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ARTICLE

Feminine Power in Proclus's *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*

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Abstract

Notorious for advancing a strict dichotomy between the masculine "demiurgic father" and the feminine "nurse/receptacle of becoming" as the "natural" origin of the cosmos, Plato's *Timaeus* has become a site for feminist interrogation. Most critics easily deem the text a masculine fantasy that projects feminine impotence and obligatory heterosexuality, reinforcing patriarchal power structures that are blindly reproduced in their historical reception. Consequently, this article analyzes the Neoplatonic replication of this framework, but with special attention given to Proclus's challenges to this gendered and sexual context. In this late, sometimes forgotten figure, we find, rather surprisingly, a Platonist who neither sequesters the feminine to the domain of the passive receptacle nor charges her simply with being a bastard image of the masculine. Rather, for Proclus, the feminine becomes the site of lived, erotic power that produces and sustains the value of authentic otherness. Furthermore, Proclus offers a challenge to the naturalness of the sex binary, suggesting a radical queerness as the basis of all identity. Overall, we shall see how classical patriarchal thinkers may, despite themselves, offer subversive models that might present readers with possibilities for troubling the sexual prejudices of ancient metaphysical schemas.

For feminist critics, the gendered ontology of Plato's *Timaeus* is infamously problematic. Some, like Genevieve Lloyd, argue that insofar as the *Timaeus* explicitly associates the nurse and receptacle of Becoming with, at best, the passive placeholder for Form or, at worst, the unruly mother who frustrates the "rational" prerogatives of the demiurgic father, this cosmological picture solidifies, as natural, a gendered and exclusionary matrix that casts the "feminine" as masculine privation—a process that sequesters the feminine to the domain of the Other, to the simple contrary of or counter-pole to order and reason, namely, nothing more than the space or matter of creation versus a true or substantial cause in herself (Lloyd 1984/1993, 3–7; see also Genova 1994, 41–51). Even more strongly, psychoanalyst and philosopher Luce Irigaray argues that the feminine does not actually appear in Plato's cosmological project, even in a subordinated role, insofar as the receptacle, nurse, and/or mother merely images the patriarchal desire for domination, producing an other to itself in order that it might have something to control or suppress, and therein situate itself or, rather, himself as primary

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and superior. In other words, for Irigaray, the image of a passive but also unruly receptacle is not the feminine other as such, but the *specular* feminine, which is produced as though it were a veritable other simply in order to be able to reinforce masculine prerogative.[1] Ultimately, for Irigaray, what gendered metaphysical schemas like the *Timaeus* produce is not a real difference between the masculine and the feminine but merely masculine sex *encore* (Butler 1990, 12), the inversion of itself, an upside-down mirror reflecting what the subject desires to excise from itself or, as Irigaray neatly deems it, an "other-of-the-same." As Irigaray writes: "For if the other is not defined in his or her actual reality, there is only an other me, not real others." The feminine within this economy, then, is merely "the complement to man, his inverse, his scraps, his need, his other. Which means that she cannot be truly other. The other that she is remains trapped in the economy or the horizon of a single subject" (Irigaray 1996, 61 and 63). Continuing this line of thought and expanding the criticism to include the overt obligatory heterosexuality undergirding the reign of the demiurge in Plato's cosmology, Judith Butler further diagnoses the problem of the *Timaeus*, arguing that it secures "a given fantasy of heterosexual intercourse and male autogenesis. For the receptacle is not a woman, but is a figure that women become within the dream-world of this metaphysical cosmogony . . ." (Butler 1993, 26).[2] In short, the gender trouble of Plato's *Timaeus* is that it reinforces obligatory heterosexuality so as to "naturalize" the reality of a strict binary between male and female whereby the former is seen as superior to the latter. Ultimately, the masculine project frames the feminine receptacle as the grotesque, but seductive, complement, a specter of the real, a thing of illusions without quality in herself, a placeholder that can only hope to mean anything if it placidly reflects the will/being of the demiurgic father.

This, indeed, is a bleak picture of Plato's likely story and one that certainly casts the philosopher as one who does not break or queer the typical regulative binaries of classical antiquity but, rather, dangerously reinforces and reproduces them.[3] Undeniably, many of the late antique Platonists, in their attempt to make sense of Plato's *Timaeus* in relation to their own understanding of his cosmological and metaphysical projects, replicate this problematic gendered and sexual framework, relegating the feminine to the domain of the specular copy, casting her as an unruly other who must be either tamed into submission or, perhaps, avoided altogether. This strain of Platonic thinking is evident in Plotinus who, leaning on Aristotle, identifies matter with the Platonic receptacle,[4] and, therein, the feminine. Seemingly embarrassed by Plato's identification of the receptacle as a kind of mother, Plotinus ultimately reinforces the identification only after he reduces the definition of mother to that which receives the seed, who can bring forth nothing without masculine form.

> The forms which enter into matter as their mother do it no wrong, nor again do they do it any good . . . so that receptacle and nurse are more proper terms for [the receptacle]; but mother is only used in a manner of speaking, for matter itself brings forth nothing. But those people seem to call it mother who claim that the mother holds the position of matter in respect to her children, in that she only receives [the seed] and contributes nothing to the children. . . . (Plotinus 1966–1988, III 6.19.1–41)[5]

As would be expected, Plotinus emphasizes the receptacle's passivity and lack of being, its need for form and, as such, he falls prey to the Irigarayan charge of producing an "other-of-the-same" insofar as matter is simply Being's ghostly image of itself, what

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Being dictates as not itself by excising it from itself, thereby leaving the receptacle/matter to lack all quality/power in herself.[6] Rather revealingly, Plotinus continuously associates feminine matter with lying and deceit, as well as vanity and an inability to grasp anything substantially.[7] For Plotinus, the feminine receptacle is utterly unalterable, unaffected, and evil (insofar as it is untouched by the good) and, as such, she is nothing, not even able to hold onto masculine form without producing deceit. As Plotinus writes, "[I]t must remain the same when the forms come into it and stay unaffected when they leave it, so that something may always be coming into it and leaving it. So certainly what comes into it comes as a phantom, untrue into untrue."[8] Again, as Butler and Irigaray would charge of Plotinus's feminine matter, the receptacle simply survives as the *inscriptional space*, the specular surface that receives the marks of a phallic signifying act, writing on her only in order to produce a reflection that images back the seeming "reality" of masculine self-sufficiency, creativity, and independence (Butler 1993, 13). Put otherwise, masculine Being seems to produce its own other—the perverted illusion, the bastard copy of the real—seeing its self-inversion as deceit and thereby producing an internal threat to its own self-image, thus reifying the "reality" of its own superiority.

This assigning of the feminine to the realm of the other-of-the-same, to that which merely reflects the inverse of masculine subjectivity, is continuously reproduced throughout the Platonic tradition. One need only reference Olympiodorus who, while retaining the *Republic*'s controversially feminist belief that women can be philosophers/philosopher-rulers,[9] tempers this progressive stance by reinforcing the identification that women as women (not as philosophers) are receptacles/receivers versus producers who, notably, take pleasure not in rational activity but in grief (Olympiodorus 1998, 33.3). They are tempters to the world of appearing, lovers of money (2016 164, 3), and enslaved to fate and the body (so much so that Olympiodorus suggests that if a woman looked into a mirror while menstruating she would stain the glass) (2016 220, 1. See also Olympiodorus 1998, 39.1 and Olympiodorus 2016, 168, 5–10). Olympiodorus consistently uses "womanish" as a term of disparagement and often employs it to support his prejudices against foreign powers like the Persians (Olympiodorus 1998, 6 2), and even refers to women explicitly as property (6 8), that is, they, like the body, are mere instruments of masculine rational agency. Explicitly reinforcing the masculinist/sexist ideology that associates errors (or temptations away from the good) with the feminine, Olympiodorus disparages the body and imagination (associating both with the feminine), referring to the latter as being as seductive and deceitful as Calypso and Circe respectively (Olympiodorus 1976, 6, 2, 5–10).[10]

Overall, these associations within the Neoplatonic tradition can certainly give feminists pause, causing them to question the value of a philosophical system that reinforces discourses that cast the feminine as the object of domination or control, the passive or unruly being who needs the agency of the masculine.[11] Now as many would expect, this feminist concern has not historically been a part of most Neoplatonic research, with very few scholars explicitly discussing these problematics.[12] Nevertheless, there is a growing trend in late Neoplatonic scholarship, particularly on Iamblichus and Proclus, that has begun focusing on how their respective philosophies redeem what has been conventionally consigned to the realm of the feminine, for example, embodied/temporal life, the world of becoming, and the seeming bedlam of generation (see Shaw 1995; Addey 2013; Layne 2019). Indeed, this trend in scholarship highlights the possibility that the late Neoplatonists might offer new ways to think

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"power" outside of standard patriarchal conceptions of power as domination, that is, as power over (an) other(s),[13] for example, the masculine over the feminine, form over matter, the Demiurge who subjugates the feminine receptacle, and so on. Contrariwise, there is a strand, still to be fully retrieved, in Platonism that explicitly juxtaposes coercive conceptions of power as an external, limiting force that attempts to control an inferior with power understood in a more robust sense,[14] that is, in a sense not necessarily constrained to the quest for sovereignty over or mere control so much as that which constitutes the being or life of things.[15] As we shall see in Proclus's commentary on the *Timaeus*, genuine power (δύνᾰμις) is to be conceived causally or generatively as a kind of empowering of the Other, an engendering of real and unlimited alterity. Moreover, in Proclus's theological metaphysics, power is not that which merely divides and excludes as a means of control and subordination so much as it secures connection, contact, or a relationship among all things. In other words, there is a form of power for Proclus that is antithetical to power as it is often conceived within patriarchal discourses wherein power culminates in the domination and subjugation of the other, particularly the subjugation of the feminine. Rather, power is conceived by Proclus as a generative and creative principle that *em*powers and *en*genders genuine plurality while allowing for transformative relations that enable and support dynamic generation rather than an annexation that seeks to contain or limit all things to the orbit of the same. Markedly, Proclus deems this contrasting form of power in his system the principle of Life (ζωὴ) and, interestingly for our purposes, associates this fundamental element of reality with the feminine.[16]

Consequently, the following will turn to Proclus's conceptualization of this life-giving power and its connection with the feminine in his commentary on the *Timaeus*. I will first show how Proclus toes the masculinist line that reinforces the naturalness of a gender binary and obligatory heterosexuality (that is, a sexual system that reinforces the superiority of the masculine term as natural), as he certainly asserts the superiority of masculine principles and deities over their feminine counterparts. Nevertheless, when we take a closer look at Proclus's system, we shall see that he does not sequester the feminine to the domain of the passive receptacle, nor is she simply charged with being a bastard image of the masculine that must be controlled or subdued. Rather, in discussing the gendered deities, particularly the goddess Night as well as her image in creation as the mixing bowl in Plato's *Timaeus*, she and all of her reflections exemplify a life-giving (ζῳογονικῆς) power that produces and sustains the value of authentic otherness, be it intelligible, psychic, or corporeal, while further reinforcing her connective, relational power. In the final section, we shall also focus on those passages wherein Proclus explicitly queers the essentialist and exclusionary nature of the gender binary insofar as nothing in his system is solely male or female, masculine or feminine. To the contrary, insofar as Proclus follows the Neoplatonic principle of *panta en pasin* (all things are in all things), both masculine and feminine causes, for example, the limiting and the unlimited, sameness and difference, the Demiurge and the Mixing Bowl, or, more mythically stated in his commentary on the *Timaeus*, Phanes and Night, the human soul and all of creation reflect erotic ambiguity.

Proclus's Gendered Metaphysics

To begin an analysis of Proclus's account of the feminine in his metaphysical schema, it behooves any honest author to emphasize first his reinforcement of the gendered distinction between 1) that which arranges and 2) that which is arranged, or 1) that which

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fills and 2) that which is filled (Proclus 2007a, I 132.10). For Proclus, "one should postulate that rivalry everywhere—as it is in gods, intellects, souls, and bodies. At that [first] level it is limit and unlimited, in intellects it is sameness and otherness, in soul it is same and different, and in bodies heaven and generation . . ." (I 132.12–15). Proclus, following the Pythagoreans, expectantly regards male and female as divine attributes, corresponding to the binaries of odd and even, unifying and dividing, static and moving (cf. I, 131.23–26), situating the latter half of the binary as "always drawn up in dependence on the better ones" (I, 132.15–16). Moreover, despite defending a literal reading of Socrates's equality of the sexes in the *Republic*, whereby men and women are regarded as the same species with the same virtues (I 46. 1–12), Proclus, like Glaucon before him and Olympiodorus after him, reinforces the inferiority of the female during his allegorical/cosmological reading of such equality:

> Even where gender had been divided, male and female of the same rank have the same tasks; it is accomplished in an initial way by the male and in a subordinate way by the female. Hence in mortal creatures too nature has revealed the female as weaker in all things than the male. Indeed everything which proceeds from the male is also brought to birth by the female, preserving its subordinate role. (Proclus 2007a, I 46.17–47.8)

Proclus further solidifies gender subordination within a heterosexual matrix by consistently reminding his readers of the divine couplings between gods like Hera and Zeus, Rhea and Kronos, Gaia and Uranus while further insisting that the feminine marker gives "birth in a derivative way to whatever the others bring forth in their fatherly and unitary way." As we can here see, Proclus appears to be guilty of appropriating childbirth as a masculine virtue by relegating the role the feminine "agent" plays in delivery to something merely derivative (I 47.15–22).[17] Consider Proclus's account of the Moon's generative subordination to the Sun:

> Here you have the coalition of male and female among intelligible gods, among intellective ones, and among hypercosmic ones. See, then, how the same thing applies to the heaven, since all generation takes its directions from the Sun and Moon, predominantly and in a fatherly way from the former, and secondarily from the latter. Hence she [the Moon] has been described by some as "a lesser Sun." (I 47.7–13)

At the level of the corporeal, Proclus further naturalizes heterosexuality via reproductive arguments concerned with physiological differences, explaining, "as far as the organs are concerned, nature has made for them a single task" (I 48.1–3). Again, while appealing to the *Republic*'s drawing of lots, Proclus offers an allegorical reading and argues that the divine guardians have carefully contrived the coupling of appropriate males or forms with their corresponding females or receptacles (I 49.17–21), writing: "For in the things of nature too receptacles are distributed so as to suit the forms, and each of the forms would hold its own standing in relation to the changes it undergoes . . . " (I 51.5–6).[18]

Overall, along with Plotinus before him and Olympiodorus after him, Proclus deploys masculinist ideology throughout his metaphysical project, explicitly promoting not only gender subordination but also reproductive heterosexual tropes that reduce women to passive receptacles.[19] In this regard, Proclus indeed appeals to patriarchal

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conceptions of power as domination, relegating the feminine to that which must be governed in order to reinforce paternal sovereignty. Nevertheless, in the rest of this section, I would like to turn to those aspects of Proclus's system that problematize *from within* his philosophical system both the inferiority of the feminine as well as the reduction of the feminine to a mere receptacle or passive placeholder for form.[20] Here, we shall see that Proclus leans on a very different conception of power insofar as power is defined as the principle of *Life* (ζωὴ) itself that is erotically imbued in all things. It will, in fact, be this conception of power that is more central to Proclus's metaphysical system than merely the power whereby X subjugates Y in order to sustain its own ends, in this instance the masculine (sameness/unity/demiurge) dominating or reigning over the feminine (difference/multiplicity/receptacle), that is, the masculine's pseudo-other, in order to have an artifice on which to cast its own inverted self-reflection.

To understand this internal reimaging of power away from the more patriarchal conception of power as dominance and as a constant reproduction of sameness, we should note that for Proclus, prior to the initial hypostasis of Being (itself a mixture of limit and unlimitedness), there exists substantially and independently (Proclus 1932, §90) the *archai* of the Limit (πέρας) and the Unlimited (ἄπειρον), wherein the former is expectantly the source of all unity, stability, and reality, and the latter is the source of all dynamism and life. The Limit is the principle of wholeness and unification, whereas every differentiation, that is, generation into otherness or plurality, is brought about by the Unlimited. In sum, Limit enables and expresses the identity of things and the Unlimited enables and expresses the erotic outpouring (*proodos*) of the One, and is, as such, perfect or absolute *dunamis*, always becoming other to itself while still remaining (*mone*) itself. In short, the Unlimited is that which undergirds all *procession* and therein constitutes the *Life* or vitality of reality, reflected notably in 1) the absolute power (*dunamis*) of the Intelligible realm, 2) the self-movement of soul, and 3) nature's infinitely productive and generative capacity. While emphasizing the generative and fertile powers of the cosmos, Proclus even couches his language in historically gendered terms, referring to the Limit as a kind of paternal *archê* (Proclus 1932, §151) and referring to the Unlimited in femininized/maternal terms, arguing that processive power "mirrors that Unlimited which is the primordial parent of the universe, whence proceeded all the generative potency whose transcendent prerogative it is to diffuse the divine gifts in their unfailing succession."[21]

As can be expected, this distinction between the Limit and the Unlimited ultimately comes to inform the gender binary whereby male or masculine deities are the cause of being "while the female embraces that which projects from itself all manner of processions and distinctions, together with their measures of life and generative powers" (Proclus 2008, I 220.5–10. Cf. I 220.15–28). From the uppermost limits of Proclus's system to the lowest, all things are regulated along the lines of this basic masculine/feminine distinction.

> [I]n that case (1) Limit and the Unlimited took their starting-points from the gods and penetrated through the whole of reality in whatever manner it exists. They are in fact found in the intelligible realm in virtue of the (2) stable and generative cause of the intelligible beings; they are also found in the intellective realm in virtue of the (3) paternal and maternal principle of the intellective gods; they are also found in the hypercosmic realm in virtue of the (4) demiurgic monad and the zoogonic dyad, and lastly also in virtue of the (5) creative and fructifying potencies. (Proclus 2008, I, 226.7–14)

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Here it should be noted that despite his reinforcement of a rigid gender binary and the patriarchal propensity to reinforce the "maternal" or "fecund" nature of the feminine, this is not the standard "wandering womb" that needs to be controlled or domesticated by masculine intellect. Rather, Proclus emphasizes that the unlimited, generative principle is the source of procession and, as we shall see, mediation whereby the feminine becomes a divine (rather than errant) cause (see also Schultz 2018; 2019). Ultimately, it will be shown in the conclusion how this seemingly strict dualism between masculine and feminine deities or "divine causes" can be queered and problematized, but for now it should be emphasized that the feminine is identified with the dynamic and processive power of the Unlimited, which ought not be confused with an uncontrollable force that cannot help but "body forth." Furthermore, this power is found at all levels of reality, be it in the intelligible and stable "generation" of eternal Ideas or in the fructifying capacities of nature.

At the level of Being, the principle of the Unlimited is reflected in the absolute active potency of Life, the middle term between inchoate Being (what is often referred to as the intelligible), and its corresponding term, Intellect (what is often referred to as intellective). Between intelligible Being and intellective Intellect there is the *Life* of Being (the intelligible-intellective).[22] Put otherwise, Life is the procession of Being that mirrors the Unlimited in its power of producing infinite distinction, difference, and otherness. Ergo, Life is the actual thinking of Being, through which inchoate Being comes to "know itself" as determinate Intellect. At the level of the noetic, Life is absolute or perfect power (*dunamis*) and, as such, this procession or connection between Being and Intellect is isomorphic or seamless, truly allowing Being to become an object for itself so that Life generates the unity of thought thinking itself. Ultimately, this highlights how Life is generative but also binding, connecting differences and safeguarding plurality even at the level of Intellect insofar as Proclus insists on the separation between Being and Intellect. Indeed, by insisting on their separation/otherness, the perfection of the processive power to connect through likeness rather than identity/sameness is guaranteed. To emphasize the point, beyond the noetic world, the principle of Life continues to sustain the dynamic procession of reality in the emergence of Soul and the world of generation while also being the principle that maintains their connection to the intelligible and, by consequence, the Good beyond Being, the One. In other words, the principle of Life is that which connects effects to their causes, allowing continuity (*sunecheia*) without collapsing everything into sameness, that is, into the orbit of self-reflection.

Overall, the principle of Life, which is marked rather consistently throughout Proclus's corpus as feminine, ensures *genuine* reproduction of otherness, multiplicity, difference, and so on rather than the other-of-the-same or the same *encore*—a necessary event *if* the cosmos is not simply to reflect but to *embody* the Good at the level of becoming and creation. Ultimately, this is true power for Proclus, a kind of power centered on the value of connection and vitalism that, strangely enough, is best understood once we turn to Proclus's overt attempts to map Orphic and Chaldean deities onto his already complicated gendered metaphysical schema.

From Night to the Mixing Bowl: Proclus's Life-giving Goddesses

The importance of the gendered nature of Proclus's higher ontological realities and the particularly potent power of the feminine is more clearly seen in his attempt to square Plato's *Timaeus* with the gods and goddesses of Orphic mythology and the Chaldean

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oracles.[23] To foreshadow the conclusions of this section, the key to understanding feminine power centers on Proclus's characterization of the first gendered deity, Night, and how her *Life* informs all further feminine emanations, including the power of the mixing bowl in the *Timaeus* as well as the power of Soul itself. Moreover, Night's role as advisor to the Demiurge, wherein she acts as the paradigmatic deity securing the bonds of *sympatheia*, highlights the role of feminine power as that which connects or erotically links all that is and all that comes to be.[24]

Table 1: Proclus's Theological Metaphysics Applied to Plato's *Timaeus*[25]

Procline Metaphysical Principles	Orphic/Chaldean Deity		Plato's *Timaeus*	
ONE	n/a		n/a	
Limit and Unlimited (the primary *archê*)	Ether and Chaos		n/a	
THE TRIAD of BEING				
Being (the intelligible)	Phanes (Androgynous)		Intelligible Living Thing (Androgynous)	
Life (the intelligible-intellective)	Night (Feminine)		n/a	
Intellect (intellective)	Zeus (masculine)	Hera (feminine)	Demiurge (masculine)	Mixing Bowl (feminine)

As mentioned, the Neoplatonist synthesizes his metaphysical worldview with the deities of Orphic mythology and the Chaldean oracles as well as images from Plato's *Timaeus*. To assist readers in understanding this sometimes-bedazzling collapse of metaphysical principles with esoteric mythology and Plato's *Timaeus*, a rudimentary outline of Proclus's allegorical schema is summarized in Table 1. Its contents will be clarified as we proceed.

To unpack this syncretic cosmology, Proclus begins with the Orphic/Chaldean deities of Ether and Chaos. For Proclus, Ether and Chaos are to be read as allegorical images of the primordial Limit and Unlimited insofar as "the former of which is situated at the limit of the Intelligibles, the latter in the [region of the] Unlimited; for the former is the root of all things, while for the latter 'there was no limit'" (Proclus 2008, I 428.3–7).[26] From Ether and Chaos emerges the Orphic egg, representing, for Proclus, primary Being or Being itself in its initial emanation. From the Orphic egg emerges Phanes, housed at the last level of the Intelligible and correspondent to Plato's Living-Thing-Itself from the *Timaeus* (I 428.10–12).[27] Here, we should note that primarily Phanes, sometimes referred to as Protogonos, acts as a paradigm of every living thing, whether intellectual, vital, or corporeal, and, as such, is explicitly characterized by both maleness and femaleness insofar it must be a mixture of limit and unlimitedness.

> [The Intelligible Living Being] includes both male and female simultaneously, for these [sexes] are present in every order of living thing in an appropriate manner—

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> being present in one manner in gods, but in another in daemons and yet another among mortal beings—and it is necessary that the primary henads of these [sexes] pre-exist within the single comprehension of Living things. From this dyad [of male and female] comes the four forms of living things so that as a result it has also been established as a tetrad. . . . The single form, Living Being Itself, exists up there, and so too does the dyad, male and female. (Proclus 2013, III 106.10–24)[28]

While essentializing the reality of the sex binary, this passage nevertheless destabilizes the reality of a singular sex presentation, because, as we shall see in the conclusion, the Living Being itself acts a paradigm for all things, therein establishing that each procession, eventually including individual souls, carries within it an image of the dyad of male and female. Again, accentuating the completeness and therein the extent of Phanes's (Plato's Intelligible Living Thing) causal responsibility, Proclus further cements the god's necessary androgyny.

> This is why the Theologian fashions a most universal living thing, placing on it the heads of a ram, a bull, a lion and a serpent, and why both maleness and femaleness are first of all in it as being the first living thing—"female and begetter is the mighty god Erikepaios [another name for Phanes]," says the Theologian (Kern 1922, 81)–and he was also the first to have wings. (Proclus 2008, I 429.27–430.1)

Moving along from this primary androgyne, as we shall discuss their influence further in the conclusion, the first explicitly gendered deity emerges only once the androgynous god, Phanes, parthenogenically gives birth to Night,[29] celebrated as [both] "female and begetter" (Proclus 2008, I 429.27–430.1. cf. Kern 1922, 163). Here, Night maps onto the intelligible-intellective order of Life and, as such, is the image of the primordial Unlimited. Sometimes referred to as Maia insofar as she is associated with being the mother of the cosmos,[30] Proclus depicts Night as initiating the life-giving series of divinities and is thereby predominantly that which constitutes multiplicity and difference at all levels of reality. As that which clearly separates effects from causes as "the separative role is appropriate for the female . . ." (Proclus 2017, III 179.28–30).[31] Night emerges as the genesis of authentic otherness as opposed to a merely upside-down or inverse image of the masculine, as through her things actually come into being as distinct and separate from their cause.[32]

Further, as the primary life-giving deity, Night is the first mediating principle of reality insofar as at the noetic level Life joins Being with Intellect, the intelligible with the intellective or, more mythically phrased in Proclus's commentary on the *Timaeus*, unites Phanes/the Intelligible Living Thing with Zeus/the Demiurge and therein establishes the link of likeness between the Intelligible Living Thing (Phanes) and the intellective creator of the sense-perceptible cosmos (Demiurge).[33] As the primary mediator, Proclus characterizes Night as the mother of prophecy and truth, an association also confirmed in Hermias's commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*. In this account, Hermias emphasizes that the order of Night is the plane of Truth insofar as Night gives "prediction without falsehood" and is thereby a prophet of the Gods (Hermias 2012, II, 153.38–154.3). As such, she is again characterized as the living mediating power between the intelligible (Phanes as Being) and the intellective (Zeus/Demiurge as Intellect), allowing Zeus, the Demiurge, to see and internalize Phanes, the Intelligible Living Thing. Hermias writes,

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No eye looked upon Protogonos,
But alone sacred Night: for all others
Perceived in heaven [only] the desperate light
irradiating from the immortal Phanes's skin (Hermias 2012, II, 155.11)

What is interesting in both Proclus's and Hermias's account is that Night's mediation manifests (makes known) the original, making the transcendent, intelligible light visible at all. Without her mediation, there is no truth or providence insofar as the light would embrace all and thus there would be no distinction, nothing separate to identify—nothing to think, live, or be. All would be absolute sameness, a problem for Proclus even at the level of the noetic. The oracular advice of Night to the demiurgic Zeus, rehearsed at least half a dozen times in Proclus's commentary,[34] ultimately manifests this unique role of the goddess in engendering otherness not only within the intelligible realm but also in the corporeal. While explaining how Timaeus imitates the Demiurge in his account of the coming-into-being of the cosmos, Proclus writes of the Demiurge's reversion to Night:

[The Demiurge] before undertaking the entire creative task is said to enter the oracular shrine of Night to fill himself with divine thoughts from there, to receive the principles of the creative task and, if it is permissible to speak thus, to resolve all difficulties and above all to encourage his father [Kronos][35] to collaborate with him in the creative task. This is what he is recorded as saying by the Theologian in his poem:

Mother, supreme among the gods, immortal Night, how, tell me,

How should I establish a resolute beginning for the immortals?

And from her he hears:

Surround all things with unutterable ether, and in the middle place heaven.

And he is then instructed about the remainder of the creative work. (Proclus 2008, I 206.28–207.20; cf. Kern 1922 164, 165, 155 and I.2)

Here we should note that Zeus, the Demiurge, is described as entering the oracular shrine of Night—indeed, still an image of penetration into the feminine, but a subversive reimagining of such penetration insofar as the role of insemination is reversed. Night's advice is what plants seed in the Demiurge. She reveals to him how the creative task is to be resolved, how tensions involved in the production of multiplicity and otherness may ultimately remain in contact/communion with their causes. Predominantly, the Demiurge is looking for a way to constitute an other, the sensible living cosmos, that despite its alienation, that is, radical disjunction from the intelligible, can nevertheless still return home, still remain connected, still bask in the light of Phanes or, less mythically understood, can still *be*. This power of Night to bind or to give advice that assists the Demiurge in crafting a product that will both constitute an other, the sense-perceptible world, while also being erotically joined in kinship, is further invoked when Zeus/the Demiurge asks Night a particularly stunning question just before embarking on his creative task.

[Zeus asks]

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> *How will all things be one for me and also each separate from the other?*
>
> [Night replies]
>
> *Wrap all things around with unspeakable Ether, and inside it in the middle place Heaven; then inside it place unbounded Earth, inside it place the Sea, inside it place all the constellations with which Heaven is crowned.*
>
> Moreover concerning all the other works of creation she further proposed:
>
> *But when you stretch a powerful bond over everything*
>
> —This is certainly the powerful and indissoluble bond which proceeds from nature and soul and intellect, for Plato too says that "living things were born bound by bonds made up of soul (38e5)—
>
> *A golden chain suspended from the Ether.* (Proclus 2008, I 314.1–16)

Confirming that Night's counsel prescribes the emergence of cosmic *sympatheia*, Proclus connects Night and her "golden chain" rather cleverly to the procession of Necessity and the Fates at the level of the sensible, thus explicitly resisting a conception of the feminine as an agent of disorder and irrationality (as mentioned, the principle of Life is not the standard wandering womb). Rather Night, that is, the principle of Life, ultimately "causes Law to be enthroned beside him [the Demiurge]" (I 315.13–15) alongside authentic friendship or connection between all things, as, for Proclus, the bond is the paradigm for proportion "engendering sympathy and harmony of opposites" (2007b, II 53.28).[36]

Overall, Night models the power of procession and mediation as the principle of intelligible-intellective Life, elucidating how unlimited generative power does not mark the feminine as nothing more than fecund mother nature. Rather, she is the agent of providential power, securing, in her advice to the Demiurge, difference/multiplicity, safeguarding that all things are bound not by absolute identity and hence ensuring that generation is never simply the production of an "other-of-the-same."[37] Rather, what is sustained in her procession is a point of contact, a golden chain of friendship, which fortifies authentic difference while retaining *sympatheia*. In other words, she is arguably the first erotic principle of reality, wherein the erotic does not subsume the beloved into the lover but does the work of both assisting the other in "giving birth" but also connecting terms that seem so disparate, for example, sameness and difference, the beautiful and the ugly, the mortal and the immortal. Rather, her power symbolized in the advice or counsel she provides Zeus/Demiurge enables things to be touched by the good in the other, the beauty and being of things in their relation, in their contact and sympathy so that all things may be both one and many, limited and unlimited. As a consequence, Proclus states that Night's advice or divinely deemed *Counsel* (literally the goddess Metis—the feminine we, like Zeus, must swallow and internalize), is "the first creator and Eros of many delights" (2007b, II 54.26, cf. I 169.18–20).[38]

Returning to the generally paradigmatic role of both Phanes (Being) and Night (Life), Proclus is quick to emphasize that their union is not a marriage, that is, the symbol of divine mixture, and, as such, Proclus is emphasizing that their coupling is not a blending of the two into identity. Rather, Proclus accentuates the importance of their distinction insofar as they are "united with each other conceptually, but are among

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those things that even with their unification display the separate nature of their powers and their activities" (Proclus 2007a, I 176.20–24).[39] As Proclus writes of their distinction and their corresponding analogies at different levels of reality:

> Consequently some say that he has left it to us to seek some of them by analogy with the two rulers in the heavens, I mean Phanes and Night. For it is necessary for those of a superior rank to act also among encosmic things, because even before the cosmos they lead the intellective gods, founded eternally in the impenetrable chamber of Phanes himself as Orpheus says, calling their secret unrevealing order an impenetrable chamber. So if one wants to enlist the rotation of the Same and of the Other to reveal them by analogy, as being male and female or paternal and generative, one would not miss the truth; and if [one wants to enlist] the sun and moon as juxtaposed powers among the planets, the sun will preserve its likeness to Phanes and the moon to Night. And if this is correct, as it seems to me, [one would not miss the truth] by making the one Demiurge of the universe stand in relation to Phanes the father, an intellect [father] himself—for the theologian [says that even if the birth of the worlds is the job of this latter, it is the former's job to make them], just as this one is [father] of heaven and earth—and making the life-generating mixing bowl [stand in relation to] Night who brings forth all life from the unseen along with Phanes, for the mixing bowl too gives birth to the entire soul for things within the cosmos. For it is better to conceive of both as prior to the cosmos, and to make the Demiurge analogous to Phanes, since he too is said to be assimilated to him in his act of universal creation, and to make the power that is in harness with him and brings forth the universe [analogous to] Night, who produces all things in obscure fashion from the father. (Proclus 2017, III 169.15–170.14)

Passing over momentarily the problematic identification of the androgynous Phanes with a paternal figure, as this will be discussed in the next section, for now we should focus on the essential role of the goddess in procession. As we have already seen with Hermias, only the goddess, that is, only Night (Life), can enter the impenetrable chamber of Phanes (Being). In other words, only the feminine is that which can penetrate the androgyny, the absolute mixture of Limit and Unlimited, which constitutes Being and all the "secret unrevealing orders" of the All. Accordingly, Night, the power of Life, is that which grants to Phanes the possibility of their progeny, making the inchoate Being determinate Intellect, therein constituting the demiurgic order and the procession of authentic otherness constitutive of the world of generation. Moreover, in the above passage, Proclus makes a final analogy of Night to the mixing bowl, whereby the feminine mixing bowl, rather than the Demiurge, expresses the power (*dunamis*) of the cosmos's ceaseless but perfective multiplicity. As an image of Night, it is the mixing bowl that adds life to soul, that is, the generative and connective power—a necessary constituent of both Soul Itself, the World Soul as well as individual souls. Proclus writes:

> For the souls were brought forth from the Demiurge as far as their *being* is concerned, but from the mixing bowl as far as their *life* is concerned—for [the mixing bowl] is the animating cause of the soul's substantive *life*. Since [souls] are principally lives and made to belong to the life-generating order, on this account their blending begins with the Demiurge but is completed in the mixing bowl. (Proclus 2017, III 248.13–16)[40]

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Remarkably, the mixing bowl is neither a mere object submissively receiving the ingredients from the Demiurge nor is the action of creation completed by the Demiurge's blending. By emphasizing that the act of the soul's creation is only completed by the mixing bowl, Proclus depicts the feminine as an active animating power contributing decisively to the creation of the soul; particularly, she is the soul's constitutive power as that which is essentially animated or living and as that which eternally animates or gives life, fosters dynamism in the world of becoming.[41]

To be sure, the exact identification of the mixing bowl corresponding to a particular feminine deity is sometimes obscured in Proclus's recreation of Orphic/Chaldean mythology but seems to be most often associated with Hera.[42] She is described as the animating deity embracing all the springs of life, including the divine, angelic, daimonic, psychical, and natural,[43] and whose virtue is described as explicitly springing from her λᾰ́γών (Proclus 2017, III 249.14),[44] her reproductive powers. She is further characterized as one of the fontal (πηγαῖος) goddesses[45] who is an "equal accomplisher with the father" (Proclus 2017, III 249.5) in the production of the cosmos and is coordinate with "the Demiurge like mother with father" (III 249.21). Consequently, "she is the leader of the entire Titanic division and the cause of the division made manifest in souls in accordance with their fated portions" (III 249.22–25). In other words, at this level of reality the life-giving goddess depicted by Hera (again, the mixing bowl in Plato's *Timaeus*) favors division and multiplicity, ensuring that this world is populated with unlimited otherness: "For she prompts all things towards procession and multiplies them, and makes them fertile through her own illuminations" (III 251.17–22). As such, Proclus offers an allegorical reading of Hera's association with making heroes mad, as, unlike Zeus, who is the cause of rational behavior, the path demanded by the goddess is one in which the hero will be tried by the contests of becoming, of ceaseless otherness.[46]

Ultimately, all souls owe their own living power to the mixing bowl/Hera, whose own proximate causes extend to Night (Life itself) and to the Unlimited, and, as such, souls at once communicate extension into multiplicity in their temporal acts as well as possessing a connective/mediating power to join the sense-perceptible to the intelligible, to assist the other in coming into *contact* with (rather than being subsumed by) the same. For Proclus, this is the unique power of soul insofar as "the defining characteristic of life is to be attributed to the soul, and the soul is also established in conjunction with the life-giving goddess when the kinds of Being are mixed in the mixing bowl" (Proclus 2008, I 151.5–10). He further writes:

> [F]or the goddess who is the cause of the soul also has a middle position among the gods—a rank she also appeared to have to the Theologians since she provides the link between the two Fathers and projects from her *womb* the life of the Soul. [emphasis in italics are mine] (Proclus 2009, II 129.24–130)[47]

Interestingly, then, we see that soul, like Night, acts as the erotic bridge and is thus generalized as feminine. This is clearly the case when Proclus describes soul as the "womb"[48] which, as the above quote indicates, receives life from the *womb* of the goddess, enacting a kind of feminine to feminine inheritance.

Overall, unlike Plotinus and others who reproduce patriarchal conceptions of the feminine as merely an other-of-the-same or as impotent or unruly matter, Proclus emphasizes the power of the feminine and its guidance in securing the unique life of the soul as between the intelligible and the sensible, as the connection or erotic

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mediator between the two. Ultimately she is that which "holds the guidance of the universe" insofar as "in the middle the soul demonstrates both extremes, and by this fact imitates its cause [the goddess] who is 'visible on both sides' and has 'faces on both sides.'" Overall, "'soul sends forth the channels of corporeal life and contains within herself the center of the procession of all being' (Proclus 2009, II 130,25. Cf. Lewy 1956/2011, 135 and Majercik, 1989)."[49]

Conclusion: Gender Ambiguity and Feminist Criticisms

It is clear that, despite valorizing the Limit over the Unlimited and consequently male over female in the realm of generation, we can see that the feminine is not at all associated with impotence or passivity but with a peculiar kind of power, that is, with processive/mediating power, a kind of *engendering* and *empowering* power. Proclus explicitly regards this power as bringing about the life or dynamism of reality as well as law, counsel, and friendship, all of which mutually establish one another. Further, this image of feminine Life squares with Proclus's descriptions of Night as that which distinguishes or causes difference/alterity and as that which connects without subsuming all things in the same. Ultimately, this understanding of a kind of life-giving feminine power undermines the patriarchal obsession with dominating power, showing that such a form of power is, perhaps, not even power at all, perhaps even impotence insofar as masculine systems of dominance and control cannot produce/see/sustain/love an other that does not simply reflect itself. In contrast, what is coded as feminine *Life* is a kind of power that loves the other, sees its beauty and kinship without appropriating or dominating it, instead allotting the other a space wherein it can manifest its own life, its own good. Furthermore, as we saw with the god Phanes, Proclus's gender system begins with a primordial ambiguity that undergirds the fact that all existence is a combination or mixture insofar as "every such entity contains both a unity and a plurality within itself" (Cf. Proclus 1968–1997 III 8.32.27–28 and Proclus 2013, III 106.10–18). Due to this, Proclus's metaphysical schema continuously problematizes the stability of a neat separation between the masculine and the feminine, the paternal and the maternal. For example, just before a particular instance in which Proclus valorizes the superiority of the masculine, the philosopher backpedals and reinforces how much these principles are intertwined:

> However, so that we can admire Plato's plan all the more, we should turn our attention to the wider issues, that is, to the organization of the universe, where we shall find an amazing integration of the lives of male and female. For among the gods these things are so intertwined, that a single individual can actually be designated male-female such as the Sun, Hermes, and certain others. (Proclus 2007a, I 46.16–22)[50]

Throughout his commentary Proclus continues to emphasize "the coalition of male and female among intelligible gods, among intellective ones, and among hypercosmic ones" (I 47.8–9). Again referring to the political analogy of the *Republic*, Proclus accentuates the importance of both sexes as bound together because "either sex is infertile in isolation, reproduction requiring both" (I 47.29–48.1),[51] whereby, for Proclus, fertility is not limited to genital sex but extends to all forms of generation and production, therein emphasizing that the feminine is necessarily a dynamic cause of coming-into-being. Due to this, like Phanes, who is explicitly androgynous (versus gender-neutral) and

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so enabled to constitute the completeness of Being, all deities and their effects reflect a mixed life and a take on both masculine and feminine characteristics (problematizing the centrality of heterosexual intercourse insofar as all generation occurs through ambiguous/queer principles copulating with other ambiguous/queer principles). For example, Proclus describes the gender bending of the god Ocean, who

> insofar as he is male, resembles the paternal cause, but insofar as he is the provider of motion he resembles the maternal cause of processions while Tethys resembles the fertile cause, but insofar as she creates a stable state for their respective lives within the producers resembles the creative [cause]. For analogous to the monadic is the male, but to the dyadic the female; and to the former the stable, but to the latter the mobile. For a dyad that proceeds from a dyad and through its entire self comes to resemble the dyad that has generated it, keeps its causes distinct as well as all the number that comes after it, so that we may in every case attribute the power of discriminating to the order of Ocean and Tethys. (Proclus 2017, III 180.24–181.3)

In this passage, Proclus dances rather precariously on the lines of reinforcing and subverting gender essentialism. By emphasizing that Ocean resembles the maternal in one act or another, or that Tethys resembles the paternal in one act or another, both deities embrace a kind of drag, appearing *like* the gender with which they are not identified and therein seemingly reinforcing the reality, the distinctness of the binary of male and female, masculine and feminine activities. Nevertheless, in that drag, the deities reveal the precariousness of any singular sexual identity, exposing how there is always a play, a fragile dance, between resembling the masculine or feminine and being the masculine or feminine. This play reveals their actual mixture, their erotic dance between being both masculine/feminine, one/multiple, identical but also different-to-self. In other words, like the original Phanes, all realities from first to last are fundamentally androgynous, never absolutely male or female but not neutral, not sexually indifferent. Rather, everything is always playfully queered in fundamental ways, not only in the gods but also in individual souls. Even more stunningly and with a hint of abandoning the heterosexual framework that regulates gender on the basis of bodily morphology, the role and value of gender ambiguity is stressed during Proclus's defense of Timaeus's prescription that the soul descend initially into the male:

> For it is also true that what is definite here is more undefined than what is indefinite there, so that in every case the fall will be to something worse, whereas "worse" will sometimes be towards what is stronger, and sometimes towards what is further, in correspondence with the rank given to them there. In this way, then, even the lunar soul may descend into birth as a man, as they say the soul of Musaeus did, and the Apollinine soul into that of a woman, as they say the Sibyl did. That those souls there have also been divided into male and female and common-to-both is also shown by the myth of Aristophanes in the *Symposium* (189d5–193a7), and that it is not always the case that male souls go into the birth of men and the females into that of women. . . . (2017, III 283.33–284.10)

Like the previous passage, one can again see Proclus's gender essentialism, but again one that permits a kind of "cross-dressing" in which the body itself is the costume, whereby the genitals fail to reveal the reality, a reality that is further understood as

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not essentially or strictly male or female but a mixture, an androgyne like Phanes (like Being itself). In other words, it is in the play between bodily presentation and the erotic ambiguity of the soul that individuals can witness the feminine in the masculine and the masculine in the feminine, a mixture that constitutes the All. Ultimately, Proclus goes on to insist that since these principles are shared at the highest levels, so should they also be shared in human lives. "Why ever should it be, then, that this same principle is observed in the universe, but seems paradoxical when applied to human lives?"

> For we are in possession of active intelligence, and rational soul that proceeds from the same father and the same life-giving goddess as the universe, and a vehicle of aether that has the same role [for us] as the heaven does [for the universe], and an earthly body composed of the four elements—to these it is also coordinate. (Proclus 2007a, I 5.12–17)

Here, intelligence and rationality, the earthly body and its elements, are all a product of both the Demiurge (Zeus) and the mixing bowl (Hera) as well as the higher principles of Phanes and Night, and as such we are tasked with reflecting that mixture, that queerness of the divine in our own lives both in body and soul. In other words, for Proclus nothing is essentially male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual insofar as such strict separation would fail to reflect the androgyny of the original term, Phanes/Being, the playful fusion (rather than neutrality) at the origins of reality.

In the end, Proclus's gendered metaphysics advances a dynamic/processive feminine that constitutes the unlimited erotic/causal power of creation, a power that does not simply produce inferior others to regulate and control—a kind of power that feminists like Irigaray have coded as masculine. Rather, Procline *Life* produces the power that not only constitutes authentic procession toward multiplicity and difference but also the power to return and come into contact with each procession, each child of androgynous Being. This is the causal power constituting the *life* of human souls, a life that is not merely limited to knowing/controlling others as objects, as this does not actually cause anything to live or to be. Life-giving power, by contrast, is the power of the human soul to infinitely generate new ideas, creations, worlds while also allowing for a connection, a playful touching that links together even the most disparate of things. In this way, one comes to embrace the Good at all levels of reality.[52]

Of course, many feminist critics may still interpret the intelligible-intellective Life-giving power of Night as the handmaiden to masculine prerogative, for example, Irigaray may argue that Proclus's metaphysics reinforces the dominance of the specular and servicing other. Having Night as the first gendered deity proceeding from the androgynous is, admittedly, not particularly promising for feminist epistemologists, as it merely reinforces that the feminine is the sex *par excellence*, that is, she is the cause/marker of sexual difference whereas Phanes is simply the masculine disguised as the sexually indifferent. Further, despite being originally androgynous, Phanes becomes the paradigm of paternity (see Proclus 2017, III 169.15–170.14 quoted above) and therein we see how the masculine invents itself through marking the other as other. As such, we see an explicit myth that reveals how masculinity needs the feminine to be what it is, as none of Phanes's light would have been seen without Night. In other words, without marking some other as other, the subject could not gain its power over the other. Consequently, feminine power in this system can certainly still be regarded as derivative and reduced to a tool used by the masculine to position itself as primary. Yet despite this criticism and with marked reservations, I come back to the

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value of the erotic mixture at the heart of Proclus's metaphysics, as well as the connective and generative principle of Life that causes us to be paradoxically separate and connected, same and other, one and many. This eroticism, this mixture that constitutes life is the movement/dynamism of reality that lets the other be other, but an other that is neither totally lost, estranged, or fallen nor annexed or sublimated as nothing more than the other-of-the-same. This eroticism always *is* in its unlimited desire for the good, a good embodied in our concrete gendered and sexual lives that are not reduced to some essentialized reading of bodily morphology but to the fundamental ambiguity or mixture of sex/gender in Being itself. So, notwithstanding its problematic essentialism and his repeated appeal to masculinist/patriarchal tropes, Proclus still offers us a feminine power and a queering of the binary that pushes back against gendered metaphysical schemas that seek to control, stifle, or efface entirely the Life and ambiguity at the heart of all things.

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Notes

1 Cf. Irigaray 1985, 136, where she writes on the masculinist project regarding the construction of the subject: "The 'subject' plays at multiplying himself, even deforming himself, in the process. He is father, mother, and child(ren). And the relationships between them. He is masculine and feminine and the relationships between them. What mockery of generation, parody of copulation and genealogy, drawing its strength from the same model, from the model of the same: the subject. In whose sight everything outside remains forever a condition making possible the image and the reproduction of the self. A faithful, polished mirror, empty of altering reflections. Immaculate auto-copies. Other because wholly in the service of the same subject to whom it would present its surfaces, candid in their self-ignorance." See also DuBois 1988 for the now classical feminist reading of Plato as appropriating the feminine body/activities for masculine prerogatives.

2 See n. 19 for more on the problematic aspect of normative heterosexuality within metaphysical discourses.

3 Whether Plato's *Timaeus* offers a defense against such a reading will be passed over in this article, as understanding Plato's own subversive and explicitly gendered project requires considering his entire corpus rather than an isolated reading of the *Timaeus*. However, it should be noted that the *Timaeus* is an explicitly erotic dialogue in which Plato is attempting to show the value and beauty of the world of Becoming (what is historically regulated to the feminine/slave), by divinizing the cosmos and therein distancing himself from escapist tendencies characteristic of those who wish to excise the feminine from philosophical endeavors. It could be argued that Plato is one of the rare thinkers of antiquity to offer not merely a political feminism but an ontological feminism that intends to combat the dogmatic and overly dualistic, and therein marginalize discourses of his contemporaries. By reimagining the value of the feminine as well as the slave (all that the aristocratic Athenian male does not wish to identify) and integrating these into his philosophical project, Plato queers the hierarchical and exclusionary matrix throughout his work. In the case of the *Timaeus*, the khoratic receptacle is not emptied of value or reduced to impotent matter (as will be the case in Aristotle, for whom "matter" arguably denominates nothing more than a logical X, that is, a space of possible predication, hence the dominance of Aristotle's metaphysics by grammatical categories, and its

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reproduction in Plotinus), but she represents the forceful power that constitutes the desire to be, the desire for authentic otherness. But this is an argument for another day. See Gordon 2012 for an excellent discussion of the eroticism inherent in Plato's *Timaeus* as well as Bianchi 2006 for a remarkably insightful rereading of Plato's Receptacle whereby she is refigured as the source of not only "motile generativity" but also "linguistic productivity."

4 See Plotinus 1966–1988, III 6.14.33 where Plotinus identifies matter with the receptacle (ὑποδοχή).

5 Cf. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* I 20 729a21–32 and *Metaphysics* VIII 4. See Bianchi 2014, 36–39 for a discussion of Aristotle's understanding of passive feminine matter in reproduction. The edition and translation of the *Enneads* throughout this essay are from Armstrong 1966–1988.

6 See Plotinus 1966–1988, III 6.7.9–21 and III 6.11.45: "It is not soul or intellect or life or form or rational formative principle or limit—for it is unlimitedness (ἀπειρία)—or power (οὔτε δύναμις)—for what does it make?—but, falling outside of all these, it could not properly receive the title of being but would appropriately be called non-being, not in the sense in which motion is not being or rest but truly not-being; it is a ghostly image of bulk (φάντασμα ὄγκου), a tendency toward substantial existence (ὑποστάσεως ἔφεσις); it is static without being stable; it is invisible in itself and escapes any attempt to see it, and it occurs when one is not looking, but even if you look closely you cannot see it. It always presents opposite appearances on its surface, small and great, less and more, deficient and superabundant, a phantom which does not remain and cannot get away either, for it has no strength for this, since it has not received strength from intellect but is lacking in all being."

7 See Plotinus 1966–1988, III 6.7.22–33: "Whatever announcement it makes, therefore, is a lie, and if it appears great, it is small, if more, it is less; its apparent being is not real, but a sort of fleeting frivolity (παίγνιον φεῦγον); hence the things which seem to come to be in it are frivolities, nothing but phantoms in a phantom (εἴδωλα ἐν εἰδώλῳ), like something in a mirror which really exists in one place but is reflected in another; it seems to be filled, and holds nothing; it is all seeming. 'Imitations of real being pass into and out of it' (*Tim.* 50c) ghosts into a formless ghost (εἴδωλα εἰς εἶδωλον), visible because of its formlessness. They seem to act on it, but do nothing, for they are wraith-like and feeble and have no *holding power* (ἀμενηνὰ γὰρ καὶ ἀσθενῆ καὶ ἀντερεῖδον οὐκ ἔχοντα); nor does matter *hold* them, but [the imitations] go through [matter] without making a cut, as if through water. . . ." See also, Irigaray 1985, 168–79 for her criticism of the Platonic tradition's reductive reading of *chorā*. Cf. Bianchi 2014, 119 who notes Irigaray's interest in Plotinus's hostile account of *chorā*: "Irigaray is precisely interested in such reductions insofar as they illustrate a certain fate of 'the feminine' in the history of Western philosophy: reduction as a sort of freezing and congealing in which the feminine is immobilized as "other of the same." Interpreting such reductions as symptomatic, rather than dismissing them as mistaken, permits an exposure of the very mechanisms by which the systemic ambitions inherent in the metaphysical project effect their exclusions and establish hierarchies."

8 Plotinus 1966–1988, III 6.13.33. Cf. III 6.14.12 where, in an interesting reimagining of Plato's *Symposium* 203b, Plotinus casts the receptacle/matter as feminine "Poverty," who violently steals from masculine "Resource" (itself not the real in Plotinus's eyes but a specular copy of the real) so that she might maintain her paltry hold on existence. "[T]his other thing by its presence and self-assertion and a kind of begging and its poverty makes a sort of violent attempt to grasp, and is cheated by not grasping, so that its poverty may remain and it may be always begging. For since it is a rapacious thing, the myth makes it a beggar woman to show its true nature, that it is destitute of the good. And the beggar does not ask for what the giver has but is satisfied with what he gets, so that this too, shows that what is imaged in matter is other [than real being]. And the name [Poverty] shows that matter is not satisfied. But by its union with 'Resource' Plato makes clear that it is not united with real being or with plenitude but with a resourceful thing, that is with the cleverness of the apparition."

9 See Olympiodorus 2016, 189, 2–10 where Olympiodorus argues for the equality of the sexes based on the common idea that there really is no sexual difference. Rather, women are simply men with parts pushed inward, leading him to advocate for a generic human species instead of emphasizing sexual difference: "For the excellences of men are shared in common [with women], since their natures are shared. The male parts, when pushed inward, become female; conversely the female parts, pushed outward [become male]; and if the female dog shows no difference from the male in regard to guardianship, nonetheless they are both guardians by disposition. If their natures are common, then why are their knowledge and excellences not also common? And one should no longer call learning 'female' or 'male,' but 'human' for 'human' is common [to both genders]." For a feminist criticism of this one-sex model, see Holmes

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2012. See also Olympiodorus 2016, 194, 18–195, 10. Of course, this is ambivalent, and we likely read this conception of sex difference with horror now, but contextualized, this may have arguably been a quite radical position. See n. 10 for a gesture toward rereading Olympiodorus's project as subversive of masculinist tendencies in philosophical practice.

10 Again, like n. 3, whether or not Plotinus and Olympiodorus could respond to these feminist criticisms cannot be discussed here. I do suggest in another article that Olympiodorus, like Proclus, subverts from within his own system this problematic conception of the feminine in his own conception of Socratic method and the problem of double ignorance (Layne forthcoming). For how Plotinus's system can be defended, see Cooper 2007. See also Baracat 2013 for an excellent introduction into the eroticism of Plotinus's metaphysics.

11 One may be tempted simply to extract the gendering of these systems in order to focus only on the ideas, which are believed to be in themselves "gender neutral." However, when we do this we fail to recall that it is through such "neutral" systems that the oppression of women and those feminized, both in antiquity and beyond, for example, slaves and foreigners, has been justified. For millennia, "neutral" reason has depicted women, slaves, and foreigners as prisoners to the body, as emotional, mad, chaotic, and so on. Consequently, continuing to appeal to the neutrality of these systems only furthers the erasure of the lives of very real people.

12 For the few sparse attempts to read Plotinus from a feminist perspective, see Vassilopoulou 2003; Cooper 2007. For essays that address the feminine or the female in Neoplatonism in general, see Dillon 1985; Baltzly 2013; Schultz 2018; 2019, as well as Schultz forthcoming, in proceedings of a conference held in 2018 at the University of Bochum.

13 For excellent discussions of the complexities of thinking about power defined as domination or "power over," see Wartenberg 1990, 9–32; Allen 1999, 11–18. Strikingly, both Allen and Wartenberg offer a contrasting view of power in their respective monographs with the former arguing for power as "empowerment" and the latter arguing for the value of "transformative" power. As will be argued, both these conceptions of power arguably reflect the Platonic conception of power advanced by Proclus, although in a radically different ontological/metaphysical schema.

14 For this juxtaposition consider *Alcibiades I*, where Socrates offers the young man the opportunity to possess the greatest power (105d–e), wherein the young man believes Socrates to mean political (dominating) power over the city whereas Socrates ultimately shows how power is rather the power to care for oneself and for one's beloved through philosophical conversation. Indeed, one could say that Plato offers a blistering critique throughout his dialogues of power conceived as domination, be it in the *Republic*, where the philosopher kings and queens are radically concerned with producing a *harmonious* city, a city built on generative relation, or the *Apology*/*Meno* in their respective presentations of Meletus and Anytus. These two characters are classical representations of those who lack knowledge but wield tyrannical power over others, which therein leads to the death of Socrates. So, indeed, they possess a kind of power "over" Socrates but not the power in which Plato/Socrates seems to be interested. Over and over again, the dialogues seem to suggest that most individuals fail to realize what true power is, that is, the creative and generative, rather than domination and control, and as such fail to understand the good (or power) of the philosophical life.

15 Cf. Plato, *Sophist* 247d–e for the Stranger's use of *dunamis* as the power either to produce change or to be effected, that is, causal power. It may also be worth noting *Republic* 509b for the explicit demarcation of the Good, the cause of being, as "beyond being" in dignity and power or *dunamis*. Of course, this use of *dunamis*, which Plato's account of the Good, as beyond being, exceeds, will nevertheless remain the cornerstone of Aristotle's conception of potency and actuality where *dunamis* is regarded as possible or potential *being* whereas *energeia* is regarded as actualized or realized *being*. *Metaphysics* VI 2 1026a33. Ultimately, this article hopes to show how this Platonic conception of *dunamis* as causal, generative power is transmitted into the later Neoplatonic tradition, although only within the parameters of a discussion of power in general rather than from within the particularities of the philosophical history of this term.

16 Cf. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* IV 1 765b9–19; he explicitly regards the feminine as that which lacks power or *dunamis*. See Bianchi 2014, 183–222 for a subversive reading of Aristotle's conception of *dunamis* and *energeia* in relation to the dynamics of matter and the feminine. With regards to translations and editions of Procline texts utilized, the citations of Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* are derived from the six volume English translation produced by Harold Tarrant (Proclus 2007a and 2017), Dirk

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Baltzly (Proclus 2007b, 2009, 2013), David Runia and Michael Share (Proclus 2008). Quotations from *The Elements of Theology* derive from E.R. Dodds's edition and translation (Proclus 1932).

17 One may cite psychoanalysts Bettelheim 1954 and Kittay 1995 who contend that men "fend off" castration anxiety by developing "womb envy." These references were drawn from reading Leitao 2012, whose book offers the definitive account of male pregnancy in antiquity. See also Dubois 1988 and Loraux 1995 for the classical feminist readings of male pregnancy and male appropriation of the feminine.

18 We may also note that Proclus describes matter in feminine terms while toeing the Platonic line with regard to her impotence: "this is not because matter is actively resisting the gods that bring her forth, but because, fleeing order on account of its own indeterminacy, it is mastered by the forms on account of this vigilance in creation, against which nothing is able to make a stand and to which all things must be obedient, so that all things in the world may endure forever and their demiurge may be the father of things everlasting, because he is unmoved and fixed in transcendence and in eternity" (Proclus 2007a, I 39.8–14).

19 Keep in mind that the problem according to some feminists with heterosexual tropes or heteronormative metaphysics is that heterosexuality is a product of patriarchal conceptions of power, whereby the masculine needs an other to be superior over and to dominate in order to be itself. In order to accomplish this, the discourse "naturalizes" the reality of the male/female binary in order to sequester the feminine to the domain of the receptacle, to that which must receive the seed and give birth. Overall, this desire for an other, constitutive of the heterosexual, is not a desire for real otherness but merely the other to penetrate and control so as to reproduce itself. It further limits fecundity to the domain of the heterosexual, making sensible reproductive sex the paradigm for higher ontological fecundity, thereby putting the lower above the higher. See Rich 1980; Wittig 1992 for more on the problematic nature of heteronormative frameworks and heterosexual discourses; Rich and Wittig argue that these may be nothing more than discourses of power conceived and sustained in order to reinforce hierarchy and domination.

20 See Bianchi 2014 for an interesting attempt to reread Aristotle in a similar way, that is, despite advancing a problematically sexist ontological framework, Bianchi shows that from within his very system Aristotle offers a counterreading of the feminine. In my estimation this is exactly what feminist readings of the history of philosophy should be doing, insofar as simply deeming texts sexist and relegating them to the wastebin does nothing to show how sexist systems can be overcome, threatening a forgetfulness of the genealogy of ideas and power structures that produce oppression. Contrariwise, this methodology shows how such systems are inherently problematic and self-contradictory, causing contemporary readers to see in close rereadings of perennial texts new and interesting ways to subvert regulatory systems in which we have found ourselves presently and will find ourselves in the future. In other words, instead of writing sexist texts out of the canon, we should still engage in dialogue with these texts Socratically, showing how, although there are problems with the ideas, such problems can be surmounted or made subversive through engagement and critical inquiry.

21 See Proclus 1932, §152: "All that is generative in the gods proceeds in virtue of divine potency, multiplying itself and penetrating all things, and manifesting especially the character of unfailing perpetuity in the processive orders of secondary principles. For to increase the number of processive terms by drawing them from their secret embracement in their causes and advancing them to generation is surely the peculiar office of the gods' infinite potency, through which all divine principles are filled with fertile excellences, each in its fullness giving rise to some further principle in virtue of that superabundant potency. Thus the especial office of generative divinity is the governance of potency, a governance which multiplies and renders fertile the potencies of the generated and spurs them to beget or constitute still other existences. For if each principle communicates to the remaining terms its own distinctive character which it possesses primitively, then assuredly the fertile always implants in its consequents the succession of fertility. . . ."

22 See Proclus 1968–1997 IV I 7.22–26, 10.1–10, 12.9–24 as well as Proclus 1932, §103. Cf. Plato, *Sophist*, 248e–249a wherein the Stranger argues that life along with thought and motion is one of the key attributes of being.

23 For Orphism and its influence on the Platonic tradition see Athanassaskis 1997. The Chaldean Oracles, dating from the fourth century CE, are often attributed to a father/son pair, both named Julian. The oracles were so revered by many Neoplatonists that Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus wrote extensive commentaries on their metaphysical and cosmological implications, providing us with an excellent example of the theological syncretism that constituted an important keystone in later Neoplatonic worldviews. The original texts of the oracles as well as the Neoplatonic commentaries on them are now lost, but see Lewy 1956/2011 for a good reconstruction of the Oracles via analysis of other Neoplatonic texts. See also Des Places 1996.

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24 The role that Night has in securing the bonds of *sympatheia* and establishing Providence and the chain of Fate is argued in Layne forthcoming.

25 Of course, this schema is actually more complicated as the triad of Being, Life, and Intellect is itself triadically mirrored so that Being has within itself a level of Being, Life, and Intellect, that is, intelligible Being, intelligible Life, and intelligible Intellect (whereby the Cosmic Egg mentioned below corresponds to intelligible Being and Phanes to Intelligible Intellect). Life is further divided into intelligible-intellective Being, intelligible-intellective Life, intelligible-intellective Intellect, and likewise with the principle of Intellect. Furthermore, each level corresponds to different divinities in the Orphic/Chaldean systems. See Layne forthcoming for a more robust outline of the deities and their corresponding ontological placement in this theological metaphysical project.

26 Cf. Kern 1922, 66. See also Proclus 2008, I 385.17–22. See also I 434.4 for the fascinating replacement of Chaos with Eros.

27 For Neoplatonic scholars familiar with Proclus's complex triads at each level of Being, it might be interesting to note that Proclus asks but does not respond to the question of what resides between the primal cosmic egg (intelligible Being) and Phanes (intelligible Intellect), that is, he does not state what corresponds to Eternity (intelligible Life) in the Being-Eternity-Living-Thing-Itself intelligible triad. See Proclus 2008 I 428 10–13. Elsewhere he suggests but does not elaborate on its symbolism that between the Orphic Egg and Phanes is the Orphic Tunic.

28 See Butler forthcoming: "Proclus explains that 'Animal Itself'—the intelligible intellect and paradigm of the cosmos, also known to the Platonists, indeed, as 'the Tetrad,' on which more below—must be regarded as father and mother alike, since the causes of both masculinity and femininity must preexist in the form of Animality; and that on the intelligible plane 'the maternal cause is in a paternal mode,' while on the intelligible-intellective plane 'the paternal cause is in a maternal mode.'" See Proclus 1968–1997, IV 28 81f.

29 See Proclus 2008 I 450.25–27, where Phanes brings forth the Nights but then has "intercourse with the middle one . . . for he himself plucked the virginal flower of his own child." Here, to foreshadow the conclusion, we can note that a feminist critic might charge this entire scenario with patriarchal and masculinist appropriations of feminine birth while also reproducing male fantasies about incest and virginal reverence. However, we should bear in mind that since Phanes is an androgynous god, it may be more accurate to emphasize it as the paradigm of the unity of opposites as opposed to a co-opting of the female by the male.

30 See Proclus 2007b III 179.11, where he explains that prior to Tethys there was another goddess, addressed as Maia, before quoting an Orphic fragment: "Maia, supreme of the gods, immortal Night, how is it that you say this?" See Harold Tarrant's note in Proclus 2017, 57, n. 59 and n. 60.

31 Here this quote refers directly to the goddess Tethys but is indirectly attributed to all feminine deities, including Night.

32 See Proclus 2008, I 428.22–25, where Proclus characterizes Phanes as "having made himself manifest from among the Hidden Gods" and as such "already contains within himself the causes of [all] secondary orders—the creative, the sustaining, the originating, the perfective, the inflexible—and holds in his embrace in the form of a single cause all the intelligible living things. . . ." Ultimately, it is through the power of Night that these secondary orders are made manifest.

33 See Proclus 2008, I 324.25 for the mediation of Night between Zeus at the limit of the intellective and Protogonos at the limit of the intellective. See Tarrant 2017, 57, n.60 where he connects Night's prophesying to the Orphic text of the Derveni papyrus.

34 See Proclus 2008, I 206.28–207.20, I 314.1–25, I 315.14, I 324.26, 2007b II 24. 25–31, 2009 II 256.20 and 2013 III 102.1–6 for explicit reference to this advice.

35 For those familiar with the later Neoplatonic triads, Kronos belongs to the highest triadic level of Intellect (intellective Being) with Rhea to follow (intellective Life) before ending with Zeus, aka. the Demiurge (intellective Intellect).

36 This characterization ultimately links Night to the goddess Themis in Proclus's system. Proclus 2008, I 396.29–397.13: "Themis is appropriately included among the principles of the creation. It is she who is responsible for the demiurgic ordinances (*thesmoi*) and thanks to her the order of the universe was indissolubly framed." (trans. Runia and Share) See also 397.22–398.3.

37 Elsewhere, Proclus repeats Night's advice, adding that she guides the Demiurge in constraining his father, Kronos, or helping the Demiurge to ingest the essential object of thought, the intelligible. See Proclus 2008, I 206.28–207.20 for Night's advice on how to constrain Kronos, while at Proclus 2013, she shows the Demiurge how to ingest the intellective Being (Kronos), as she is both intelligible and

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intellectual: "Orpheus says that [the Demiurge] 'leapt upon' and 'ingested' [the intelligible—that is, after Night showed [him how to], for since Night is simultaneously intelligible and intellectual, the intellectual intellect is connected to the intelligible [intellect]" (Proclus 2013, III 102.1–5).

38 See also 2008, I 396.29–397.13 and I 397.22–398.3 for role of Themis as reflective of Night's binding counsel. See Layne forthcoming for how Night is the source of the triad of Adrasteia, Necessity (Themis), and the Fates. See also Proclus 2013, III 271.1–17 where the life-generating divinity is regarded as the paradigm of fate.

39 For my speculative take on this see n. 52.

40 See also Proclus 2007a, I 11.19–30: "From this goddess all life proceeds, both intellective [life] and that which is inseparable from things managed. Being attached from that point and suspended from it, it pervades all things unhindered and breathes life into them. On her account even the most lifeless things partake of a kind of life, and things that perish remain eternally in the cosmos, maintained by the causes of the specific forms within her."

41 It could be noted that we do not actually see this action in Proclus, and therein the feminine mixing bowl neither contributes the ingredients nor participates in the action of creation and may therein be a typical example of a feminine passive object. However, Proclus is clear in the above quote that the mixing bowl is the source of the soul's life, the necessary and essential ingredient of soul. Here, one could imagine an interesting analogy with bread-making. The demiurge, like a baker, provides the basic ingredients and mixes or kneads the dough in the bowl. Yet now the rising process must occur, and in this cosmic analogy it is the mixing bowl that provides the yeast—it is the mixing bowl that gives the dough the power to rise.

42 See Proclus 2017, III 249.12–25 for the identification of the mixing bowl with Hera, which overall supports her divine place and role as life-generating and as the leader of the "Titanic division in souls."

43 For her connection to Nature, see Proclus 2007a, I 11.19–30 where Proclus quotes the Chaldean Oracles, writing, "From this goddess all life proceeds, both intellective [life] and that which is inseparable from things managed. Being attached from that point and suspended from it, it pervades all things unhindered and breathes life into them. On her account even the most lifeless things partake of a kind of life, and things that perish remain eternally in the cosmos, maintained by the causes of the specific forms within her. As the oracle says: "*Unwearied Nature rules over worlds and over works, So that the Heaven may run on, sweeping along his eternal course.*"

44 See also Tarrant's translation in Proclus 2017, 135, n. 354, where he substitutes ovaries instead of flank.

45 See Proclus 2017, III 249.15–16. See III 250.8–14 for characterization of the "fontal" as the unique life of soul rather than of intellective or natural life.

46 See Proclus 2017, III 249.22–25 as well as III 191.15 where she "completes this motion of visible things and this unraveling of the forms. That is why myths too pass on traditions about her, sometimes sending madness upon people, and sometimes assigning tasks for others." For more on the goddess Hera and her powers see Butler 2013.

47 Proclus 2009, II 129.24–127. See Baltzly's comments in Proclus 2009, 89, n. 82; he identifies this goddess with Hecate.

48 See Proclus 2009, II 129.24–29 as well as II 249.14 for explicit references to the flank or womb.

49 Proclus 2009 II 130.21–27. Again, in agreement with Baltzly 2009, this Janus-like description indicates Hecate as the World-Soul. Furthermore, it should be noted that for Proclus, due to the encosmic realm's inherent multiplicity, there is a dominance of feminine gods in the encosmic realm, where this power is displayed in a variety of goddesses, but most notably in Earth herself. Proclus explicitly connects the sublunary Earth to the Unlimited, writing in Proclus 2017, II 175.26–176.8: "But the earth that stands in analogy to her and presides in the sublunary world is, as it were, the [locus of the] fertile power of the heaven, bringing to light its providential role of siring, bounding, measuring and containing, and spreading it across all things by means of fertile <powers>. She generates all the limitlessness of sublunary things, just as heaven [generates] its twin column of limit—the one that brings the boundary and limit upon secondary things. So whereas boundary and limit determines the subsistence of each thing, the very thing according to which daimons, gods, souls, and bodies are held together, and gives unity to the things that imitate the single henad of the universe, the limitlessness multiplies the powers of each. For there is a great deal of limit in all sublunary things, and a great deal of limitlessness too, spreading through the divine and all that comes after the gods." See also II 175.15–25: "First Earth and the doctrine concerning her boundary…she appears first in the middle of the intelligible triad alongside Heaven which is the first of the intellective triads and is assimilated to the extent that is possible among the life-generating orders, she is

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assimilated to the first Limitlessness, and she is the receptive recess of the generative divinity of Heaven and the central focus of his paternal goodness; she reigns alongside him and is the [locus of the] power that he exercises as father." Finally, consider III 134.33 where she is described as nurse and nourisher; see also III 140.8–17.

50 Cf. Proclus 2007a, I 17. 29–18.3 "For by analogy, as monad is to dyad, so being is to life, father to power and intelligible to intelligence. And as is dyad to triad, so is life, or power, or intelligence to mind. Moreover all things divine are in all things, and they are unified by one another, so that all are in one and each is in all and they are held together by divine friendship."

51 See also I 48.24–28: "All offspring, you see are the offspring of all, even though some are characterized by their own special relationships, and all are in all, and are unified with all with an undefiled purity (*amiges*)."

52 Again, to reiterate, Proclus's metaphysics accounts for a queering of a strict sex/gender binary at all levels of reality insofar as no god is wholly masculine or wholly feminine. While the masculine and feminine are real, they exist in the Intelligible Living creature; they are not separate in anything, be it intelligible, psychic or corporeal. Only the primary principles of the Limit and the Unlimited are free from mixture (but technically these principles do not exist *per se* as they are above Being). Taking a speculative leap, this is perhaps why Proclus does not unite Phanes and Night in marriage. See 2008, II 176.20–24. Keeping in mind that effects that are closest to the cause most resemble their cause, as closest to the two primary *archai*, Phanes and Night are those whose being and power requires distinction (or lack of marriage). Only at the consequent levels do we begin to see a constant blending of divine powers and marriages, whereby some act as feminine in one manner but masculine in another or through their marriage are able to produce offspring. In some ways, I see the entire system of mixture as a defense against the Irigarayan reading of the Platonic tradition insofar as for the Platonist, conceptually speaking, the Limit and Unlimited are the only opposites separated completely (not touching). Being, though, is a mixture or blend/tension of these opposites beyond being, so that in some way all of reality reflects the erotic/transcendent mixture of the One more appropriately than the separated *archai* of Limit and Unlimited.

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