

PROCLUS IN TIMAEUM III.13.16–29 D.

The highest levels of reality below the One and its henads in Proclus' system are being, eternity (αἰών) and mind. The sequence runs in descending order, with each lower plane directly or primarily participating (μετέχειν) the next higher. Being is unified because it participates unity, eternity exists because it participates being, mind is eternal because it participates eternity.

This general scheme is the background for Proclus' discussion of the relationship between eternity and the 'intelligible animal' (αὐτοζῶον, i. e., a phase of mind) in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*. In III.13.16–29 he is arguing that the former is ontologically prior to the latter.

It has been shown earlier by him [Plato] that the intelligible animal is unique, so that [we are not to think] of eternity as a living thing [ζῶον] and one which is different from the intelligible animal. It is, then, not a living thing at all. For [if it were], it would be either different from the intelligible animal or identical with it. As we have shown, neither can be said: the former because the intelligible animal is unique, the latter because time and what is in time are different too [i. e., as time is different from temporal things, so eternity is different from what is in eternity, e. g., the intelligible animal]. And if eternity is participated [by the intelligible animal] but does not itself participate the intelligible animal, it would be prior to it. Being a god, it is intelligible but not yet a living thing [ζῶον], if the intelligible animal, too, is a god, and that is so if the universe is. For what is participated in the intelligible world but does not itself participate is much more universal than what is participated. And it is clear that the relationship of participation does not apply in the same way to both. For the sharing and unity which occur among intelligibles and which we now wrongly call 'participation' is different from the participation of things in our universe.

There seems to be something slightly odd about the third last sentence (13.25: τὸ γὰρ μετεχόμενον ἐκεῖ, μὴ μετέχον δὲ τοῦ μετεχομένου πάντως ὀλικώτερον). For convenience it can be subdivided as follows:

- In the intelligible world
 - (1A) what is participated
 - (1B) but does not itself participate
- is much more universal than
 - (2A) what is participated.

Though Proclus sets up a contrast between 1 and 2, the single explicit feature which characterizes the latter is identical to 1A. A contrast emerges only if we supply a second feature in 2 to balance the second feature in 1 and then only if we supply ‘and what does itself participate.’ We then have

- (1A) what is participated
- (1B) but does not itself participate
- is more universal than
- (2A) what is participated
- (2B) and does itself participate.

That is to say:

- (1A) eternity is participated by the intelligible animal
- (1B) but does not itself participate it.
- (2A) the intelligible animal is participated by lower levels
- (2B) and itself participates eternity.

It is possible to find such a contrast in the passage in light of the doctrine of participated characteristics (*μετεχόμενα*, *El. Th. 63*). Each level of reality is anchored on an unparticipated entity (*ἀμέθεκτον*) containing in radically unified, absolute form the characteristics which are participated by lower levels. Thus the One projects its unity in the form of henads which are participated (as imperfect unity) by lower levels. The One itself is an *ἀμέθεκτον*, the henads are its *μετεχόμενον* phase and lower levels are *μετέχοντα*. Similarly, in one of its phases eternity is an *ἀμέθεκτον* from which comes the *μετεχόμενον* phase which, in turn, provides the property ‘eternal’ to the lower levels which participate it (in this case, primarily the eternal intelligible animal). In view of this, we can see how one *μετεχόμενον* can be contrasted with another hierarchically: participated eternity is, in fact, more universal than participated intelligible animal because it is a step higher in the procession of unity from its ultimate source. At the same time, only the One is absolutely exempt from participating, for in the unbroken chain of reality all lower levels must participate a higher predecessor in order to exist. Only the One has no predecessor. This principle is formally inconsistent with the reference in 1B to ‘what does not participate,’ for that in this case is eternity, which does in fact participate being. But since that is irrelevant to the specific relation of eternity and the intelligible animal, it can be ignored because attention is focussed on that relation. In this limited

perspective eternity does not participate the intelligible animal, while it does participate eternity (cf. *El. Th.* 99).

This may be what Proclus had in mind. But he seems actually to be thinking of a sharp contrast between μετέχόμενα and μετέχοντα. His commentary in this section begins at III.8 and repeatedly appeals to the superiority of μετέχόμενα over μετέχοντα.

If that which is eternal is so because it participates, and if eternity is neither said to participate (μετέχειν) the intelligible animal nor gets its name from it [i. e., is not a ζῶον], it is clear that the one is secondary, the other simpler and more primal (10.12f.).

Eternity is prior to the multiplicity of intelligible living things [i. e., the content of mind], for they are eternal, and eternal things participate (μετέχει) eternity (11.7f.).

Because there is nothing eternal prior to it, [the intelligible animal] comes immediately after eternity . . . the universe participates (μετέχει) time primarily, and the intelligible animal participates eternity primarily (13.2f.).

Hence eternity is participated (μετέχεται) first by the intelligible animal (13.12).

The formula is clear¹) – αἰὼν μετέχεται, αὐτοζῶον μετέχει – and it is natural to suppose that it applies to the sentence at 13.25. One of the most interesting aspects of Proclus' system is the way in which it is generated as though by a 'computerized' thought pattern, to use a highly anachronistic term. That is to say, reality is organized in accordance with a set of sharply defined patterns or 'programs'. Proclus often thinks of them in spatial terms: 'higher', 'lower', 'chains', 'orders', 'wholes', 'parts', 'center', 'circumference'. They are connected through triadic 'circuits' along which lines of energy run as reality articulates itself. The linguistic style used by Proclus to deal with this is accordingly highly abstract and consists of key terms arranging themselves in endless variations along the circuits through switching points (the middle member of triads) which close connections here, open them there. All circuits sooner or later lead to the One, and when a datum (e. g., a Platonic text) is fed into the system, a whole network of responses often with astonishingly extensive ramifications is triggered. Hence the

1) Cf. *Theol. Plat.* III.16, p. 55.1 f. (Westerink/Saffrey); 'If that which participates is universally secondary to that which is participated, the αὐτοζῶον too is secondary to αἰὼν'. In *Tim.* III.27.22 f. time is participated by soul and does not participate it but leads around the things which participate it, i. e., time is the μετέχόμενον, soul is the subordinate μετέχον which is made to move in a cycle by it. Cf. In *Rep.* I. 258 f.; *El. Th.* 24.

peculiar effect of Proclus' philosophic text: repetitive, formulaic, proliferating under an inner momentum, at once simple (in range of vocabulary and style) and highly intricate.

With this in mind we can say that the discussion of eternity and the intelligible animal in III.8f. runs along the pattern of 'superior μετεχόμενον, inferior μετέχον'. The pattern occurs once more in 13.22:

If eternity is participated (μετέχεται) and does not participate (μετέχει) the intelligible animal . . .

Then follows the clause in which the expected μετέχον is replaced by another μετεχόμενον:

For in the intelligible world what is participated but does not itself participate is much more universal than what is participated (τὸ γὰρ μετεχόμενον ἐκεῖ, μὴ μετέχον δὲ τοῦ μετεχομένου πάντως ὀλικώτερον).

It is tempting to wonder whether emendation is in order here to complete the familiar pattern by reading μετέχοντος for μετεχομένου:

For in the intelligible world what is participated but does not itself participate is more universal than what participates (τὸ γὰρ μετεχόμενον ἐκεῖ, μὴ μετέχον δὲ τοῦ μετέχοντος πάντως ὀλικώτερον).

We could then dispense with any silent addition to set up a contrast. The sentence would describe the typical asymmetrical relationship between higher and lower levels: the higher is participated, the lower participates.

If this was the original reading, the first part of μετέχο -ντος might well have been connected with μέν, οὖπω in line 23/24 or with μετέχεται μέν, οὖ in line 22 and μετεχο- completed with -μενου. -ντος would then easily be altered into πάντως, perhaps influenced by the residual -πω in line 24²). The result is a phrase in structure much like El. Th. 24: 'That which participates . . . is entirely secondary to that which is participated' (τὸ μὲν γὰρ μετέχον . . . δεύτερόν ἐστι πάντως τοῦ μετεχομένου). Our passage emended says the same thing from the opposite point of view: τὸ μετεχόμενον . . . τοῦ μετέχοντος πάντως ὀλικώτερον.

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2) The collocation of μετεχόμενον and μετέχον has caused a textual problem again at Theol. Plat. I.26, p. 114.15.