

## ARISTOTELIAN PROCLUS

### Using the *Analytics* against the *Topics* to interpret the *Parmenides*

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Article abstract

Proclus, while interpreting the dialectical method of the *Parmenides*, makes the astonishing claim that Aristotle at *Prior Analytics* I 27 had imitated Plato here, but that, of course, what Plato laid out was more complete. This remark is important in three ways: first, this is the only surviving case where a connection is made between the Neoplatonic interpretation of the method of the *Parmenides* and Aristotle's *Analytics*; second, it provides a key to understand how Proclus interpreted the method; third, it reveals the increasing comfort – or decreasing antagonism – the later Neoplatonists had towards Aristotle. What I would like to do is to examine how Alexander interprets this passage, and in particular I will examine his development of *per se* predication here, how Proclus develops this in the context of the Parmenidean method and compare this to Philoponus' commentary on this passage.

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## ARISTOTELIAN PROCLUS: Using the *Analytics* against the *Topics* to interpret the *Parmenides*

DAVID D. BUTORAC

The relation which Proclus and Athenian Neoplatonism has to Aristotle has been receiving increasing interest of late. O'Meara and Steel have highlighted the adoption of central elements of Aristotle's metaphysics into this school.<sup>1</sup> Less noted is the gradual incorporation of Aristotle's logic into it.<sup>2</sup> This paper will look at Proclus' differing strategies towards the *Topics* and *Analytics*, in relation to his interpretation of the dialectical method of the *Parmenides*.<sup>3</sup> However, insights about his use of Aristotle's logic will also have interesting implications for the absorption of the metaphysics and our interpretation of Proclus' philosophy as a whole.

It is clear that he felt the need to defend *his* (or his master, Syrianus') interpretation of the method found in the *Parmenides* against similarities to

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1. Dominic O'MEARA, "La science métaphysique (ou théologie) de Proclus comme exercice spirituel," in Alain-Philippe SEGONDS and Carlos STEEL (ed.), *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, Actes du colloque international de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998), Leuven, University Press, 2000, pp. 279-290; ID., "Le problème de la métaphysique dans l'antiquité tardive," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 33 (1986), pp. 3-22, and Carlos STEEL, "Theology as First Philosophy: the Neoplatonic Concept of Metaphysics," *Quaestio*, 5 (2005), pp. 3-21.

2. And of course there is the influence of Stoic logic. However, Stoic logic has likely been mediated by Alexander, who is in turn read in a highly Platonic manner. It would be difficult to say in what sense the Stoic elements are still actually Stoic in the hands of Proclus. A nice introduction to Proclus' relation to earlier 'logical' interpretations of the *Parmenides* is Carlos STEEL, "Proclus et l'interprétation 'logique' du *Parménide*," in Linos G. BENAKIS (ed.), *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1997, pp. 67-92; in general, Carlos STEEL, "Une histoire de l'interprétation du *Parménide* dans l'antiquité," in Maria BARBANTI and Francesco ROMANO (ed.), *Il Parmenide di Platone e la sua tradizione*, Catania, CUECM, 2002, pp. 11-40, and Luc BRISSON, "The Reception of the *Parmenides* before Proclus," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*, 12 (2008), pp. 99-113.

3. Proclus sees three parts to the dialogue, noted only by Père Saffrey: this middle section outlines the universal Platonic method and contains an example of a middle gymnastic dialectic. Not seeing this tripartition leads to very problematic statements about the nature of Procline dialectic and his account of the *dialectics* found in the dialogue. See David D. BUTORAC, "Proclus' Interpretation of the *Parmenides*, Dialectic and the Wandering of the Soul," *Dionysius*, 27 (2009), pp. 33-54. This article will focus exclusively on Proclus' interpretation of the method section of the dialogue and not the final third.

elements in the Aristotelian *Organon*. One can imagine lively and skeptical discussions in class with Syrianus or Proclus that preceded Proclus' composition of this commentary on the theological *Parmenides*. However, these defenses should be understood as indices of how close the *Organon* had become to metaphysics / theology and necessary to it, but also necessary to the Neoplatonic project itself.

We will examine his varying relation to the *Organon* by looking at how he compares the Parmenidean method to the 'dialectical method' of the *Topics* and the Parmenidean method to one section of the *Analytics*.<sup>4</sup> I will argue that in both cases Proclus' protestations that what Plato and Aristotle are doing in these places is different are rather weak, belying how close the revered teacher and student had become within the mind of the Neoplatonism itself. As we will see, one of Proclus' objections to the *Topics* is somewhat more substantial than the others, although connected with them: the true Platonic dialectic should use intelligible forms of some kind and not variable *endoxa*. Once that is out of the way, however, Proclus is able to more freely employ all Aristotelian methodological developments in his interpretation of the *Parmenides*. Aristotle has a different relation to the *Analytics*: if one assumes the usage of universals, as is the case with the *Posterior Analytics*, then one is able to move more freely between the *Analytics* and the *Parmenides*.

Proclus follows the tradition of Theodore of Asine who first saw a meta-pattern, as it were, between the positive and negative hypotheses of the *Parmenides* (cf. 1057, 5-7), where half are true and half are false, instead of seeing in all the hypotheses some kind of adumbration of reality. However, this would open such an interpretation to accusations that what Plato outlined in the *Parmenides* was nothing other than the dialectic Aristotle outlined in the *Topics*.<sup>5</sup> The problem for a Platonist is that, according to Aristotle, the method uses *endoxa*, commonly held opinions, something which would condemn either all Platonic dialectic as useless, or at least, but quite problematically for a Neoplatonist, the *Parmenides*, as useless.

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4. For a general introduction of Proclus' interpretation of the *Prior Analytics* I 27, John DILLON, "Proclus and the Parmenidean Dialectic," in Jean PÉPIN and Henri-Dominique SAFFREY (ed.), *Proclus, lecteur et interprète des anciens*. Actes du colloque international du CNRS (Paris, 2-4 octobre 1985), Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 1987, pp. 165-175. This part of Aristotle's *Analytics* has received almost no attention. The other exception is: Miira TUOMINEN, "Alexander and Philoponus on *Prior Analytics* I 27-30. Is there Tension between Aristotle's Scientific Theory and Practice?," in FRANZ A.J. DE HAAS, Martina LEUNISSEN & Marije MARTIJN (ed.), *Interpreting Aristotle's Posterior Analytics in Late Antiquity and Beyond* (Philosophia Antiqua, 124), Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2010, pp. 137-154, but this article has no bearing on the present topic.

5. The reasons for this will be discussed below. There is, reasonably enough, a superficial similarity between the structures. Cf. *In Aristotelis Topicorum libros octo commentaria*, ed. Maximilianus WALLIES. *Commentaria in Aristotelem graeca* (2, 2). Berlin, Verlag Georg Reimer, 1891, 28,23-29,6. As well, both Aristotle and Plato's *Parmenides* ascribe to their dialectics a 'gymnastic' function.

### Test case one: the *Topics*

Proclus' rebuttal to the purported similarities between the Aristotelian dialectical method of the *Topics* and the *Parmenides* is in fact more nuanced than at first appears.<sup>6</sup> For Proclus, it is not a matter *simply* of both methods presenting opposing sides of an assertion or that one uses opinion and the other the forms. Proclus is clear that the 'true' Platonic dialectic does not use *doxa* or *endoxa*, as Aristotle's does, but intelligible forms; he seems to drop this rather obvious point, but he and we will return to this later. He points, rather, to the fact that Aristotle proposes many different ways or methods address one 'problema' (that is, kind of predication), whereas the Parmenidean method presents one method for every problem. This seems to be merely a rhetorical point, but there is something to it. The method that Parmenides lays out is a small paragraph and applicable to any kind of 'problema' or predication. Even if we cut out the examples from the *Topics*, Aristotle's proposed methods of dialectic would still be quite voluminous and rather hard to memorize and then master. The density of the four or five lines of a modern edition of Plato which one can use for the investigation of any kind of predication is not an insignificant thing.

Proclus also makes here another more subtle point about the superiority of Parmenidean method. The goal of Aristotelian dialectic, according to Proclus, is that one chooses a given assertion and then one can "either confirm or refute" (κατασκευάζειν ἢ ἀνασκευάζειν, 984, 2) the opinion which has been put forward. His point seems to be that the main point of the Aristotelian method is to simply propose and defend the problem at hand and that the opposition to it (what looks like 'negative hypotheses') is, in a sense, external and subsequent to it. Rather, with the Procline *Parmenides*, one can, in the same method and at the same time, examine opposing problems with the purpose of confirming or rejecting (κρατῦναι...ἐλέγχει 985,31) one of them. One can also see through his choice of language that Proclus sees the Aristotelian confirmation or rejection to be *artificial* as well. Here we come back to Proclus' assertion that Plato's dialectic uses intelligible forms. For Proclus the true dialectical method takes both its form 'from Above,'<sup>7</sup> but, for the Platonists, form and content of thought are one: just as the objects that opinion employs are "completely unstable and undefined by knowledge" (1003,5), so also is that method. Whereas because the true Platonic dialectic

6. What follows will be a paraphrase of *In Parmenidem* 984,21-985,3, following the edition and lineation of *Platonis Parmenidem commentaria*, ed. Carlos STEEL, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007-2009.

7. Ἄνωθεν, *In Parm.* 985,2. Dillon / Morrow translates this as 'from the outset,' but Luna correctly sees that the meaning is, 'à partir d'en haut.' I have only been able to use this single reference to the new edition of the fifth book of *Proclus. Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, livre V, ed. Concetta LUNA and Alain-Philippe SEGONDS, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2014.

uses *logoi*, which derive from *Nous* where both thinking and objects thought are one, the method which Parmenides reveals here is itself also ordered.

What we see here in this interesting comparison between the *Topics* and *Parmenides* is that Proclus' objections occur within a position which has agreed to the need for logic, properly understood. However, Proclus' statements about logic elsewhere cloud the issue, for he says it is a pseudo-science and entirely empty.<sup>8</sup> In the opening chapters of the *Platonic Theology*, Proclus is arguing against one set of interpreters who see the goal of the dialogue to be logical, not against the role of the logic within the *Parmenides* or indeed Neoplatonic metaphysics. If one attends to Proclus' arguments here in the *Parmenides* commentary, once one puts aside the related assertion about employing intelligible forms, one can see that Proclus thinks Plato outlines the method of dialectic *better*, not that Aristotle's is empty *tout simple* and to be rejected outright. He defends it because, in his or Syrianus' hands, the *Parmenides* and the Platonic philosophy is able to bear within it logic. This transforms Neoplatonism.

### Test case two: the *Analytics*

Where Proclus must more strongly distance the *Parmenides* from the *Topics*, because they have become so similar, and even though the content of his objections are not exactly crushing, when it comes to the *Analytics*, he need only reference, almost in passing, the similarity of it to the *Parmenides'* method. The fact that Proclus accuses Aristotle in his *Prior Analytics* I 27 to have imitated the dialectical method of the *Parmenides* should cause every scholar of Neoplatonic metaphysics to pause, for it tells us how central logic had become to that most central and theological dialogue. Before we look at Proclus' account, let us look at where Aristotle 'copied.'

Aristotle spends the first twenty-six chapters of the *Prior Analytics* outlining what seems to be every possible categorical syllogism, but having done so one needs, first, a vast array of terms out of which one can construct syllogisms and, second, to know how precisely the terms are related to each other. This latter fact will be crucial in a correct account of Proclus' interpretation.

We must select the premises suitable to each problem in this manner: first we must hypothesize the subject and the definitions and whatever is a property of the subject; next after this, whatever follows the subject, and again those which the thing follows, and then whatever cannot belong to it. [...] Of the terms which follow we must distinguish those which fall within the essence, those which are predicated as properties, and those which are predicated as accidents, and of the latter those which apparently and those which really belong. The larger the supply

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8. Δοξοσοφίας, *TP* I 9, p. 36, 9. Κένος / διακένος, *TP* I 9, p. 34,15-16; p. 36,9; p. 37,13; p. 39,3; p. 40,16; I 12, p. 56,6. Cf. also *In Parm.* 1051,29-1052,3.

a man has of these, the more quickly will he reach a conclusion; and in proportion as he apprehends those which are truer, the more cogently will he demonstrate. (*Prior Analytics*. I 27, 43b1-11; trans. A.J. Jenkinson)

Aristotle's point here is that to employ his three term syllogism one needs to provide a definition of that thing, and to situate the given subject or term within its class, both in terms of what is above and what is below it. As well one must provide other terms that are related to it, how they are related to it and those things that are not related to it. That is to say, to construct a valid syllogism, one must order the terms or 'beings' of the conclusion of the syllogism in an ordered manner, observing how precisely each term is related to each. The actual employment of the Aristotelian categorical syllogisms themselves *presupposes the selection and knowledge* of three terms that are somehow related to each other and whose relation is known or hypothesised so that the appropriate form of syllogism (*barbara*, *darapti* and so on) can be identified and employed. Prior to the categorical syllogism itself, therefore, one must set out an array of terms and their relation to each other.

It is from this chapter that Proclus sees the similarity:

I know certainly that Aristotle, in his imitation of this method [in the *Parmenides*] aims in the case of his categorical syllogisms to set out the predicates and the subjects and what does not belong to the subjects and the predicate, stating what follows and what does not follow from it and what it is posterior to. What is set out here [in the *Parmenides*], however, is far more complete, having assumed every mode through division through which one must proceed for the exercising of one's intellect on each aspect of being. [...] When we are in pursuit of reality, we are more likely to discover it through this system than through that of Aristotle, since through this multiplicity of hypotheses we can track down with more finesse the subject of investigation.<sup>9</sup>

Anthony Charles Lloyd has incorrectly taken Proclus' statement here to be a flat out comparison of Platonic division and the whole of the categorical syllogism and so much of his criticisms of Proclus evaporate.<sup>10</sup> Rather, Proclus' point here is only that the *Parmenides* is more *comprehensive* than Aristotle's more abbreviated version and that this comprehensiveness is essential to the investigation of reality.<sup>11</sup> Lloyd is aware that Proclus might in fact be pointing

9. In *Parm.* 1007,7-19; translation Glen R. MORROW and John M. DILLON, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2018.

10. Anthony C. LLOYD, *Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1990, p. 16. "...we have to conclude that his criticism of Aristotelian categorical logic is mostly too confused to amount to anything." Dino BUZZETTI, "On Proclus' comparison of Aristotelian and Parmenidean logic," in John J. CLEARY (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1997, pp. 331-343, defends Proclus against Lloyd's depredations, but this defense was not necessary had Proclus' text been more closely read.

11. Cf. David D. BUTORAC, "The Place and Purpose of Hypotheses in Proclus: Method, Logic, Mathematics and Philosophy," in Angela LONGO (ed.), *Argument from Hypothesis in Ancient Philosophy*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2012, pp. 365-382.

to this other activity that one must do before one syllogizes. This ordering of terms within a science (Lloyd refers to the *Posterior Analytics*, but it equally applies here) no doubt, he says, “does not occur in any actual science. But if it does not, that is not due to the logic. It is a matter of something prior to the logic, namely the choice of primitive premises including definitions.”<sup>12</sup> Lloyd, I think, unwittingly gets the sense exactly right of how Proclus sees the Parmenidean method and what exactly Proclus is referring to in his suggestion that Aristotle copied the *Parmenides* at *An Pr* I 27ff. Before one proves the relation of certain terms, one needs to be supplied with terms and an idea of their relation. For Lloyd, this is prior to logic. But it is clear that for Proclus, this ordering of terms (as Aristotle ‘imitated’), originating as it does from the *Parmenides*, is no prior activity to anything. For Proclus, this is the heart of dialectic and thus also theology. That the *Analytics* incorporates demonstrative syllogisms – thus blessing the entire project – also would enable a Platonist to dwell on the significance of the *Analytics* for a Platonic project. Once again, it is because he sees the *similarities* between what he is doing with the *Parmenides* and this part of the *Analytics* that he feels the need to indicate that Aristotle followed Plato, but if this is the case, by Proclus’ own accusation, the difference rests strictly on degree of difference and not of kind.

## Conclusion

The incorporation of Aristotle’s metaphysics into Neoplatonism could, possibly, have been foreseen from its Athenian bursting forth from Zeus with Plotinus, but the confidence and the unperceived need to incorporate *his logic* is most certainly *not*, not least into the interpretation of the theological dialogue par excellence of the *Parmenides*. To see this openness to Aristotle’s logic and Proclus’ own employment of the *Organon* to interpret the theological *Parmenides* is to see for the first time an original and creative continuum between the *Organon* and the *Metaphysics*,<sup>13</sup> within a Platonic problematic. The logical works of Aristotle become, now, a key to interpret the *Parmenides* and the Neoplatonic philosophy. And yet why? The significance of the fully descended soul, begun with Iamblichus, becomes yet more worked out: what the soul is, is dianoetic. Yet if this so, this raises important questions about Proclus’ philosophy and those who come after him.

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12. Anthony C. LLOYD, *Anatomy*, p. 15; italics mine. Likewise, on premises reached by division in Proclus, “[a]s for this, we have to notice that it does not concern the deductive logic and that there is equal room for it in the preliminaries to categorical syllogistic” (*Anatomy*, p. 16).

13. This begins with Alexander. Cf. Katerina IERODIAKONOY, “Syrianus on Scientific Knowledge and Demonstration,” in Angela LONGO (ed.), *Syrianus et la métaphysique de l’antiquité tardive*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2009, pp. 401-422; Maddalena BONELLI, “Dialectique et philosophie première: Syrianus et Alexandre d’Aphrodise,” *op.cit.*, pp. 423-438.



All scholars of Proclus have underplayed the scientific, logical character of the *Parmenides*' dialectic in the third part, highlighting only the silence which Proclus indeed enjoins upon us.<sup>14</sup> Yet to do so, they miss the *tension* at the centre of Proclus' philosophy.<sup>15</sup> The *more geometrico* does get mentioned, but then cast aside. Thus while scholars see only the apophaticism in Proclus' *Parmenides*, they forget that this is only the first hypothesis and that extreme kataphaticism follows. Perhaps if we had the rest of Proclus' commentary on the remaining hypotheses, this unanimous conclusion might have been avoided. Likewise, that Proclus sees a structure of bi-conditionality in the positive and negative hypotheses (necessary for the soul's knowing and essence) is rather indicative of a man in worship of science, as Hegel notes. It this tension – which I see to be integral to Proclus, problematically – between the apophatic and kataphatic which causes Damascius to reject the One as 'known' in the soul, even apophatically. Letting Aristotelianism into the heart of Neoplatonism I see to be both necessary and destructive of it. The soul and its scientific grasp of all becomes dominant, *even when it practices apophaticism*. Within the soul, apophatic and kataphatic statements are equal and necessary. Proclus is merely consequent and at the end of this ingress of Aristotelianism. His project is a sign of confidence and creativity, to be sure, as witnessed in the magisterial (and influential for Christian and Islamic thought<sup>16</sup>) *Elements of Theology*, but also, as we know, defensive against the imperial religion set against it. However, if Damascius is the judge of the Procline synthesis of Plato and Aristotle, a new ground should be sought.

### *Independent scholar*

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14. E.g. Carlos STEEL, "Au-delà de tout nom. *Parménide* 142A3-4 dans l'interprétation de Proclus et de Denys," in Bart JANSSENS, Bram ROOSEN and Peter VAN DEUN (ed.), *Philomathestatos. Studies in Greek Patristics and Byzantine Texts Presented to Jacques Noret for his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, Leuven-Dudley MA, Uitgeverij Peeters, 2004, pp. 603-624; ID., "Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus' *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology' in Martin PICKAVÉ (ed.), *Die Logik des Transzendentalen*," Leiden, Brill, 2003, pp. 581-599. The exception to this is John N. MARTIN. *Themes in Neoplatonic and Aristotelian logic*. Hampshire, Ashgate, 2004, but his interesting accounts of the final part of the *Parmenides*, coming from a standpoint modern logic, fails to make clear how this might relate to the Aristotelianism which might have been familiar to Proclus, to Proclus' broader project or to general conclusions about the significance of the whole of Proclus' philosophy. This is not meant as a harsh criticism at all; only to locate his account in relation to those Neoplatonic scholars who do make these assertions.

15. But see the early article by John M. RIST, "Mysticism and transcendence in later Neoplatonism," *Hermes*, 92 (1964), pp. 213-225. This article highlights general tendencies within Proclus to excellent effect but not, specifically, Proclus' *Parmenides* interpretation. See also David D. BUTORAC, "Proclus' Aporetic Epistemology," in David D. BUTORAC and Danielle A. LAYNE (ed.), *Proclus and his Legacy*, New York NY, De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 123-135.

16. Cf. David D. BUTORAC and Danielle A. LAYNE (ed.), *Proclus and His Legacy*.



## SUMMARY

Proclus, while interpreting the dialectical method of the *Parmenides*, makes the astonishing claim that Aristotle at *Prior Analytics* I 27 had imitated Plato here, but that, of course, what Plato laid out was more complete. This remark is important in three ways: first, this is the only surviving case where a connection is made between the Neoplatonic interpretation of the method of the *Parmenides* and Aristotle's *Analytics*; second, it provides a key to understand how Proclus interpreted the method; third, it reveals the increasing comfort – or decreasing antagonism – the later Neoplatonists had towards Aristotle. What I would like to do is to examine how Alexander interprets this passage, and in particular I will examine his development of *per se* predication here, how Proclus develops this in the context of the Parmenidean method and compare this to Philoponus' commentary on this passage.

## SOMMAIRE

Proclus, en interprétant la méthode dialectique du *Parménide*, affirme de manière étonnante qu'Aristote, dans les *Premiers Analytiques* I, 27, a imité Platon mais que, bien entendu, ce que Platon avait exposé était plus complet. Cette remarque est importante à trois égards : premièrement, il s'agit du seul cas qui subsiste où un lien est établi entre l'interprétation néoplatonicienne de la méthode de *Parménide* et celle des *Analytiques* d'Aristote ; deuxièmement, elle fournit une clé pour comprendre comment Proclus a interprété la méthode ; troisièmement, elle révèle l'aisance croissante – ou l'antagonisme décroissant – des néoplatoniciens tardifs vis-à-vis d'Aristote. Je voudrais examiner comment Alexandre interprète ce passage, et en particulier ici son développement sur la prédication en tant que telle, comment Proclus développe cela dans le contexte de la méthode parménidienne et le compare au commentaire de Philopon sur ce passage.