility that Proclus regarded the whole list of propositions in the *Elements* as axiomatic¹¹: each might, in principle, be susceptible to being known as self-evident through *noesis*. In his interpretation of the *Timaeus*, Proclus often remarks that Timaeus first announces a conclusion and then provides an argument for it, taking this to indicate that the character directly intuites the truth of the conclusion though *nous* and then offers an argument, by way of *dianoia*, for the benefit of his listeners¹². Likewise, Proclus construes the dialectic exercise of the *Parmenides* as a laborious «task» for the Eleatic philosopher, since he is descending from his habitual state of intuitive apprehension to the use of discursive reasoning for the sake of Socrates’ training¹³. Thus, perhaps the *Elements* as a whole is knowable through *noesis* and there is no list

10. See Opsomer 2022, Lernould 1987, Bonelli 2016, and Kiosoglou 2023.

11. To be clear, neither author makes the leap I am making here from their starting points.

12. See *In Ti.* II 114.5–115.5 Van Riel (= I 282.27–283.18 Diehl); II 182.18–183.3 Van Riel (= I 330.12–20 Diehl); II 225.17–226.10 Van Riel (= I 360.5–17 Diehl); and see also *In Prm.* VI 1125.14–16.

13. *In Prm.* V 1020.9–12.

of axioms because it itself constitutes such a list, merely accompanied by proofs for the benefit of learners¹⁴.

By introducing the theme of *noesis* and self-evidence, this reconstruction of the *Elements*' internal logic brings us to what truly separates it from dialectic. For even if we were to imagine that the *Elements* constitutes a list of self-evident truths, self-evidence alone is not sufficient to bestow «unhypothetical» status upon a proposition. Indeed, Proclus is quite clear that the One-Being – the hypothesis from which Parmenides sets out in the dialectical exercise – is Being itself, existing separately from all particular beings, and is thus known only through *noesis* (Procl. *In Prm.* I 704.7–18):

All beings actually come from a single unit (*monas*) which is called primarily Being, by which they are and are named beings according to their respective orders; and from this unit all beings share a predicate with one another (συμπαθῇ ἐστὶν ἀλλήλοις) and are in a sense the same, as coming from the One-Being. It is to this union of all beings that Parmenides was looking when he demanded that we call the All one, primarily and most strictly the All which is united with the One, but also the All simply (ἀπλῶς); for all things, in so far as they participate in the One-Being are in a sense the same as one another and one¹⁵.

However, Being itself is not the unhypothetical first principle, because it has a further cause, namely the One or Unity itself (Procl. *In Prm* V 1033.23–33):

Parmenides begins from the One Being [...] and ascends from the One Being to the One, thus indicating clearly that the One in the strict sense wishes only this, to be One, and «snatches itself away» from Being; and that the One Being is second to this by reason of its descent, going forth towards being, whereas the One itself is superior even to the «is», and the hypothesis «if it is»; for together with the «is», the One in the strictest sense no longer remains¹⁶.

14. This would correspond to the claim in *Resp.* VI 511b–e that dialectic knows through *nous*, a topic which Proclus discusses at *In Eucl.* 42.9–44.24.

15. Tr. Morrow and Dillon 1987, modified. See *In Prm.* V 986.21–27 on how the primary *eide* are not definable and are apprehensible solely by *nous*.

16. Tr. Morrow – Dillon 1987, modified.

That there is no *noesis*, no self-evident grasp of Unity, is clear for three reasons familiar to scholars of Neoplatonism:

(i) because Unity is the Good beyond being, and only beings can be known by *nous* (*El. Theol.* 8, 13, 123);

(ii) because the very duality of *nous* – which characterises self-evidence, in which there is an activity (knowing, «being evident») and a being (the *noeton*, the «self» that is evident) with identical content – makes it clear that it is not simple Unity and is below the One (*El. Theol.* 20);

(iii) and finally, because all beings and all *noeta* are a mixture of limit and the infinite, and thus fall short of Unity itself (*El. Theol.* 89).

*A Short Digression on Plat. Theol. II 12: What is the First Thought of Dialectic?*¹⁷

The above presentation of an *eidos*, the One-Being, as Parmenides' starting point in the hypotheses of the eponymous dialogue may come as a surprise. Although Proclus clearly refers to Parmenides as beginning from the One-Being in his commentary on the dialogue (e.g. *In Prm.* V 1033.17-1034.29, VI 1071.4-7, 1079.4-20), a passage in his *Platonic Theology* has given many readers the impression that his starting point is actually a proposition (*Procl. Theol. Plat.* II 12.66.2-20):

What, then, would be the very first thought (*noema*)¹⁸ of the science that goes forth from *nous* and shows itself? What else will we say but that it is the simplest and most knowable of all thoughts within that science? For this is also especially most like the contemplation of *nous*. What is it then? «Unity», says Parmenides; «if there is Unity, it would not be many». For multitudes participate in Unity necessarily, but Unity does not participate in Unity but is Unity itself. But neither is primary Unity participated in: for pure Unity would not be mixed with any

17. I would like to thank Carlos Steel for his insistence that I revisit this passage.

18. On *noema* in Proclus, see his discussion of Socrates' suggestion at *Prm.* 132b3-6 that the *eide* are thoughts (*In Prm.* IV 891.4-898.1). The term appears to denote both an activity of thinking and an innate concept belonging to the soul's essence.

multitude, nor would what it is to be one receive any addition of what is worse than it [...]. This, therefore, Parmenides did not deem worthy of demonstration; rather, as most evident to all, he announced it first, given the (as it were) 'opposition' between multiplicity and Unity.

To reconcile this passage with those in which Proclus clearly states that the One-Being is the starting point of the first hypothesis, Lernould (2021, 100-1) goes so far as to identify the One-Being with the proposition «Unity is not many». I see no need, however, for such a radical reinterpretation. Indeed, it seems clear that what is called here «the first thought» of this science is the first negation of the first hypothesis (*In Prm.* VI 1089). Yet this is clearly presented as a consequence of the claim «Unity is», which expresses the existence of the One-Being. As Proclus explains: «Parmenides begins from the One-Being for «if there is Unity», refers to this order of realities, since it contains besides «Unity» also «is» (*In Prm.* V 1033.18-20).

However, if the One Being is known through *nous* (as *In Prm.* V 986.21-27 suggests), then a science that begins by stating its existence is indeed one that starts *apo nou*, «from *nous*». The very first predication it makes of the One-Being, «Unity is not many», may thus be legitimately called a *noema* – not simply because it is a thought, but because it is a product of *nous*¹⁹. It is true that no demonstration or argument is offered for this inference, nor is there any appeal made to a principle such as «something is not its opposite»; rather, the inference is presented as immediately evident. But it still rests on a more basic insight into the One-Being.

Proclus is eager to show that Parmenides' premises are self-evident and that his arguments are valid. However, neither the *Platonic Theology* nor the parallel passage *In Prm.* VI 1092.13-1093.13 describes his starting points as «the unhypothetical first principle», in such a way that Platonic dialectic could be reduced to a model of deriving all knowledge from a set of self-evident truths. But if science is not grounded in self-evidence, then in what is it grounded? The answer, as we will see, is «the one of the soul» or «the will». But how can the will ground science?

19. See *In Prm.* IV 897.2-5.

The Discovery of the Will as Ground in the First Hypothesis

In *De Providentia* §57.60, Proclus defines the will (*voluntas*) in contrast to the power of choice: whereas the latter is capable of pursuing both real and apparent goods, the will is a unitary power directed solely toward the good. The man who lives according to the will «becomes god and governs the whole world» as he says. This agrees with *In Ti.* II 241.15–243.10 Van Riel (= I 371.9–372.18 Diehl), where Proclus presents the will (*bouleusis*) as mediating between the goodness of the gods and their exercise of *pronoia*, understood as their characteristic act of bestowing goodness upon things, prior to any divine plan or *nous* (*El. Theol.* 120). The potential of the will to deify us, together with its role in the gods' exercise of their most characteristic activity, would already be sufficient to identify it with the one of the soul, the soul's participation in Unity itself (see *De dec. dub.* §63–65). But there is no need to rest my argument solely on this. Indeed, in the *Commentary on the Parmenides* we learn that the soul's innate striving for the Good itself is actually identified with the one of the soul (*In Prm.* VII 509.10–24). Proclus explains this as the faculty through which the soul unites itself as an «I», and says «I am» and «I do such and such» (*In Prm.* IV 957.22–958.10)²⁰.

Proclus turns to this faculty when resolving an aporia concerning the first hypothesis: how is it possible that the soul should not «lose itself in the void of non-being» once everything has been denied of Unity itself, and imagination and thought have nothing to hold on to? (Procl. *In Prm.* VI 1072.1–11)

So then, we need demonstrative power in our preliminary assumptions, whereas we need intellectual activity in our investigations of being (for the orders of being are denied of Unity), and we need inspired impulse in our consciousness of that which transcends all beings, in order that we may not slip unawares from our negations into Not-Being and its invisibility by reason of our indefinite imagination²¹,

20. On this passage, see Costa Lima 2012, 119–21 and Vargas 2025. In this context, it is significant that Proclus' explanation of the one of the soul as the source of selfhood arises precisely as he seeks an analogy to divine *pronoia*.

21. Cf. *In Prm.* VI 1105.32–42.

but rousing up the unity within us and, through this, warming the soul we may connect ourselves to Unity itself and, as it were find mooring, taking our stand above everything intelligible within ourselves and dispensing with every other one of our activities, in order that we may consort with it alone and perform a dance around it, leaving behind all the intellections of the soul which are directed to secondary things²².

Proclus here claims that it is our own striving for unity – which points to Unity itself as what is ultimately desired, even in the lack of any concept or image of unity – that allows us to refer to Unity itself after total negation. This teaches us something about how the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* and its negations of all predicates of Unity is supposed to work. It shows us that Proclus interprets the final denial – «Therefore it is not named or spoken of, nor is it the object of opinion or knowledge, nor does anything that is perceive it» (*Prm.* 142a) – not as a denial of every kind of knowledge of unity, but only of the kinds of knowledge that are listed: the will and its reference to unity remain untouched. The first hypothesis thus begins with the One-Being, known through *noesis*, and ends by showing that our reference to Unity itself, as the cause of the Unity of the One-Being, is independent of that *noesis*. Phrased differently, the series of negations shows that when we, together with Parmenides, claim that «All is one» (see *supra* 107), the unity we predicate and intend is prior and independent of any insight into being. The argument therefore is not a process of acquiring new knowledge, but of bringing the reasoner to realise that they already possess an innate reference to Unity itself.

Proclus stresses that our striving toward unity is not, as it were, a presence or activity of Unity itself within us (Procl. *In Prm.* VII Finis Graece Redditus 511.3–8):

But our notion and apprehension of Unity is in our nature itself and does not come about through perception or cognition. The other notions, being cognitions, coexist with their objects and can name them, for their objects can be grasped by them. This notion, however, is not cognitive and does not grasp Unity, but is essentially an operation of nature and a natural desire for unity²³.

22. Tr. Morrow – Dillon 1987, modified.

23. Tr. Morrow – Dillon 1987, modified.

The denial Unity's presence in the will is crucial, for it is precisely because Unity itself is not present in the will except as its ever-absent goal that our own unity can serve as a truly absolute and unhypothetical starting point for our thinking, one that contains no duality at all. In this respect, it is significant that Proclus also discusses the unity within us as a *synthema* of Unity²⁴, as opposed to an *eikon*: for a *synthema* need not resemble what it refers to, nor mirror its content in any way (*In R.* I 198.1–25)²⁵.

We can compare this to Iamblichus' reply to Porphyry's remark that he «concedes the existence of the gods» (*Myst.* I 3.1–11):

That is not at all the way to put it. For an innate knowledge about the gods is coexistent with our nature, and is superior to all judgement and choice, reasoning and proof. This knowledge is united from the outset with its own cause and exists in tandem with the essential striving of the soul towards the Good. Indeed, to tell the truth, the contact we have with the divine is not even knowledge. Knowledge, after all, is separated (from its object) by some degree of otherness. But prior to what knows another as being itself other, there is the unitary connection with the gods that is natural <and indivisible>²⁶.

It is important to bear in mind that Iamblichus and Proclus disagreed on the interpretation of the first hypothesis: Iamblichus thought that it concerned Unity and the gods, whereas Proclus believed it concerned only Unity, with the orders of the gods discussed exclusively in the second hypothesis (*In Prm.* VI 1066.13–1070.12). Iamblichus can nonetheless help us to understand more clearly the character of the one of the soul as an absolute starting point. Yet when it comes to the knowledge of the gods in Proclus, we must turn to how our striving for unity functions in the second hypothesis, where positive conclusions are derived concerning the One. How, indeed, can something that is not a judgement – indeed, not even a concept – allow us to draw any positive conclusions at all?

24. See *Theol. Plat.* II 56.16–57.3, *In Ti.* II 8.9–14 Van Riel (= I 210.3–8 Diehl), *In Or. Chald.* IV 63–66.

25. The innate concepts (*logoi*) of the soul, however, are clearly called *eikones* of the forms in *El. Theol.* 195.

26. Tr. Clarke *et al.* 2003, modified.

The Use of the Will as Ground in the Second Hypothesis

We should recall that Proclus does not think that the unity of the soul alone suffices for the interpretation of the *Parmenides*. As *In Prm.* VI 1072.1–11 (quoted above, 110–11) states, *nous* and *dianoia* are also required. *Nous* allows us to grasp the definitions of the orders of beings and to intuit the truth of the initial hypothesis, «Unity is», which Proclus interprets to mean «there is the One-Being». What the one of the soul appears to ground is the claim at the beginning of the second hypothesis, that «unity» has a meaning that is entirely independent of beings (*Pl. Prm.* 142b–c):

«Consider from the beginning: if unity is, can it be, but not partake of being?» – «It cannot».

«So there would also be the being of unity, and that is not the same as unity. For if it were, it couldn't be the being *of* unity, nor could unity partake of it. On the contrary, saying that 'unity is' would be like saying that unity is unity. But now that is not the hypothesis – namely, what the consequences must be, if unity is unity – but rather if unity is. Isn't that so?» – «Of course».

«Is that because 'is' signifies something other than 'unity'?» – «Necessarily».

«So whenever someone, being brief, says 'unity is,' would this simply mean that unity partakes of being?» – «Certainly»²⁷.

For reasons that would take us too far afield, Proclus interprets this initial passage in what appears to be a topsy-turvy manner. He takes it to claim not that unity participates in being, but that being – or, rather, the One-Being – participates in a unity (a *henad*). Thus, according to Proclus, Plato is offering an analysis of the One-Being into a triad that comprises a *henad*, its power, and the One-Being that is generated by the unity through its power (*Procl. Theol. Plat.* III 24.84.20–26):

This triad is thus the summit of the intelligibles: the unity, the power, the being – i.e., the producer, the product, and the power dependent on the unity, which is brought together with the being. It is this triad, then, that *Parmenides* immediately presents at the beginning

27. Tr. Gill – Ryan 1997, modified.

of the second hypothesis, attaching to the unity the simplest participation of *ousia* [...].

The one of the soul preserves this analysis of the One-Being from a possible objection of the following kind: «The ‘unity’ of Being is a mere abstraction and nothing real – as the first hypothesis’ attempt to think a pure unity shows». Against this, one can reply: «I know Unity is something beyond being from my own case, for I desire unity in the necessary absence of any kind of knowledge (and where there is no knowledge, there is no being)».

Furthermore, our unity not only allows us to distinguish Being from Unity; it also allows us to distinguish between Unity, which is entirely unparticipated, and the unity of Being, which must be participated by Being. That is, it allows us to recognise the henad or divine unity that must ground Being’s unity. Thus, Proclus can perhaps accept Iamblichus’ claim that we know the gods to the extent that we desire the Good – for, in cooperation with *nous*, the one of the soul also allows souls to have an innate knowledge not only of the first principle itself, but also of the gods.

The key to understanding how the cooperation of unity and *nous* allows one to know the gods lies in Proclus’ repeated emphasis that each negation in the first hypothesis corresponds to an affirmation in the second (e.g. *In Prm.* VI 1061.17–1063.4). Thus, for instance, the affirmation that «Unity is» at the beginning of the second hypothesis contradicts the negation «Unity is not» at the end of the first hypothesis at *Prm.* 141e9–10. Furthermore, for Proclus, the only predications that can be affirmed – and thus the only ones that can be denied of Unity – are those asserting that Unity itself belongs to a certain «order of being» (*In Prm.* VI 1085.11–1086.7). Examples of such claims would be that unity depends on being in time, or that unity depends on being a self-identical substance. According to Proclus, the former is denied in the conclusions that «Unity is not in time» (*Prm.* 140e–142e, *In Prm.* VII 1212.26–1213.1), and the latter in the denial that Unity is the same as and different from itself and the things other than it (*Prm.* 139b–e, *In Prm.* VII 1176.22–27). According to Proclus, by denying that Unity depends on these specific kinds of unification, the argument also shows that Unity is distinct from the specific kind of unities or henads that are

responsible for producing it, what he calls an «order of the gods». Thus, the negations of the first hypothesis reveal Unity's transcendence with respect to all these divine orders.

The affirmative conclusions of the second hypothesis, however, all demonstrate – by contrast – the existence of these divine orders. As we saw above, the very first conclusion allows Proclus to distinguish within Parmenides' One-Being the divine unity or god responsible for unifying it. To see how the one of the soul continues to function as a productive ground, let us also consider the following conclusion, that Unity is a whole and has parts (Pl. *Prm.* 142c7–d8):

«Let's again say what the consequences will be, if unity is. Consider whether this hypothesis must not signify that unity is such as to have parts». – «How so?»

«In this way: if we state the 'is' of the One-Being (τοῦ ἐνὸς ὄντος), and the 'unity' of the Unity that is (τοῦ ὄντος ἐνός), and if being and oneness are not the same, but both belong to that same thing that we hypothesised, namely, the One-Being, must it not itself, since it is one, be a whole, and the parts of this whole be Unity and being?» – «Necessarily».

«Shall we call each of these two parts a part only, or must the part be called part of the whole?» – «Of the whole».

«Therefore whatever is one both is a whole and has a part» – «Certainly»²⁸.

«The One-Being» appears here alongside the inverse expression, «the Unity that is». If Proclus explicitly interprets the former as Being itself in its transcendent unity beyond all beings (see *supra* 107), then «the One that is» can plausibly be understood as the henad that unifies the One-Being and whose existence is, for Proclus, demonstrated in the previous argument of the second hypothesis. From a Procline point of view, then, this argument now shows that once the distinction between the One-Being and its henad has been drawn, we are confronted with a new kind of unity: the unity of a whole composed of parts. This whole exists because of the causal relationship between them, whereby the henad produces the One-Being

28. Tr. Gill – Ryan 1997, modified.

through its power. As Proclus puts it «from the power [of the henad] comes the second kind of wholeness [i.e. being a whole of parts: see *El. Theol.* 65]» (*Theol. Plat.* III 25.88.18). Thus, once we have analysed the One-Being into Being and its specific kind of unity, this analysis requires the existence of another kind of unity: the specific unity of wholeness. The one-of-the-soul is necessary in maintaining the separation of one of the two parts of this wholeness, the henad or separately existing unity, and also in ensuring a further conclusion that according to Proclus is demonstrated in the passage quoted above: namely, that there is a henad responsible for this particular kind of unity, i.e., wholeness, in the same way that the first argument showed that there is a henad responsible for the peculiar kind of unity that is being. In the argument of the second hypothesis, then, the one of the soul always serves two functions: on the one hand, our innate knowledge of unity beyond being grounds the analyses in all the prior arguments, thereby enabling the separation of the henads from the beings they cause; on the other, in each new argument, a new kind of unity of being is established (wholeness, totality, number, and so on). For each of these unities, the one of the soul enables the analysis of that new unity of being into a kind or order of being on the one hand, and a transcendent unity or henad on the other, which unifies this kind or order of being. This constant and renewed analysis drives the argument toward its conclusion that there are ever-new and increasingly complex forms of unity, ultimately producing, according to Proclus, an exhaustive list of all the orders of the gods and the kinds of being they are responsible for (*In Prm.* VI 1083.1-1088.2).

Conclusions

In conclusion, our will, the unity of the soul, grounds the science of dialectic (and thereby, all sciences) by requiring that *dianoia*, our discursive thought, at every step break up and analyse the simple unity of being grasped in *noesis* into modes of being and orders of gods. Thus, it is not surprising that the deduction of the essence of the transmigrating soul and its

thought in time appears in the third hypothesis, according to Proclus, motivated by the need to both deny and affirm all predicates of unity²⁹. *Dianoia* arises precisely because of the interplay of Unity, represented by the first hypothesis, and *nous*, represented by the second hypothesis.

In any case, it should be clear that this absolute ground – this willing of our own selfhood, which has no further cause – does not function as a self-evident proposition from which all science is derived. Rather, it provides science with its foothold in the absolute, but science itself still requires *nous* (the insight into self-evident unities) and *dianoia* (discursive thought). In this regard, there is an analogy between Proclus' theory of causes and his account of dialectic. In his view of causes, a cause essentially remains what it is, and its effect manifests itself around the cause³⁰. Correspondingly, in his account of dialectic, the knowledge of unity remains what it is, and *nous* and *dianoia* generate science by circling around the absolute certainty of our will.

Finally, it should be obvious to all that none of this is present in the *Elements of Theology*. The *Elements of Theology* is an attempt to render the theorems of theology in a mathematical and thus more easily learnable form, but it does not do so dialectically. It does not start from an unhypothetical first principle; rather, it seeks to discover a set of basic hypotheses from which all theological truths can be derived. It is an incomplete attempt, and that is why there is no list of axioms in the text as we have it. Nevertheless, this is the direction it tends toward – this is the project, insofar as we can recognise one in the text. But even if this project were completed, it would never start from an unhypothetical first principle, because the mode of reasoning here is fundamentally different from that in Plato's *Parmenides* (in light of the *Parmenides* commentary).

29. Pl. *Prm.* 155e4–6; see Trouillard 1972, 133–54.

30. Procl. *El. Theol.* 30.6–7: τὸ γὰρ πάντα προῖδὸν οὐδὲν ἂν ἔχοι ταυτὸν πρὸς τὸ μένον, ἀλλ' ἔστι πάντα διακεκριμένον. What goes forth entirely has «nothing» in common with its cause, which implies that the cause, qua cause, has no activity» or «effort» emanating from it, because it is entirely immutable. Therefore, the effect must possess an aspect of its own that remains in the cause, and from which it separates itself in its production.

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Antonio Vargas, *Can the Will Ground Science?*

This chapter has two aims: to determine the ultimate ground of knowledge in Proclus and to argue that his answer to the problem of an unhypothetical first principle is not a self-evident proposition. The author contends that the science grounding all knowledge on an unhypothetical first principle is the Parmenidean dialectic, and Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, despite its *more geometrico* style, is not an instance of this ultimate science. The speculation that it might be so considered because the *Elements* lacks an initial list of axioms is challenged; the author argues this absence is insignificant given the text's overall deficiencies vis-à-vis the geometric ideal. Furthermore, the *Elements* fails to utilize what Proclus, in the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, identifies as our true access to an unhypothetical first principle: the so-called «one of the soul». Based on the *De Providentia*, this «one of the soul» can be partially identified with the will. The essay thus complements its negative argument regarding the *Elements* with a positive argument demonstrating how the will in Proclus can serve as a viable ground for knowledge.

Antonio Vargas
 Universidade de Brasília (Brazil)
 antonioiv@gmail.com

