

III.
OTHER SCIENCES AND THE DIVINE

Gerd Van Riel

PROCLUS' POTAMOLOGY:
THE ROLE OF RIVERS IN ESCHATOLOGY

Plato's Underworld

In the ancient Greek descriptions of Hades, the underworld was always associated with rivers. Hesiod and Homer are still rather vague about the topology of the underworld, and in general, they seem to know only one river: the Styx, which starts from Oceanus and flows into the cavities of Tartarus¹. Yet in the tenth book of the *Odyssey*, the number of rivers in the underworld is suddenly extended: in this passage (X 513–515), Hades is located where three rivers meet, one of which is said to be a branch of Styx:

There into Acheron flow Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus, which is a branch of the water of Styx, and there is a rock, and the junction of the two resounding rivers².

So according to this text, there are four rivers in Hades, which stands in contrast with Homer's and Hesiod's account elsewhere. The question has been raised whether this is not a later addition, stemming from a time (probably before the standardisation of the Homeric corpus by Pisistratus in the late 6th c. BCE) when the topography of Hades had become more sophisticated³.

1. Mackie 1999, 486.

2. ἔνθα μὲν εἰς Ἀχέροντα Πυριφλεγέθων τε ῥέουσι / Κώκυτός θ', ὃς δὴ Στυγὸς ὕδατος ἔστιν ἀπορρώξ, / πέτρῃ τε ξύνεσις τε δῶα ποταμῶν ἐριδοῦπων. See Mackie 1999, 485.

3. Mackie 1999, 486–87.

At any rate, by the time of Plato, a standard view of the rivers in Hades had been laid down. There are four of them: Styx, Acheron, Pyriphlegethon, and Cocytus.

An obvious question then is, how about the fifth river, called Lethe in the tradition? In fact, the earliest extant reference to the «river of forgetfulness» is Plato's *Republic*, and even there it is not so clear that we are dealing with a river called Lethe. It is true that before Plato, the poet Simonides of Ceos (6th–5th c. BCE) mentioned the δόμοι Λήθης, the Halls of Lethe, but this seems to be a reference to the goddess of forgetfulness rather than to a river. The next occurrence is found in *The Frogs* of Aristophanes (dated 405 BCE), where explicit reference is made (v. 186) to τὸ Λήθης πεδῖον, the plain of Forgetfulness, located in the underworld. And this is exactly the formula used by Plato in the myth of Er in the tenth book of the *Republic*. In this text, Plato mentions only one river, called Ameles, «the river of Unheeding», situated in the plain of Lethe (Pl. *Resp.* X 621a–b):

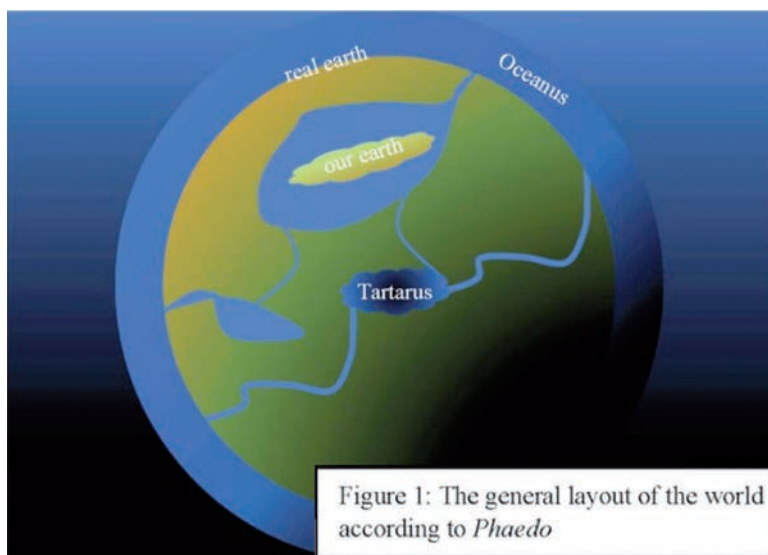
They travelled to the plain of Forgetfulness in burning, choking, terrible heat, for it was empty of trees and earthly vegetation. And there, beside the river of Unheeding, whose water no vessel can hold, they camped, for night was coming on. All of them had to drink a certain measure of this water, but those who weren't saved by reason drank more than that, and as each of them drank, he forgot everything and went to sleep⁴.

The souls drank a certain measure of this water, meaning that they might eventually have some memory of the lessons they learnt in the underworld⁵, except for the ones whose reason was not strong enough to save them: they forgot everything. When they finally fell asleep, an earthquake opened the way to this world again, and the souls left the underworld. Interestingly, in the conclusion to this myth, Socrates wraps up this narrated

4. πορεύεσθαι ἅπαντας εἰς τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδῖον διὰ καύματός τε καὶ πνίγους δεινοῦ· καὶ γὰρ εἶναι αὐτὸ κενὸν δένδρων τε καὶ ὅσα γῇ φύει. σκηναῖσθαι οὖν σφᾶς ἤδη ἑσπέρας γιγνομένης παρὰ τὸν Ἀμέλητα ποταμόν, οὗ τὸ ὕδωρ ἀγγεῖον οὐδὲν στέγειν. μέτρον μὲν οὖν τι τοῦ ὕδατος πᾶσιν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πίνειν, τοὺς δὲ φρονήσσει μὴ σφωζομένους πλέον πίνειν τοῦ μέτρου· τὸν δὲ αἰεὶ πίνοντα πάντων ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι, tr. Grube 1992.

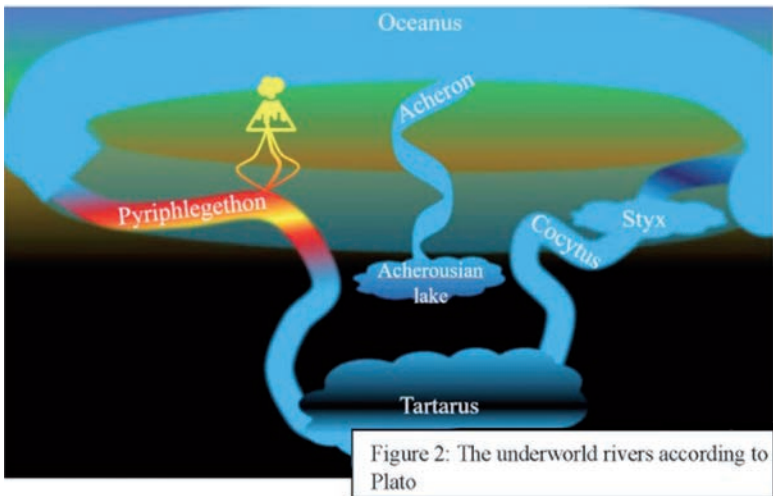
event using the term «river of forgetfulness» (τὸν τῆς λήθης ποταμόν, *Resp.* X 621c). So it seems to be Plato himself who introduced this fifth river, and he probably did not even mean to call it Lethe – its name is Ameles, and it is only in retrospect that it is described as the river of forgetfulness (without capital letters). At any rate, the plain of Forgetfulness did exist before Plato, but it is interesting to see that through Plato's account, the river Lethe came to join the other four rivers in later tradition.

Of these other four rivers, Plato's *Phaedo* offers not just a description, but they become part of a complete geography of the underworld. In the first place, according to the *Phaedo* narrative (*Phd.* 111e–112a), Tartarus is an immensely wide hole in the earth, similar to all the different cavities that constitute different biospheres like ours, but deeper than all others, and spreading unto the centre of the sphere of the earth. There, in the place called Tartarus, all water that flows under the surface of the earth comes together and is pumped up again.



5. See Morgan 2000, 209.

Furthermore, in this account of the *Phaedo*, Styx is not referred to as a river, but as a lake formed by the river Cocytus. And Oceanus is considered to be a river, a stream that flows around the earth. According to this description, the Acheron flows away from Oceanus into a cavity of the earth, to debouch into the Acherousian lake. Cocytus and Pyriphlegethon also originate in Oceanus, and they flow through the depths of the earth into Tartarus, each of the two passing along the Acherousian lake, though without mingling with its waters (*Phd.* 112e-113a). Pyriphlegethon dives into the earth through hot and fiery regions, and Cocytus winds through a wild region with a blue-gray color, then forming the Stygian lake, before descending back into Tartarus (*Phd.* 113b-c). At the same time, Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus are said to bring the souls out of Tartarus in a cycle that passes again via the Acherousian lake (*Phd.* 114b-c), which is no doubt due to the pumping movement of the entire water household of the system⁶.



6. See Pender 2012.

The Later Neoplatonists' Reading: μυθικῶς and φυσικῶς

In the interpretation of the later Neoplatonists, the topography of the underworld is not just an allegorical feature, but also a real description of a truly existing part of the cosmos. This interpretive starting point is then bound to face Aristotle's criticisms as laid down in the *Meteorologica*, where Aristotle contends that Plato's description cannot be correct, as it implies rivers flowing upwards, thus challenging the laws of physics⁷.

It would have been easy for interpreters of Plato to dismiss Aristotle's critique by stating that this is just imagery, and that Aristotle lacked the phantasy to see that this should be taken metaphorically. And obviously, on the one hand, that is what the Neoplatonists will do: according to them, the myth of the *Phaedo* provides us with a metaphorical description of the place of punishment below the earth, where the souls are gathered in the afterlife. It is to be taken as an exhortation to become godlike, and to avoid punishment in the afterlife⁸. Hence, in many respects, Plato's language needs to be taken μυθικῶς⁹.

Yet, at the same time, in the Neoplatonic interpretation, this mythical meaning can only make sense if it relies on a straightforward description of the real nature of this place¹⁰. Thus, the topography depicted by the *Phaedo* has to be taken φυσικῶς as well as μυθικῶς, that is to say, the allegorical or metaphorical meaning relies on a description of a physical reality. It should be added, though, that this reference to a «physical reality» does not necessarily mean that the text needs to be taken literally. A physical reading may also be allegorizing. Olympiodorus, for instance, complemented his statement that Tartarus is about morality and punishment, by adding a φυσικῶς explanation that took the description of Tartarus as a reference to matter (ὕλη), with its

7. See Arist. *Mete.* B 2.355b32-34; 356a14-25.

8. Procl. *In R.* I 168.3-23; II 128.12-23; Dam. *In Phd.* I 471; Olymp. *In Grg.* 241.11-28; *In Mete.* 144.21-35.

9. Olymp. *In Mete.* 144.7-15; see Steel 2012, 176.

10. See Procl. *In R.* II 132.5-13; II 93.18-25; II 129.4-130.4 (referring to Numenius); II 132.14-17. See also Proclus' literal reading of the geography of *Phaedo* at *In Ti.* I 270.8-271.18 Van Riel (= I 180.25-181.28 Diehl).

typical turmoil and chaotic motion¹¹. The variation on the scale between strictly literal and entirely allegorical readings is also a matter of applying different readings to different parts of the *Phaedo* myth. The description of the earth, for instance, which is the first part of the myth, would notably be taken literally by late Neoplatonists, as Carlos Steel has shown¹². Yet for other parts of the narrative, as we shall see in the case of the account of the rivers, the interpretation will be more allegorizing, even though it will remain altogether physical.

The Physics of Psychic Motion

Why was it important to maintain such a physical reading? Wouldn't it be enough to point out that the eschatological myths are conveying a moral lesson in the guise of a fantastic mythical setting, as present-day readers would have it? To Plato's Neoplatonic readers, that would indeed be an insufficient reading, which renders the message less powerful than it should be. For the vicissitudes of the soul's moral life are not just metaphors: they correspond to real movements that require a genuinely spatial environment. If the world of generation is a real world, then the realms above and beyond it should also be localised. And that is exactly what Plato's eschatological myths are doing. To be sure, they are not literal renderings of the realms beside ours, but, as Damascius echoes Plato himself, they describe what it *should* look like, given what we know about the soul¹³.

So, in the Neoplatonists' view, the topography of the underworld is subservient to explaining the soul's ongoing transmigration between the levels of reality in a physical way. The first question is, however, why does the soul have descend altogether, and face eventual punishment if things go wrong? Why can't the

11. Olymp. In *Mete.* 146.25-27; Gertz 2011, 186.

12. See Steel 2012, 179-83.

13. See Procl. In R. II 128.23-132.19; II 140.14-21; II 156.12-157.8. Dam. In *Phd.* I 466.2-4 clearly expresses this: οὐ πᾶν δὲ μῦθος ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὅσον συμπεραίνεται λέγων ὡς «ταῦτα ἢ τὰ τοιαῦτα» (*Phd.* 114d2-3) χρὴ τὰ ἐν Ἀΐδου ἡγεῖσθαι. τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν καὶ τὸ εἶδος τῶν Πλατωνικῶν μύθων ἅτε καλῶς τὴν ἀλήθειαν μιμουμένων, ὡς ἐν Πολιτείᾳ (*Resp.* II 277d9) φησίν.

soul just remain in the intelligible world? Proclus treats the question explicitly in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, and replies that the soul abandons contemplation for two reasons. First, the soul's life reflects the life of the gods, which is characterised by a twofold activity: contemplation and providence. In so far as they contemplate, the gods are static, but their providential activity is in motion, directed towards the lower realms. So if the soul reflects this life, it cannot just remain contemplative, but has to be performing a providential activity as well, which, in the individual soul's case, involves the care for an individual body. Secondly, the perfection of the cosmos requires that there be not only immortal intellective beings (i.e., gods), nor only mortal irrational animals, but also a class in between: mortal animals that partake in reason and intellect – and the latter are to be animated by souls that descend and ascend throughout the world of generation¹⁴. Thus, the descent of the soul into the world of generation is not a matter of punishment. It is a normal part of its existence, also because at the top of the system, souls that contemplate all the time get tired, and long for an active life to counterbalance their contemplative life, just as much as the souls that have been living in punishment are longing for a change¹⁵.

The scientific description of the soul's migration also entails another question: how does an immortal and intelligible entity such as the soul become mobile? As such a thing would in principle be immobile, we need a theoretical tool to explain how locomotion of the soul can happen. So again, we are faced with the fact that mythical language about the soul needs to be embedded in some kind of topological or physical description. Moreover, as always, the Proclean system requires that there be an intermediary between two opposites, meaning that an intelligible being such as the soul cannot be connected with the corporeal realm without any mediating instance. In this case, the solution comes from a specific Platonic concept, mentioned in *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*, where Plato makes reference to an

14. Procl. *In Ti.* V 214.3–23 Van Riel (= III 324.4–24 Diehl); V 152.2–4 (= III 278.25–26 Diehl). See also Fortier 2018, 311.

15. Procl. *In R.* II 159.19–160.11.

ὄχημα, a vessel or vehicle, by which the soul is vehiculated through the cosmos¹⁶.

Someone like Proclus does not need to be told twice that intermediary levels are necessary. Even more so, according to him, the difference between the eternal, unchangeable and noetic being that is the soul and the corporeal mass of matter is too big to be bridged in one jump, by introducing merely one ὄχημα¹⁷. Hence he argues for the existence of a cumulative system of different vehicles of the soul. The first one, he says, is the astral or luminous vehicle¹⁸. It is eternal (αἰδίων) and make the soul encosmic. Thus, for encosmic souls, this vehicle is part of their nature (συμφυές)¹⁹, which means that it cannot be taken away from them. The second vehicle is called pneumatic²⁰. It makes the soul belong to the world of γένεσις, as it is added at the moment when an encosmic soul enters the realm of generation, and is taken away again when the soul leaves this realm²¹. It is what Timaeus calls «a troublesome mass of fire, water, air, and earth that had afterwards adhered to the soul, confusing and unreasoning»²². It is, thus, made out of the entirety of simple elements and is not indissoluble²³. But it is anterior to the body

16. Pl. *Ti.* 44d8-e2: ἵν' οὖν μὴ κυλινδούμενον ἐπὶ γῆς ὕψη τε καὶ βάθη παντοδαπὰ ἐχούσης ἀποροῖ τὰ μὲν ὑπερβαίνειν, ἐνθεν δὲ ἐκβαίνειν, ὄχημα αὐτῷ τοῦτο καὶ εὐπορίαν ἔδωσαν. *Phd.* 113d4-6: καὶ οἱ μὲν ἂν δόξωσι μέσως βεβιωκέναι, πορευθέντες ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀχέροντα, ἀναβάντες ἃ δὴ αὐτοῖς ὀχήματά ἐστιν, ἐπὶ τούτων ἀφικνοῦνται εἰς τὴν λίμνην. *Phdr.* 247a8-b3: ὅταν δὲ δὴ πρὸς δαίτα καὶ ἐπὶ θοίνην ἴωσιν, ἄκραν ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπουράνιον ἀψίδα πορεύονται πρὸς ἄναντες, ἧ δὴ τὰ μὲν θεῶν ὀχήματα ἰσορρόπως εὐήνια ὄντα ῥαδίως πορεύεται, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα μόγις.

17. Procl. *In Ti.* V 176.23-24 Van Riel and 177.9-13 (= III 297.24-25 and 298.5-10 Diehl).

18. ὄχημα αὐγοειδές: Procl. *In R.* II 154.25-26; II 195.11; II 196.26-27; II 199.21; *Theol. Plat.* III 5.19.10-11; *In Ti.* III 112.21 Van Riel (= II 81.21 Diehl); III 117.14-15 Van Riel (= II 85.3 Diehl); V 257.6 Van Riel (= III 355.16 Diehl).

19. Procl. *In Ti.* V 178.5 Van Riel (= III 298.28 Diehl).

20. ὄχημα πνευματικόν: Procl. *In R.* II 349.4; *In Ti.* V 94.8 Van Riel (= III 234.11 Diehl); V 98.21-22 Van Riel (= III 237.25 Diehl); V 99.24-25 Van Riel (= III 238.20 Diehl); V 223.19-20 Van Riel (= III 331.7 Diehl).

21. Procl. *In Ti.* V 177.19-22 Van Riel (= III 298.15-16 Diehl).

22. Pl. *Ti.* 42c-d: τὸν πολὺν ὄχλον καὶ ὕστερον προσφύοντα ἐκ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος καὶ ἀέρος καὶ γῆς, θορυβώδη καὶ ἄλογον ὄντα.

23. Procl. *In Ti.* V 208.9-11 Van Riel (= III 320.14-16 Diehl); V 176.24-177.5 Van Riel (= III 297.26-298.2 Diehl), quoted below (see note 33).

and survives it after death. Finally, at a third stage, the soul enters the shell-like vehicle²⁴, i.e., the body (which Timaeus calls a third «vehicle», *Ti.* 69c7), the existence of which is characterised as chthonic²⁵. It owes its unity to the pneumatic vehicle onto which it is added²⁶.

Based on this triple division between vehicles of the soul, Proclus explains the different levels of psychic existence. The system is cumulative, in that sense, that a lower soul always also includes the mode of existence (the vehicle) of the higher one: the astral souls (the souls of the gods and the planets) only have the astral vehicle, whereas the souls of elemental bodies are carried by an astral plus a pneumatic vehicle, and the individually embodied souls are always riding an astral plus pneumatic plus shell-like vehicle²⁷.

In this same vein, Proclus explains the faculties of the soul at the different levels of its existence. To be sure, in each vehicle, the soul is equally tripartite, displaying the functions of reason, anger and desire. It is thus clear that the rational and the irrational parts of the soul are structurally present at every level, even though, at each stage, their relative status will differ²⁸. The highest soul's life is noeric, devoted to the contemplation of true forms, and thus mainly determined by its rational faculty. Yet at the same time, Proclus emphasises that the highest soul is a chariot with two horses, along the lines of the *Phaedrus* myth²⁹. At this level, the irrational functions of the soul are present as «the highest pinnacles of non-rational life» (τὰς ἀκρότητας τῆς ἀλόγου ζωῆς)³⁰, i.e.,

24. ὄχημα ὁσπρεῶδες: Procl. *In Ti.* V 178.7 Van Riel (= III 298.28 Diehl); V 208.12 Van Riel (= III 320.17 Diehl); ὁσπρεῶδες σῶμα: Procl. *In R.* II 126.12; 187.11; *In Ti.* V 99.1-2 Van Riel (= III 237.26-29 Diehl); ὁσπρεῶδες ὄργανον: *In R.* I 172.4-5; *In Ti.* V 177.19-20 Van Riel (= III 298.15-16 Diehl); V 179.12-13 Van Riel (= III 299.25 Diehl).

25. Procl. *In Ti.* V 177.19-20 Van Riel (= III 298.15-16 Diehl) and V 178.7 Van Riel (= III 298.28 Diehl).

26. Procl. *In Ti.* V 208.9-19 Van Riel (= III 320.14-20 Diehl).

27. Procl. *Theol. Plat.* III 5.19.3-15; See *In Ti.* V 136.6-138.19 Van Riel (= III 266.24-268.20 Diehl); V 178.5-13 Van Riel (= III 298.27-299.4 Diehl).

28. See Fortier 2018, 309. Also Opsomer 2006, 152-61.

29. Procl. *In Ti.* V 138.2-7 Van Riel (= III 268.5-8 Diehl); Fortier 2018, 309.

30. Procl. *In Ti.* V 97.23 Van Riel (= III 236.32 Diehl); See *In Ti.* V 100.9-10 Van Riel (= III 238.30-31 Diehl).

that these irrational forces are present there in a causal mode (κατ'αίτιαν), and that «the non-rational life exists in a rational way in the souls», just like «body exists in an incorporeal way in the intelligible causes»³¹.

If a human soul succeeds in actualizing its highest functioning, led by reason, it will partake in the chorus of the divine souls, as explained by the *Phaedrus* (246e). Thus, in its purely astral vehicle, the soul lives in the supracelestial place (ἐν τῷ ὑπερουρανίῳ τόπῳ), in the chorus of its leader-god³². Yet this is hard to attain, and when a soul gets there, it will at any rate have to descend again. It then takes on the second vehicle, of an elemental nature and bound to the world of generation, in which irrationality becomes an active part of the soul's existence (Procl. *In Ti.* V 176.20–177.5 Van Riel = III 297.21–298.2 Diehl):

For souls as they descend to earth take on from the elements garments of this type or that (airy, watery, earthy), and then, so equipped, finally enter into this dense mass here. For how could they immediately pass from immaterial *pneumata* to this body? So even before they descend into this, they possess the non-rational life and the vehicle belonging to that life, made ready from the simple elements, and they put on from these the «troublesome mass», so called because it is of a different type from the vehicle born along with the souls, since it is made from a variety of garments and weighs the soul down³³.

Thus, irrationality in the soul's life is not the effect of the body (the third vehicle), but of the second one, which explains how it can play a role in the soul's life apart from the body, and in the punishment in Hades³⁴. In this way, the life of the human

31. Procl. *In Ti.* V 160.1–4 Van Riel (= III 284.27–30 Diehl) and V 161.9–12 Van Riel (= III 285.30–286.1 Diehl).

32. Procl. *In Ti.* V 132.22–133.11 Van Riel (= III 264.3–13 Diehl).

33. εἰς γῆν κατιοῦσαι γὰρ αἱ ψυχαὶ προσλαμβάνουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων ἄλλους καὶ ἄλλους χιτῶνας, ἀερίους ἐνυδρίους χθονίους, ἐπειθ' οὕτω τελευταῖον εἰς τὸν ὄγκον τὸν παχὺν τοῦτον εἰσκρίνονται· καὶ πῶς γὰρ ἔμελλον ἀμέσως ἀπὸ τῶν αὐλῶν πνευμάτων εἰς τόδε τὸ σῶμα χωρεῖν; καὶ πρὶν οὖν εἰς τοῦτο κατέλθωσιν, ἔχουσι τὴν ἄλογον ζωὴν καὶ τὸ ἐκείνης ὄχημα κατεσκευασμένον ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπλῶν στοιχείων, καὶ ἐνεδύσαντο ἀπὸ τούτων «ὄχλον», οὕτως αἰ καλούμενον ὡς ἀλλότριον μὲν τοῦ συμφοῦτου τῶν ψυχῶν ὀχήματος, ἐκ παντοδαπῶν δὲ χιτῶνων συγκείμενον, βαρύνοντα δὲ τὰς ψυχάς, tr. Tarrant 2017.

34. Procl. *In Ti.* V 99.10–18 Van Riel (= III 238.5–13 Diehl).

soul is embedded in the different modes of existence one finds throughout the entire cosmos. This was to be expected, as a human being is a μικρὸς κόσμος, because, Proclus says, the human being also «has an intellect and reason and a divine body and a mortal one, just like the universe, and he has been divided up in a way that corresponds to the divisions of the universe»³⁵. Interestingly, Proclus explicitly refers to «cosmic physics» here (*In Ti.* V 257.7-8 Van Riel = III 355.18-19 Diehl):

Accordingly, in order to make you see the totality under the aspect of the parts, the explanation of human existence has been made to correspond to cosmic physics as a whole³⁶.

Thus, indeed, the different life choices, though depicted in mythical terms, are in fact a matter of physics, of locating the individual encosmic souls in specific areas of the cosmos. And the point at which the souls become physical is their connection with one or more of the vehicles. The vehicles are to be seen as the physical locations of the soul, making it possible for the soul to migrate from one *place* in the universe to another.

The Role of Rivers in the Soul's Locomotion

In his *Phaedo* commentary, Damascius raises the question of why judgment in the afterlife (*Phd.* 108b) has to take place in a specific location, given that the divine judges are omnipresent, and the souls themselves could undergo the judgment anywhere³⁷. The context of this section is entirely Proclean³⁸, which means that question and answer most probably stem from Proclus' own commentary. The answer is threefold (Dam. *In Phd.* I 499.3-6):

35. Procl. *In Ti.* V 256.20-22 Van Riel (= III 355.7-11 Diehl): δεῖ δὲ ὡς τὸν ὅλον κόσμον, οὕτω καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπισκέψασθαι τελείως, διότι μικρὸς ἐστί καὶ οὗτος κόσμος· ἔχει γὰρ καὶ νοῦν καὶ λόγον καὶ θεῖον σῶμα καὶ θνητόν, ὥσπερ τὸ πᾶν, καὶ διήρηται ἀνάλογον τῷ παντί, tr. Tarrant 2017.

36. Ἰν' οὖν καὶ μερικῶς ἴδῃς τὸ ὅλον, ὁ περὶ ἀνθρώπου λόγος τῇ πάσῃ φυσιο-λογίᾳ συντέτακται (my tr.).

37. Dam. *In Phd.* I 499.1-3: διὰ τί εἰς τὸν αἰθέριον συλλέγονται τόπον; οἱ τε γὰρ δικάσται πάντα ὁρῶσι πανταχοῦ καὶ αἱ ψυχαὶ πανταχοῦ οὕσαι δύνανται τυγχάνειν τῆς ψήφου.

38. As indicated by Westerink (footnote *ad loc.*), the view that the judgment takes place in the αἰθέριος τόπος is Proclus'.

In the first place, souls become more amenable to treatment when removed from the influence of the lower regions; secondly, some places are more suited than others to a particular person or a particular form of illumination; thirdly, we prefer to appear before the gods in holy places, even though they are everywhere³⁹.

Again, this requires the physics of locomotion, and Proclus does not fail to stress that in this context of the *Phaedo* also, Plato indicates that the souls make use of their vehicles (*In Ti.* V 96.6–9 Van Riel = III 235.22–25 Diehl):

Even in Hades he depicts the souls making use of their vehicles. He says, «Getting up into what serve for them as vehicles» (*Phd.* 113d) they cross the river, according to Socrates in the *Phaedo*⁴⁰.

In the eschatological myths, these ὀχήματα are primarily the vessels with which the souls cross rivers, as in the text quoted just now, or enter into the rivers to be brought to different places in the underworld. Indeed, in Plato's *Phaedo*, but also in the myth of Er, the role of the rivers is mainly that of conveyor belts through Hades, leading the souls to their places of judgment, punishment, or elevation.

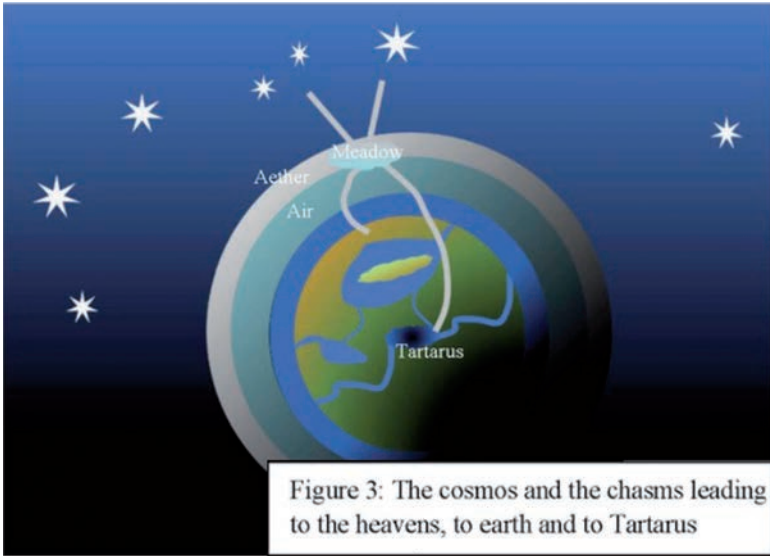
About the exact role of the rivers, Proclus refers us to his «commentary on the *Nekyia* of the *Phaedo*», the part of his (lost) *Phaedo commentary* that dealt with the eschatological myth⁴¹. As this text is lost, we do not have Proclus' general explanation, but enough is preserved in the extant works, in particular in his commentary on the myth of Er (the 16th essay of *In R.*) and his remarks on the creation of the soul in *Timaeus* (the 5th book of *In Ti.*), to reconstruct the larger part of Proclus' analysis.

In Proclus' interpretation, the myth of Er provides the higher strata of the geography, while the *Phaedo* myth describes the earth and the subterranean areas.

39. ἡ πρῶτον μὲν αἱ ψυχαὶ ἀπαλλαγεῖσθαι τῶν χειρόνων τόπων ἐπιτηδειότεραι γίνονται· δεύτερον ἄλλοι {δι'} ἄλλων τόπων πρὸς τόνδε ἢ τήνδε τὴν ἑλλαμψιν ἐπιτηδειότεροι· τρίτον ὅτι καὶ μᾶλλον ἐν ἱεροῖς τόποις βουλόμεθα προσιέναι τοῖς θεοῖς, καίτοι πανταχοῦ εἰσιν, tr. Westerink 1977.

40. καὶ γὰρ ἐν Ἀΐδου τὰς ψυχὰς ποιεῖ τοῖς ἐαυτῶν ὀχήμασι χρωμένους – «ἀναβάντες γάρ», φησίν, «ἀ δὲ αὐτοῖς ὀχήματά ἐστιν», ἐπεραιοῦντο τὸν ποταμόν, ὥς φησιν ὁ ἐν Φαίδωνι Σωκράτης, tr. Tarrant 2006.

41. Procl. *In R.* II 179.9–17.



The myth of Er starts off with the gathering of the souls in a «wondrous place» (δαίμονιος τόπος, *Resp.* X 614c), which Proclus identifies with the «meadow» (λειμών) where the souls arrive from all directions to camp for seven days, and where the souls exchange what they experienced in the areas they came from (*Resp.* X 614e and 616b). Proclus locates this meadow between heaven and earth, i.e. in the ether⁴², and as Plato describes it, there are two pairs of chasms opening up into that place, two into the earth, and opposite to them, two into the heavens. Between them, there are judges who send the souls up to the heavens or down into the earth⁴³. So the four chasms that

42. Procl. *In R.* II 131.27–132.2; II 135.12–14.

43. Proclus also connects this description with the myth of the *Gorgias*: Procl. *In R.* II 132.20–133.27; at II 132.5–13, he indicates that the *Gorgias* narrative implies a triple pathway: one into the Isles of the Blessed, one into Tartarus, and a third into generation. As he explains at II 139.18–140.25, however, he considers the myth of the *Gorgias* to be a bit more focusing on particular situations, while the narrative of the myth of Er is more general (καθολικώτερον and περιληπτικώτερον). This explains why in one case, Plato mentions only three pathways, and in the other he distinguishes four chasms.

according to the myth of Er open up in the wondrous place (*Resp.* X 614c) are pathways, one pair leading the souls into heaven and bringing them down from heaven, while the second pair makes them descend to earth and into the underworld⁴⁴. In this sense, two pathways lead to what Plato calls λήξεις, i.e., allotted dwelling places (namely the heaven and the underworld), while two others lead toward γένεσις (one descending from heaven, one ascending from the subterranean world)⁴⁵.

In this context we encounter the first river, the one that leads from the wondrous place into genesis (i.e., from ether to earth), in the plain of Lethe. Proclus locates this plain immediately below the wondrous place (or the meadow), indicating that as the meadow is identical to the ether, the plain of Lethe is the zone of dense air just below it, which our souls enter «in their descent towards the lifelessness of matter»⁴⁶. More in general, as the air is the highest stage of the world of generation, the arrival at the plain of Lethe stands for the soul's entering γένεσις altogether, and the river of Lethe represents the flow of materiality that surrounds us in this realm⁴⁷.

When commenting on the river to which the souls are bound at *Timaeus* 43a, Proclus provides the same explanation (*In Ti.* V 216.8–16 Van Riel = III 325.25–326.2 Diehl):

Certainly the term «river» does not signify the human body alone, but also all the coming-to-be that engulfs us from the outside on account of its unstable and unbalanced flow. So too in the *Republic* what he called the River of Lethe meant the entire generation-working nature⁴⁸.

Proclus seems to have recognised that the other river mentioned here by Plato, the Ameles, is essentially the same as the

44. Procl. *In R.* II 138.24–139.18; II 140.26–141.13.

45. Procl. *In R.* II 132.14–19; II 155.23–157.8.

46. Procl. *In R.* II 346.25–347.16.

47. Procl. *In R.* II 95.9–12: ὁ δὲ τῆς Αἰθήρης ποταμὸς πᾶσαν τὴν ῥύσιν τῶν ἐνύλων καὶ τὸ ῥόθιον κύτος (*Or. Chald.* 48) ἡμῶν, αἰὲ λήθης ἀναπιμπλῶς τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν αἰεὶ ἐστώτων λόγων. See *In R.* II 354.10–23.

48. See also the references to ποταμὸς τῆς γενέσεως at *In Ti.* V 217.18 Van Riel (= III 326.28 Diehl); V 223.3 Van Riel (= III 330.20 Diehl) and 226.12 Van Riel (= III 333.1 Diehl).

river of Lethe. For he attributes the exact same characteristics to Ameles as to Lethe⁴⁹. As we saw, the event of entering into γένεσις implies the souls' taking on a second vehicle, the pneumatic one, on top of their luminous ὄχημα.

In this context, even the forgetfulness that fills us when drinking from this river is explained in a physical way: Proclus explains the loss of memory by the fact that by this drinking, our pneumatic vehicle becomes wet, and the humidity causes the imprints of the ideas in our soul to fade⁵⁰.

Moreover, this humidification does not only obliterate the imprints of the ideas, it also makes the pneumatic vehicle much heavier, and tears the soul further down⁵¹.

Thus, the imagery of streams and rivers is also applicable to the higher spheres, where the chasms provide the passage ways to and from the meadow. The driving force of this imagery is the idea that the highest levels of reality are overflowing with their power, and are always filling the lower beings with life, layer by layer⁵².

While this analysis is resting on a more metaphorical interpretation of the rivers, the description of the river of Lethe is physical in a more literal sense, as we saw, since it is the place where the soul enters generation. And the same is true for the rivers in the underworld, which according to Proclus correspond to the composition of the pneumatic vehicle out of the basic elements. For indeed, Proclus says, we find in the underworld (i.e., in the lowest ranges of the universe) the dregs (ὑποστάθμαι) of everything, and the four rivers over there correspond with the four elements in their lowest mode of existence⁵³.

49. See Procl. *In R.* II 348.2–349.3, where the river Ameles is likened to the thick moisty air that surrounds the earth, and identified as the flux of γένεσις. Moreover, Proclus here repeats the identification of this river with the one mentioned at *Ti.* 43a.

50. Procl. *In R.* II 349.3–8.

51. Procl. *In R.* II 349.8–12. See also *In Ti.* V 223.19–24 Van Riel (= III 331.6–12 Diehl), where Proclus says that the «inundation» mentioned at *Ti.* 43b hits the pneumatic vehicle first, before making the soul wet.

52. Procl. *In Ti.* V 105.21–106.3 Van Riel (= III 242.29–243.4 Diehl).

53. Procl. *In Ti.* III 67.21–68.4 Van Riel (= II 49.17–19 Diehl); see IV 182.17–183.4 Van Riel (= III 141.25–30 Diehl); Dam. *In Phd.* II 145.1–6.

This view, which Proclus took over from the Orphic tradition⁵⁴, meets Damascius' criticism. For, says Damascius, the position of the rivers does not correspond to the natural place of the elements, and, moreover, if they were «rivers», the elements should share a characteristic that allows for this common denominator, which the elements don't have. For that reason, Damascius rejects the purely physical reading and stresses the moral and theological significance of the rivers⁵⁵. But Damascius is too dismissive of Proclus here. In fact, the latter position is also Proclus'. In his commentary on the myth of Er, Proclus indicates the following (Procl. *In R.* II 183.11–23):

Above all, the pinnacle of badness, the fact that the souls «were guided» [...] «to Tartarus», the jail of punishment, is a clear definition of the things that this type of life deserves, and that this person, as he was recalcitrant and fled all laws, was forced into the most disordered place of the entire world-order, and as he ran away from intellect, he was forced into the darkest possible place. For that is how Tartarus is: the place of all disorderly and obscure matter, into which the lowest ends of the cosmic elements flow together. It is the opposite of the Olympus, for the latter is all light and envelops all things, as their highest pinnacle, while the former is obscure, the deepest trench that is enveloped by all things. That is why the poets call it «the subterranean abyss» (Hom. *Il.* VIII 13–14)⁵⁶.

The rivers thus have a double function: they are the streams that carry the dregs of the elements, and they are the streams that drag down the souls as a punishment. In his *Commentary on the Republic*, Proclus renders this even clearer (Procl. *In R.* I 121.27–122.9):

54. See *Orph. fr.* 341 Bernabé (= fr. 123 and 125 Kern); also fr. 154 Bernabé (= fr. 222 Kern), quoted by Procl. *In R.* II 340.11–23.

55. See Gertz 2011, 184.

56. ἔκτον ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τὸ τῶν κακῶν τέλος, ὅτι ἄγοιντο παρ' αὐτῶν μετὰ τὰς ἀσπαλάθους ἐπὶ τὸν Τάρταρον, τὸ τῆς τίσεως δεσμωτήριον, ἐναργῶς ὥρισεν, οἷον ἐστὶν ἄξιον τὸ τοιόνδε τῆς ζωῆς εἶδος, καὶ ὅτι ἄτακτον ὄν καὶ φυγὸν ἅπαντας θεσμούς εἰς τὸ ἀκοσμώτατον συνέωσται τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ ἀποδρᾶν νοῦν εἰς τὸ ἀλαμπέστατον. τοιοῦτος γάρ ὁ Τάρταρος, χῶρος ὢν πάσης ἀτάκτου καὶ σκοτεινῆς ὕλης, εἰς ὃν συρρεῖ τὰ ἔσχατα τῶν κοσμικῶν στοιχείων, πρὸς δὲ τὸν Ὀλύμπου ἀντίθετος. ὁ μὲν γάρ ὀλοαμπής, πάντα περιέχων, ὑψηλότατος. ὁ δὲ σκοτεινός, κοιλότατος τόπος ὑπὸ πάντων περιεχόμενος· διὸ καὶ ἡ ποιήσις βαθυτάτον αὐτὸν εἶναι φησιν βέρεθρον ὑπὸ χθονός. (my tr.).

Just as for souls which are ascending into the heavens a wide variety of places have been assigned for their allocation up there, so one must also believe that places have been dedicated under the earth for souls which are still in need of punishment and purification. These places are made up, on the one hand, from diverse effluences of the elements above the earth, which effluences [Plato and Homer] have called «rivers» and «streams». While on the other hand, different orders of daemones have been appointed there, some as avengers, some to inflict punishment, some for purification, and some as judges. If the poetry has spoken of «places dank and terrible to look upon which the gods despise» (Hom. *Il.* XX 65), it is not right to find fault with this⁵⁷.

In this way, the description of the rivers as the dregs of the world of genesis, each river following its own element, is paralleled by the moral value of the soul's descent into its lowest mode of existence, where its proper motion ends and its powers are shared with the body. And this close connection to corporeality has its deleterious influence on the soul, which sinks into darkness and disorder, away from the life of intellect and light⁵⁸.

The Proper Characteristics of the Rivers

With the identification of the rivers with the elements comes a specific characterisation of each of them: Pyriphlegethon, given its etymology, is associated with fire, Styx or Cocytus (part of which is the Stygian lake, in Plato's account)⁵⁹ with earth,

57. ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ταῖς εἰς οὐρανὸν ἰούσαις ψυχαῖς πολλοὶ τόποι καὶ παντοδαποὶ τῆς ἐκεῖ λήξεως ἀφορίσθησαν, οὕτω δὲ νομίζειν καὶ ταῖς κολάσεως ἔτι καὶ καθάρσεως δεομέναις τοὺς ὑπὸ γῆς τόπους ἀνεῖσθαι, ποικίλας μὲν ἀπορροίας ἔχοντας τῶν ὑπὲρ γῆς στοιχείων, ἃς δὴ ποταμοὺς καὶ ρεύματα κεκλήκασιν, δαιμόνων δὲ τάξεις διαφόρους ἐφρεστώσας, τὰς μὲν τιμωροὺς, τὰς δὲ κολαστικὰς, τὰς δὲ καθαρτικὰς, τὰς δὲ κριτικὰς. εἰ δὲ ἡ ποιήσις «σμερδαλέ» εὐρύνοντα τὰ τε στυγέουσι θεοὶ περ' ἐκεῖνα προσείρηκεν, οὐδὲ τοῦτο αἰτιάσθαι προσήκει, tr. Baltzly *et al.* 2018.

58. See Procl. *In R.* II 126.8–18. This combination of a physical and a symbolic reading is the case also of Olympiodorus (*In Mete.* 148.7–13), who follows Proclus in identifying the underworld with matter and the instability of the world of becoming, while at the same time reading the rivers and Tartarus as symbolic references to the soul's wickedness and punishment (because of its getting too closely attached to the world of becoming). See Gertz 2011, 186–87.

59. Pl. *Phd.* 113b–c.

Acheron with air, and Oceanus with water⁶⁰. Plato's narrative only partially supports this identification (e.g., the Pyriphlegethon is fiery, but it is also characterised as muddy)⁶¹, but as said, the evidence from the *Orphic hymns* (obviously also based on Plato's account) comes to the rescue. At any rate, the rivers conduct the souls' vehicles through Hades, and the river by which a soul ends up being dragged along corresponds to the sort of misbehavior the soul displayed in its previous life⁶². As the *Phaedo* has it, average people embark on the Acheron, and are brought to the Acherousian lake, where they are rewarded for their good deeds and punished for their wrongdoings. Incurable perpetrators are thrown in the deepest hole of Tartarus, never to emerge from it. Curable perpetrators who did violence to their parents or committed murder but repented it, are thrown into Tartarus, but the violators are left out of it through Pyriphlegethon, and the murderers through Cocytus. Both of those rivers bring the souls along the Acherousian lake, where, as we saw, the perpetrators cry out to the souls dwelling there to release them, and the cycle is repeated (apparently through the pumping system of the waters in the underworld) until they are eventually rescued by the souls in the Acherousian lake (*Phd.* 113d-114b).

In many ancient accounts, the visions of Tartarus and Hades are about retribution, or pay-back time (or rather pay-back eternity). Others, among whom Plato takes pride of place, have always complemented this goal of retribution with the aim of purification of the soul⁶³. For indeed, as we saw earlier, this purification only makes sense if the judgment is not the final one, i.e., that one believes in reincarnation, and that the punishment in Tartarus is not the end of the story. This aim of purifying the souls, instead of just imposing a retributive punishment on them, obviously becomes even more important in the Neoplatonic interpretation: Plato was still referring to the possibility

60. Dam. *In Phd.* II 145.12-16.

61. Pl. *Phd.* 113a-b.

62. See Pender 2012, 214, who stresses the active force and energy expressed in verbs such as ἐκβάλλει, ἐκπίπτει, etc. in the description of the rivers (*Phd.* 113a-b).

63. See, e.g., Procl. *In R.* II 184.14-28.

of «eternal punishments», whereas Proclus *cum suis* considered all judgment and punishment to last for one cosmic revolution at the longest, after which the souls are at any rate released and make a new life choice⁶⁴. The punishment is proportional, not only in its grades of severity, but also in so far as it is structurally identical to the misconduct that elicited the punishment. The idea seems to be similar to the one behind exposure therapy, as a means to enact some kind of katharsis. As Proclus explains (Procl. *In R.* II 147.13–14 and 20–23):

For indeed, by suffering under these passions we get to hate them, not by acting in accordance with them [...] whereby Dike all but shouts that the souls that indulge in these sorts of life must of necessity be joined with similar agents, and in this conjunction they must suffer from them what is befitting for those agents to do⁶⁵.

The interesting point to note here is that in the geography of the underworld, not only the punishment is structurally identical to the misbehavior, but also the gateway to the place of punishment is specific, depending on the character of the misbehavior of the souls. So the rivers themselves are also playing their part in the punishment and katharsis.

64. On Plato's upholding the possibility of eternal punishment, see Annas 1982, 131, who points out that by accepting that the punishment in Tartarus is not eternal, the myth of Er differs from the account in the *Gorgias*, and also from the myth in the *Phaedo*. Annas 1982, 127–28 interprets this as leading to a contradiction between the supposed finality of the judgements in Hades and the theory of reincarnation. However, Pender 2012, 229–32 argues, against Annas, that «the geography of the true earth, with its *scale* of experiences of embodiment, is precisely the way that Plato reconciles after-life judgement and reincarnation». See also the clear indication that punishment is temporal in *Phdr.* 249a–b. The later Neoplatonists clearly denied the possibility of eternal punishment: see Procl. *In R.* II 178.2–8; Dam. *In Phd.* I 492 (arguing against Iamblichus, who accepted that some souls remain forever in the intelligible world); Olymp. *In Mete.* 146.9–25 (stressing the difference between αἰδιον, timeless eternity, and αἰώνιον, the word used by Plato, which refers to everlastingness for the duration of an αἰών). See also Fortier 2018, 307; Gertz 2011, 185–86.

65. καὶ γὰρ πάσχοντες ὑπ' αὐτῶν μισοῦμεν τὰ πάθη, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐνεργοῦντες κατ' αὐτά. [...] μόνον οὐχὶ βωδύσης τῆς Δίκης ὅτι τὰς τὰ τοιαῦτα ζωῆς εἶδη φιλοφρονησαμένας ἀνάγκη συνεῖναι τοῖς ὁμοίοις, συνούσας δὲ πάσχειν ὑπ' αὐτῶν ὅσα τοῖς τοιοῦτοις προσήκει ποιεῖν (my tr.).

This is also the case of the higher realms, notably of the four chasms that open up to the «meadow» (Proclus' ether), where the connection between heaven and genesis is made. Plato already indicated that some souls who wanted to get out of the underworld before their time was up, were held back by the chasm itself (*Resp.* X 615e:):

They thought that they were ready to go up, but the chasm wouldn't let them through, for it roared whenever one of those incurably wicked people or anyone else who hadn't paid a sufficient penalty tried to go up⁶⁶.

Commenting on this passage, Proclus recognises the consciousness Plato ascribes to the chasm, as it has an awareness of the progress the souls are making during the time of their punishment. Proclus explains this by locating demons in the chasm who render this conscious interaction possible⁶⁷. Apparently, ascribing awareness to lifeless holes in the cosmos would be going too far. But the point is that, indeed, the conveyor belts themselves have an active role to play in the assessment of who passes through them and who doesn't.

Likewise, then, the rivers in the underworld have their own characteristic, each in accordance with one of the elements. The aim is to chastise the souls by forcing them to go through those places⁶⁸.

The meaning of this is mainly moral: every individual soul ends up in the river that is most akin to that soul's own misbehavior⁶⁹. The river thus confirms the life choice of the soul, *and* it adds its own impetus onto that of the soul. I.e., once you end

66. οὓς οἰομένους ἤδη ἀναβήσεσθαι οὐκ ἐδέχετο τὸ στόμιον, ἀλλ' ἐμυκάτο ὅποτε τις τῶν οὕτως ἀνιάτως ἐχόντων εἰς πονηρίαν ἢ μὴ ἱκανῶς δεδωκὼς δίκην ἐπιχειροῖ ἀνέναι, tr. Grube 1992.

67. Procl. *In R.* II 141.28–143.13.

68. Procl. *In R.* II 183.29–184.3: τὰ μὲν οὖν παντοδαπὰ δαίματα δαιμόνων ὄψεις ἦσαν φοβεραὶ καὶ ὄφρσιν ἐοικότων καὶ κυσίν, καὶ τόπων καταπληκτικαὶ δυνάμεις θολεροῦ πυρὸς γεμόντων ἢ ψύξεως ἀφορήτου ὑπὸ πνίγους ἢ σήψεως (followed by a lacuna).

69. See, e.g., Procl. *In R.* II 181.8–14, on the role of fire (and Pyriphlegethon) in chastising tyrants, who themselves have destroyed all lawfulness.

up in a particular river, your own character will be reinforced by that of the river, which makes it even harder to escape the consequences of your choice⁷⁰. As Proclus indicates, commenting on Plato's remark (*Resp.* X 614d) that souls coming from earth are covered in dust and dirt, while those coming from heaven are pure (*In R.* II 156.25–157.6):

No surprise that the pneuma(tic vehicle) of the souls that ascend from inside the earth still displayed a specific mark of the places of punishment down there, for instance, of Pyriphlegethon or of the Stygian river (i.e. of Cocytus), or that the ones that descended from heaven would attract some light that entered them from up there, as for instance a light often shines in stones that absorb the effluences of the sun, the moon or the stars. For indeed, every soul retains what is proper to it, the ones that ascend from inside the earth retain what is material and dark, while the ones that descend from heaven retain what is luminous and the shining that came from the rays of the cosmic light⁷¹.

Herein lies the moral or protreptic message of the myths. The choices made by individuals set in action a series of events that render a different life choice more difficult. For the ways of attaching ourselves to the body will be reflected by the life choice we make for the next incarnation, and our fate in Hades confirms this again: the rivers impose their characteristic upon us, on the basis of our soul's own inclinations (physically undergone by the souls in their vehicle), and they reinforce these inclinations by their own impetus. Thus, it becomes harder and harder to escape the vicious circle of self-confirmation, once we have been led astray by wrong choices. And as Plato indicates, the cycle will go on just as long as the better souls in the underworld deem it necessary: until we are allowed to leave the

70. See Pender 2012, 217–20.

71. εἰ δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐκ γῆς ἀνιουσῶν ἔτι τοῖς πνεύμασιν ἐνεφαντάζετο τις ἐνοῦσα τῶν ἐκεῖ κολαστικῶν τόπων ιδιότης, οἷον τοῦ Πυριφλεγέθοντος ἢ τοῦ Στυγίου ῥεύματος, ταῖς δὲ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ προσῆν ἐφέλκεσθαι τι φῶς ἐκεῖθεν ἐγγενόμενον, οἷον δὴ πολλάκις ἐλλάμπει καὶ λίθοις ἀπορροίας ἔχουσιν ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης καὶ ἄστρον, οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν· κατέχει γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἐκάστη τὸ οἰκεῖον, αἱ μὲν ἐκ γῆς ἀνιῶσαι τὸ ὑλῶδες καὶ σκοτεινόν, αἱ δὲ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κατιῶσαι τὸ φωτεινόν καὶ <τῆν> ἀπὸ τῶν αὐγῶν τοῦ κοσμικοῦ φωτὸς περιλάμπειν (my tr.). A similar description is given at *In R.* I 121.10–23.

Pyriphlegethon or the Cocytus and to enter the Acherousian lake. That is to say: the chastisements do have some purificatory power, in so far as they make our souls repent their wrong choices, and fill them with the wish to leave these errors behind. But this is not an easy task, and moreover, the final decision about this escape is left over to the souls of those who were allowed to rest at the Acherousian lake in the first place⁷². So by making our first choice to perpetrate, we lose control over the plot, and are delivered to the rivers, which have the tendency of confirming our character, and to the judgment of our victims. And that cannot be an attractive perspective.

In sum, just like the abyss of Tartarus is the reverse image of mount Olympus, as we saw, one might draw a certain parallel between the rivers into which the souls are thrown and the «choruses» of the gods, in the wake of which our souls and characters are established (*Phdr.* 248a and 252c–253c). For just as the individual gods lead their chorus of human souls into the heavens, the rivers in the underworld lead their souls through the chasms of the underworld, and the souls reflect the characters of the leaders they follow. The heart of the matter is not, however, that our souls should make a choice between either following a god or being swallowed by a river. The case is more complex, as any soul may end up in a river in the underworld, by making choices against the lofty life in heaven, and being thrown in Hades as a wrongdoer⁷³. After all, the point is not which god one follows, but rather, how attached does one become to the sensible world and its lures. Once the soul allows itself to be dragged down by the body, it takes on the elemental life at the bottom of the system, where the dregs of the whole flow together. And that is the person's own responsibility: the god, after all, remains *anaitios*.

72. On these points, see Pender 2012, 225–29.

73. See Herm. In *Phdr.* 197.31–198.18 Lucarini – Moreschini; see also 163.26–164.1 Couvreur = 170.27–171.8 Lucarini – Moreschini.

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Gerd Van Riel, *Proclus' Potamology: The role of Rivers in the Underworld*

This chapter explores Proclus' interpretation of the role of rivers (potamology) in Plato's eschatological myths of the Underworld, specifically Lethe, Styx, Acheron, Pyriphlegethon, and Cocytus (as laid down in *Phaedo* and *Republic X*). The later Neoplatonists, including Proclus, rejected merely physical or solely allegorical readings. Instead, they combined a literal interpretation (at a cosmological level) with a moral message regarding the destiny of the soul. The role attributed to these rivers provides valuable insight into the interaction between body and soul, as well as the complex relationship between cosmology, theology, physics, and ethics within Proclus' comprehensive philosophical framework. By examining Proclus' «potamology», the chapter illuminates how he integrates mythological elements into his scientific and ethical account of human existence and the cosmos.

Gerd Van Riel

KU Leuven (Belgium)
 gerd.vanriel@kuleuven.be