

Meta-Discourse: Plato's *Timaeus* according to Calcidius

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Abstract

This paper brings Calcidius' 4th. c. AD Latin commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* into the fold of research on the methodological assumptions and hermeneutical practices of the ancient commentary tradition. The first part deals with the question of how Calcidius sees his role as a commentator in relation to the original text, to his audience, and to the Platonist tradition. The second part examines the organizing principles and structuring devices of the commentary, and what these can tell us about connections between exegesis and worldview. As with many other commentaries, Calcidius' purpose becomes clearer if we approach him from a pedagogical angle. His practice, like most of the content of his commentary, appears to connect him to older layers of Platonism, pre-dating so-called Neoplatonism. It reveals a distinct authorial voice, of someone who is very conscious of his role as a cultural mediator and who has a philosophical line to pursue.

Keywords

Calcidius, commentaries, hermeneutics, Plato, *Timaeus*, Platonism

Calcidius is the mysterious author of a 4th c. AD Latin translation of, and commentary on, part of Plato's *Timaeus* (the translation runs from the beginning up to 53C, the commentary treats 31C-53C). This work is a central source for our knowledge of ancient philosophy because of its many citations, and it became one of the main channels of transmission of Plato's thought to the later tradition. Scholarship until now has focused on the date and the identity of the author – about whom very little is known, on the search for Calcidius' main source or sources, on the compilation of parallel passages, on the commentary's potential contribution to a better understanding of ancient philosophy, on the analysis of specific subsections

such as the treatise on fate embedded in the commentary, and on its impact on the subsequent tradition. Curiously enough, the commentary itself, as a discourse in its own right, and its philosophical significance have disappeared behind these diverse lines of inquiry.

The last twenty-five years have witnessed a major deepening of our understanding of the ancient commentary tradition, and most of the research on which this paper draws has been published in the wake of Waszink's monumental edition of Calcidius.¹ The results of these efforts make one realize that the questions mentioned above cannot be answered in a satisfactory matter unless one acquires a clearer sense of what the author was trying to accomplish: why did he write the commentary in the first place, and why in this manner (taking into account the possibility that the extant text may be incomplete)? The possibility of a consistent approach permeating the entire commentary is relevant for the issue of sources: is Calcidius primarily a compiler or does he have his own authorial voice? The answer to this question will help, in turn, with evaluating parallels between Calcidius and other authors: what, if anything, is distinctive about Calcidius' use of common material? We also need this perspective to be able to assess the reliability of his citations: can we tell whether he is adjusting his selection of materials to his own exegetical framework? A stronger awareness of Calcidius' intellectual and cultural parameters within the commentary tradition, based on the text itself, will provide a different vantage point on the question of his identity, and it can yield a clearer diagnosis of how the work had to be appropriated in order to make it fit into the tradition of later, primarily Christian, thought.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to open up the line of inquiry into what the commentary can tell us about Calcidius' overall purpose. As it turns out, Calcidius is not stingy with clues, but the clues are interspersed in the entire commentary. In order to draw out the implications, one needs to combine two questions: first, that of how Calcidius constructs his authorial voice in relation to the preceding Platonist tradition, and second, that of how he sees the connection between Plato's *Timaeus* and his own philosophical project in the commentary, viewed in comparison to other modes of reading the *Timaeus* in Antiquity. To us such issues of meta-discourse may seem merely preliminary to the real philosophical work, but to the ancient commentators – even though, as we will see, they do recognize a

¹) Waszink (1962). All references to Calcidius are according to this edition.

category of *prolegomena* – these issues are intrinsic to philosophy itself, because they are foundational. Hence one should not be surprised to find, at the deepest level of philosophical significance, a strong correlation between exegesis and worldview, or between hermeneutics and ontology.

I.i. Calcidius' Authorial Voice

Any commentator faces a double bind: first, he has to be careful not to diminish the reputation of the thinker whose work he is elucidating – why, after all, would a text need a commentary, if it were not because of inherent deficiencies?; second, he cannot afford to insult his addressee's intelligence, and through the addressee, that of his potential broader audience. Throughout the commentary tradition we can see these issues addressed. Calcidius solves the problem by inserting a mini-treatise on the issue of 'obscurity' (*obscuritas*, ch. 322), when he gets to the admittedly thorny topic of prime matter (*silva*). Succinct as his treatment is, it ranks among the most complete overviews we have on the subject, which was a stock theme.²

There are three causes for obscurity, Calcidius tells us: the first resides with the author, the second with his audience, and the third with the subject matter of an exposition. Obscurity on the part of the author can be intentional, as is the case with Aristotle and Heraclitus, he goes on, or it can be the result of a weakness of expression (*ex imbecillitate sermonis*). The audience could be struggling too, either because it is not familiar with the topics that are being discussed, or because it is 'slow' and dim-witted (*pigriore ingenio ad intellegendum*). Finally there could be a difficulty embedded in the topic itself, as with prime matter, which eludes our ordinary cognitive faculties.

But with Timaeus as a speaker and his listeners – that is, within Plato's account – we are safe, Calcidius claims: Timaeus is a reliable speaker and his audience is up to speed. It is the topic itself that poses the problem. As readers of Calcidius, in turn, we are invited to adopt a similar attitude to

²) For analyses of common practices in commentaries and their prefaces, cf. I. Hadot, Hoffmann, and P. Hadot (1990), 113-122. For an English summary, cf. I. Hadot (1991); Mansfeld (1994). On the question of obscurity, however (see especially his ch. 5), Mansfeld does not include this passage from Calcidius. See also I. Hadot (1996); Praechter (1990); Westerink (1990). For a succinct rendering of the *topos* in the tradition of commentaries on Aristotle, see Barnes (1992).

Plato as author and to his reader, who happens to be, in this case, Calcidius' addressee Osius.

That we are entitled to do so emerges from Calcidius' dedicatory letter and from the Preface to his commentary. The challenge of the *Timaeus* as a whole does not reside in any weakness in Plato's language (*non ex imbecillitate sermonis*, ch. 1, a claim Cicero had already made),³ but in the degree of specialized knowledge it presupposes. Even the ancients already considered it to be a difficult text, Calcidius says soothingly to Osius. One needs a thorough preliminary training in the sciences, or in what Calcidius calls *artificiosa ratio*, that is, in arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, in order to be able to follow Plato's exposition. Thus Calcidius invokes his second cause of obscurity, and by implication the third. His approach invites a comparison with the opening remarks in Theon of Smyrna's account of the mathematical knowledge one needs in order to follow Plato's arguments (*Expositio Rerum Mathematicarum*..., 2nd. c. AD). Theon states that he wrote his work on behalf of those who had not been trained since childhood in the mathematical sciences that are necessary both to understand Plato's work (...*Ad Legendum Platonem Utilium*) and to gain access to other forms of knowledge. As Ilsetraut Hadot has seen, Theon and Calcidius attest to the fact that, in their respective periods, mathematical training was not to be taken for granted.⁴

In the Preface to his commentary, Calcidius raises the issue of the *Timaeus*' opaqueness together with other standard topics such as the purpose of the author and the book, a division into chapters, and a hint of Plato's staging of the exchange, and of reasons for his choice of characters, though without deploying a symbolical interpretation. These points refer to the oldest of two forms of the introductory schema for reading Plato's and Aristotle's work (the so-called *prolegomena* schema, mentioned above), which is also attested in such texts as the Christian Origen's Preface to his commentary on the Song of Songs.⁵

³ Cicero *De Finibus* 2.15; the best parallel for Calcidius' treatment of obscurity is in Galen's *compendium* of the *Timaeus*, 1.14-6 Kraus-Walzer; see also his *In Hippocratis Librum De Fracturis* 18.2, 319.7ff. Kühn.

⁴ I. Hadot (1984), 70.

⁵ See n. 2; cf. also Dillon (1999), Porphyry *In Cat.* 55.3-57.15 Busse, *Anon. in Theaet.* 1.1-4.27 Diels and Schubart, Origen *Comm. in Canticum Canticorum* 61-88 Baehrens (GCS, t. 33, Origen t. 8), Macrobius *In Somnium Scipionis* 1.4.1.

In spite of the real challenges the *Timaeus* presents, however, Plato himself does come to the aid of his readers. Thus Calcidius, like other interpreters before him, starting as early as Speusippus and Xenocrates,⁶ holds that Plato uses the language of a creative process in time merely as a metaphor to convey the world's eternal dependence on a higher cause. People have an easier time grasping a causal relation, he says, if it is cast in the temporal language of 'before' and 'after,' as in the relation between a father and son (ch. 26). So, Plato applies such a metaphor for pedagogical purposes (τρόπος/χάριν διδασκαλίας, as this is called in the Greek tradition). Similarly, Plato uses a mode of direct speech when the Demiurge addresses the younger gods (41A7-D3) in order to give his audience a break from abstract discourse, to allow for an easier assimilation of his thoughts, and to claim divine authority for his views (ch. 138).

Yet, even if one allows for these pedagogical concessions on Plato's part, the *Timaeus* remains a difficult text. Calcidius compares Plato's account to an intelligible form that is hidden, obscure in the sense of not being easily accessible, and compares his own translation into Latin to a copy of that model. Given that the original is difficult, the translation risks being even more obscure because, as a mere copy, it has to be weaker than its model (*exemplum-simulacrum*, Letter 6.8-10 Waszink; Preface ch. 4). Calcidius shrewdly borrows here the ontological language of the *Timaeus* in order to register a hermeneutical point.⁷ (The issue of the link between ontology and hermeneutics permeates the ancient commentary tradition, and is one to which we need to return.) In his role as commentator he comes to the aid of his translation, and provides the bridge between model and copy, or between the sensible and intelligible realms, hence, not unlike the character Timaeus, performing one of a philosopher's most important tasks, of redirecting the audience's gaze towards the truth. At the same time Plato's account implicitly acquires a highly authoritative status, because it becomes as exemplary as the Forms and the divine. And this implies too that as a model the *Timaeus* is not to be surpassed or cast aside by a different and higher truth, such as the one claimed by Christianity.

Calcidius also uses the relation between model and copy to describe how the *Timaeus*, as a discourse on nature, relates to Plato's *Parmenides*, which treats the very origin of reality (ch. 272, 277.5-9 Waszink). Macrobius too,

⁶ Cf. Baltes (1976-1978); Speusippus F41, 61, 72 Tarán; Xenocrates F54, 68 Heinze.

⁷ Dutton (2003).

for instance, uses the analogy to describe the relation between Plato's Myth of Er in his *Republic* and Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* (*In Somn. Scip.* 1.1.2). But what is so striking in Calcidius' opening move is that it allows him to instate himself as an author, with a strong first-person voice that he will maintain throughout the commentary. Through the model/copy analogy Calcidius expresses his awareness of his role and responsibility.

In the polished rhetoric of the dedicatory letter, as one would expect, Calcidius extols his addressee's capacities, and modestly devalues his own, no doubt in order to avoid insulting Osius, as I pointed out above. The dedicatory letter hinges on the theme of friendship. Like virtue, it makes the impossible feasible. And friendship's requirement of generosity too (*magnanimitas*) demands that one give one's very best, even if a request seems daunting. One could easily be lulled by the rhetorical commonplaces of this letter into dismissing it as an ornament.

Yet, apart from the fact that rhetoric is rarely ornamental, what seems at first glance a rather banal reference to generosity immediately acquires a sharp edge and polemical tone in the Preface, and this sign of tension turns out to be very informative for Calcidius' position in the Platonic tradition. The *Timaeus*, Calcidius claims, appears to have been composed for an audience of specialists in the sciences. But those very same specialists refuse to share their blessing with others, in a detestable lack of generosity, because of a malicious and unfortunate invidiousness. Calcidius does not mince his words here: *...infelicis invidiae detestabili restrictione largae beatitudinis fusionem incommunicabilem penes se retinuerunt* (Preface ch. 3). Unlike those people, we are meant to infer from the dedicatory letter, Calcidius will share, through his commentary, whatever he knows, and thus not limit himself to a translation.

I.ii. Calcidius and the Platonist Tradition

Calcidius' strong first-person consciousness goes together with an avowed polemic against other interpreters. His attack appears to target the schools of professional philosophers, and in particular the Platonists, who had a reputation of wanting to train an intellectual elite of select pupils, the circle of so-called 'friends' or *hetairoi*. This criticism curiously reads like the reverse of a complaint lodged against the Christians, namely that the adherents of that sect spread their message indiscriminately among the widest audience possible, including the rabble and unlearned people, thereby demeaning

its value.⁸ Christian interpreters of Scripture such as Origen and Clement of Alexandria, for all of their Platonist sympathies, indeed had to walk a very fine line between not lessening the value of the surface meaning of the text, accessible to all,⁹ and allowing for a deeper meaning that would be available only to the initiated.

If the debate over the accessibility of teachings is at the back of his mind, Calcidius could be trying to forestall a potential criticism from Christian quarters, and a prejudice against the elitism and exclusivity of so-called pagan and Platonist philosophy. This reading in itself does not imply that Calcidius is a Christian; it merely requires that his addressee be one,¹⁰ and that Calcidius' move here would be a concession as part of an overall strategy to ensure Osius' goodwill and capture his attention. Thus Calcidius presents himself in the commentary as a cultural mediator, not merely between the Roman and the Greek tradition, but also between Christianity and non-Christian philosophy, especially Platonism (to the extent one can even make that distinction).

Calcidius is remarkably consistent in this cold attitude towards Plato's successors. Except for a few cases (as in chs 136 and 300) he lets the grand master stand on his own, without a reference to other Platonists. For this commentator Plato represents the culmination of all philosophy not only because he holds the true view, but also because he presents the most complete analysis of any question at hand.¹¹ Calcidius uses this procedure of singling out Plato for other topics as well, such as fate, dreams, and matter, but he shows his hand most clearly in his discussion of the sense of sight (ch. 243, 255.2-4):

he [Plato] gave the most complete explanation and taught both the cause itself of sight, as well as those factors that accompany the cause and aid it, without which sight could not exist¹²

⁸) As in Minucius Felix *Octavius* 5.4, 8, Celsus in Origen *Contra Celsum* 3.44, 55, Porphyry *Contra Christianos* F81, 82, 87 Harnack.

⁹) Cf. Mansfeld (1994) 13, 159-60, Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 5 and 7 *passim*, Origen *De Principiis* 4.2-3, *Philocalia* 1.14-21 (see also 2.3); for Porphyry's criticism of Origen's hermeneutics, cf. F39 Harnack = Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 6.19 (see also below and n. 5).

¹⁰) Reydam-Schils (2002).

¹¹) Cf. also Plutarch *De Defectu* 435F-436A.

¹²) Nam cum ille perfectam rationem attulerit docueritque tam ipsam causam videndi quam cetera quae causam sequuntur atque adiuvant et sine quibus non potest visus existere...

Plato, then, surpasses all other philosophers, because he both identifies the real cause and takes concomitant factors into account, a claim for the sake of which Calcidius uses terminology borrowed from the *Timaeus*, that is, of auxiliary causes (cf. also ch. 212).

When it comes to Plato's successors, however, matters look quite different (ch. 243, 255.4-8, continuation from previous passage):

his [Plato's] successors got hold only of parts of the full account, and from these same partial perspectives pronounced judgments about the whole. And thus, to the extent that they speak the truth, they proceed rightly, but, because there is no completeness in a part, they stumble to some extent, as the matter itself, with the exposition of Plato's view, will show.¹³

Like Lady Philosophy at the opening of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Calcidius turns entire groups of thinkers into marauders, who got away with whatever bits of truth they could lay their hands on (ch. 246, 256.14-16): ... 'the younger generations of philosophers, like unworthy inheritors who squander their father's wealth, broke up a complete and fruitful view into defective little opinions (*in mutilas opiniunculas*).'¹⁴

In this approach to Plato we can detect an echo of Atticus and Numenius (rather than of Porphyry, who is often claimed to be Calcidius' main source, see below). In order to contrast Plato's comprehensiveness with other philosophers' piece-meal method, both Middle Platonist authors use the same image of Pentheus' body being torn limb by limb and scattered.¹⁵ Whereas Atticus applies the image to emphasize Plato's superiority over his predecessors (F1 des Places), Numenius brandishes it as a weapon against Plato's successors in the Academy (the generations of Platonists who in their quarrels ruined his legacy) in a treatise called, in case we would miss the point, 'On the Stand-Off between Plato and the Academics' (Περὶ τῆς τῶν Ἀκαδημαϊκῶν πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαστάσεως, F24-28 des Places). In this invective Numenius also did not omit emphasizing the connections between Plato and Pythagoras, lampooning the shameful behavior of other

¹³) ... iuniores sumptis ex plena sententia partibus de isdem partibus tamquam de universitate senserunt proptereaque, ut qui vera dicant, merito movent; sed quia nulla partis perfectio est, aliquatenus succidunt, ut exposita Platonis sententia res ipsa monstrabit.

¹⁴) ... iuniores philosophi, ut non optimi heredes paternum censum in frustra dissipantes, perfectam atque uberem sententiam in mutilas opiniunculas ceciderunt.

¹⁵) Cf. also Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 1.13, 57, 1-6.

schools, as well as trying to shame the Platonists by pointing to the unity in the Epicurean ranks. Numenius, however, still had some respect for the first generations of Platonists, and notably for Speusippus and Xenocrates, and if Nemeseius' rendering is accurate, could even bring himself to cite Xenocrates (F4b des Places=Nemeseius 2, 8-14).¹⁶ Not so Calcidius.

Of course, being aware of the potential gap between Plato and his interpreters could have exegetical advantages. Calcidius establishes a direct connection between himself and Plato; unlike Boethius, for instance, in his work on Aristotelian logic, Calcidius never mentions a tradition of commentators (*commentatores*).¹⁷ The direct connection allows Calcidius to make some very astute observations, such as the claim, which he repeats twice, that Plato himself did not use the term *hulê* to designate the receptacle, or third ontological principle (278.1-2; 309.4-6). In drawing our attention to this point, he does better than many an ancient reader, as well as later scholar. The insight does not prevent him from using his famous translation of *hulê* as *silva* for his own purposes, because he is always commenting *both* on the *Timaeus* and on a range of different philosophical views.

Yet in spite of his overt polemic, Calcidius does not dismiss the Platonist tradition entirely. He does mention both Numenius and Philo of Alexandria – a fact that does not in itself entail that he used these authors as direct sources. On the contrary, if he has a tendency to cover up his immediate sources, his mentioning these two thinkers explicitly would work against the assumption. Be that as it may, it remains striking that he chooses to highlight thinkers who from a current (and possibly mistaken) perspective are not part of mainstream Platonism. Moreover, at the end of the commentary (chs 352-end) he parts company even with Numenius, when he rejects the latter's hypothesis that a disorderly rudimentary soul inherent in matter is the cause of evil (chs 295-99).

In addition to Numenius and Philo of Alexandria, there is the tantalizing possibility that Calcidius may have thought he was quoting at least one other Platonist when he referred to an interpretation of Genesis by 'Origen' (ch. 276). This point is complicated, and requires some unpacking, but it goes a long way towards signaling the gulf separating our understanding of the ancient tradition and that of the ancients themselves.

¹⁶ Cf. G. Reydam-Schils (2006).

¹⁷ As in Boethius *De Interpretatione*, *passim*.

In order to build his case that Calcidius is a Christian, Waszink relies heavily on the fact that the commentator cites this interpretation of Genesis. But to claim that only a Christian would cite the Christian Origen is a *petitio principii*. Perhaps Calcidius did not realize that the Platonist and the Christian of the same name (second to third cent. AD) could be two different people.¹⁸ If there was a mistake in the conflation, it was made already in Antiquity: Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.19.4-8) claims to have found it in Porphyry (his *Contra Christianos*), and corroborates the assumption. The Christian *persona* of Origen too is heavily indebted to Platonism; he is said to have embraced the ideas of a 'Greek' on the nature of the world and the divine, and to have had enough of a reputation even with the philosophers to be cited by them. The Platonist *persona* of Origen is documented as having had a strong interest in the *Timaeus* (see e.g. Proclus *In Tim.* 1, 63.21-65.3 Diehl), as having left very little in writing, but as having composed a treatise on demons (according to Longinus at Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 20.41). Both *personae* allegedly had an interest in Numenius, (neo) Pythagoreans and Stoics – the Christian *persona* in his now lost *Stromateis*,¹⁹ which, according to Jerome, also contained material from Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition. There appears to be plenty of room for confusion, and the combined *persona* of a Platonist-cum-Christian Origen could have constituted an ideal meeting ground between Calcidius and his interlocutor. We need to keep in mind too that an interest in Hebrew Scriptures is attested for other Platonists, such as Porphyry, and Numenius,²⁰ as well as for authors such as Galen (his *De Usu Partium* 11.14).²¹ And there is at least one more piece worth adding to the Origen puzzle here: according to Proclus, the Platonist Origen interpreted Plato's *Parmenides* as having a primarily ontological focus, dealing with the realm of intelligible reality,²² and this interpretation, unlike later Neoplatonist ones, appears to be in line with Calcidius' own reading – a point to which we need to return below.

¹⁸) See the groundbreaking article by Goulet (1977).

¹⁹) For the hypothesis that Origen's *Stromateis* are in fact Calcidius' main source, see Beatrix (1999).

²⁰) See e.g., Fl1, 9-10, 13, 30, 56; for an excellent discussion of the issue, see Zambon (2002). See also ps. Longin. *On the Sublime* 9.9.

²¹) Brisson (2002).

²²) Cf. Proclus *Theologia Platonica* 2.31.4-22 Saffrey and Westerink.

I.iii. Unacknowledged Debts: The Case of Porphyry?

It is a curious feature of many ancient texts that they tend not to cite their immediate sources. Among those unacknowledged influences on Calcidius, Waszink has ranked Porphyry very high in importance (in the introduction to his edition). This assumption, however, needs to be revisited, and we will consider one example more closely here, which demonstrates how context and overall purpose affect Calcidius' use of a parallel passage.

In one instance of an allusion to the Platonic tradition (*auditores Platonis*, ch. 301), though very broadly construed, we actually find one of the few explicit echoes of Porphyry that are both confirmed elsewhere and quite specific. The first point matters in order to avoid a kind of circular reasoning, whereby one first assumes that there is a direct connection between Porphyry and Calcidius, only then to use Calcidius as a source for Porphyry, and notably for his commentary on the *Timaeus* (as Sodano did in his edition of the fragments).²³ The second stipulation, about the echo being specific enough, helps us to discern that if we are dealing with themes and arguments that are relatively widespread and not unique to Porphyry, we may have a connection, instead, with doxographical accounts.

Let us turn to the text of the parallel passages first. This is Calcidius' rendering into Latin of a certain position on matter and the question of its connection to evil. Among the *auditores Platonis* who hold that matter is eternal and not generated:

There are also who think that, according to Plato, this disorderly and confused motion [discussed in the previous paragraph] is not present in matter but in the materials and bodies alone which are called 'principles and elements of the world' (ch. 301, transl. van Winden).

Calcidius' wording here invites a comparison with a passage in Philoponus (*De Aeternitate Mundi* 14.3, p. 546.5 Rabe; cf. also 6.14, p. 164.16ff.), explicitly attributed to Porphyry (as noted in Waszink's edition):

Calcidius' Latin:

Nec desunt qui putent inordinatum illum et tumultuarium motum Platonem non in silva, sed in materiis et corporibus iam notasse, quae initia mundi atque elementa censentur.

²³) Sodano (1964).

Philoponus' Greek:

ὁ γοῦν Πορφύριος ἐν τοῖς εἰς τὸν Τίμαιον ὑπομνήμασιν...

οὐ τὴν ὕλην φησὶν μετὰ τῶν ἰχνῶν τὸ πλημμελῶς εἶναι καὶ ἀτάκτως κινούμενον...

ἀλλὰ τὰ ἥδη ἐξ ὕλης καὶ εἰδους γενόμενα σώματα, ἐξ ὧν ὁ κόσμος συνέστηκεν· οὐ γὰρ εἶναι κόσμου ἀρχὰς ὕλην καὶ εἶδος, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν σώματος εἶναι ἀρχὰς (ἐξ ὕλης γὰρ καὶ εἶδους τὰ σώματα); κόσμου δὲ ἀρχὰς τὰ ἐξ ὕλης καὶ εἰδους συστάντα σώματα.

In comparing the two passages, one can tell that Calcidius' wording is a condensed version of a longer argument that comes in two steps: the first is that the source of evil and of disorderly motion is not in matter, but in the elements; the second – which gives us the reason for the first – is that matter and Form are the principles merely of bodies, and that the elements qua bodies in turn are the principles of the universe. So this position builds on two levels of ontological principles.

Waszink claims that the stance Philoponus attributes to Porphyry coincides with Calcidius' own line, that evil does not result from matter itself, but from corporeality, which has a derivative and secondary ontological status. If Waszink is right, this surely would attest to Porphyry's influence on Calcidius?

Yet there are at least two major problems with Waszink's hypothesis. First of all, there is a crucial difference between Calcidius' own stance and the one he has reported in his doxographical overview: for him the elements, precisely because of their derivative status, *cannot* be considered principles (*initia-ἀρχαί*). He argues explicitly against calling the elements 'principles,' in ch. 307. So with this argument, even if he did use Porphyry, he also asserts his independence.

The second point may be even more problematic. Calcidius has included *in his doxography*, and not in the main body of his argument, a position that is similar to one elsewhere attested for Porphyry. So... are we to assume that Porphyry included himself in a doxographical schema, from a third-person standpoint, rather than presenting himself as giving his own view? This would be decidedly odd, and is not attested elsewhere for what we know of the practices of Porphyry's philosophical discourse. It is much more likely that a view like Porphyry's (and perhaps even like that of a predecessor?) was already included in a doxographical schema which Calcidius derived from another source than the Platonist, or that he himself drafted the schema based on his reading, which could have included

some Porphyry – provided we are willing not to discard altogether real autonomy on Calcidius' part.

In sum then, if we ask how Calcidius' authorial voice relates to the Platonist tradition, it turns out that he is very conscious of his role and importance as a commentator. Throughout the commentary he does not hesitate to use a first-person voice, and to speak as an *ego* or a *nos autem*. And the starkness of this first-person voice is quite striking by contrast with Neoplatonists who claim an allegiance with some members of the Platonic family, most often their own teachers, in their criticism of others. In spite of a sometimes sharp tone towards 'wrong' views of their predecessors, the mode of discourse of these Platonists, in contrast to Calcidius', does remain a family affair. And thus they designate their teachers and the predecessors of whom they do approve as 'fathers' and 'grandfathers'.²⁴

From what we can tell, based on the limited extant evidence, Porphyry does not hesitate to speak in his own voice either, without necessarily declaring an allegiance, though he does have a sense of a Platonist tradition, and mentions names.²⁵ An interesting larger question would be whether the positioning of oneself in relation to the Platonist tradition would depend on the level of audience one is addressing: that in introductory or more elementary forms of discourse or those addressed to 'outsiders' (as is the case also with Calcidius' work) one would have less of a need to refer to the inner tradition, whereas in advanced expositions for a smaller group of *hetairoi* – in which there could be a stronger need to assert one's authority vis-à-vis rivals, or to legitimize oneself through the proper allegiances – internal references to the school tradition would be more prominent. But such a distinction would not help explain why Proclus names representatives of the Platonist tradition in his commentary on the *Republic*, whereas in his commentary on the *Parmenides*, his doxographical overviews tend to be anonymous (that is, he mentions a variety of positions without attaching names).

The distinction does not solve the conundrum of Calcidius either, in spite of the fact that he addresses an outsider. It is one thing not to dwell

²⁴ I. Sluiter (1999), esp. 195-197; see also Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 1.1.1. We can even find something like a justification of the practice in Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Encheiridion*, 37.94-125 I. Hadot.

²⁵ On this topic, cf. Zambon (2002).

on the Platonist tradition, but quite another to express an explicit hostility – which, as I have already indicated, is more in line with a Numenius. In addition, Calcidius is quite happy in his doxographical overviews to mention key representatives of other schools, such as Stoicism. But when it comes to Plato's legacy, only Plato as a 'father of all fathers' counts (see 256.14-16, quoted above), and the parricide of Calcidius' own potential teachers has happened already outside the text, which merely shows traces of the erasure and of the motivation behind it.

II.i. The *Timaeus* as an Intensive Course in Theoretical Philosophy

So, what is it, generally speaking, that this self-confident commentator is trying to accomplish with his exposition of the *Timaeus*? In the introduction to his edition, Waszink (xvii-xxxv) adopts van Winden's proposal for the structure of Calcidius' commentary.²⁶ The main hinge of the commentary would be a distinction derived from the *Timaeus* itself (47E),²⁷ between the works of reason and providence (*quae providae mentis intellectus instituit*, 273.8-9; notice how Calcidius adds the notion of Providence here to the Greek original), on the one hand, and those of necessity, on the other (*ea quae necessitas invexit*). This would leave us with two main parts of the commentary, after the Preface: one, chs 8-267 and two, chs 268-355 (end). But as van Winden and Waszink note, the first part of the commentary is divided into two parts in turn, which they name, one, the generation of the world (8-118), and, two, its further completion (119-267, or, in Waszink's version, its condition after its generation). Thus the basic schema would look as follows:

- A. Works of Reason and Providence (8-267)
 - a. Generation of the World (8-118)
 - b. Completion of the World (119-267)
- B. Works of Necessity (268-355)

The break between the generation (Aa) and the completion of the world (Ab), however, is not as clear in Calcidius' transitional paragraph (119) as this division would require.

²⁶ van Winden (1959), 10-23.

²⁷ ... ἐπιδέδεικται τὰ διὰ νοῦ δεδημιουργημένα· δεῖ δὲ καὶ τὰ δι' ἀνάγκης γιγνόμενα τῷ λόγῳ παραθέσθαι.

In the transitional passages between A and B Calcidius himself actually gives us another clue for structuring devices he may have used, in addition to the hinge phrase from the *Timaeus* quoted in ch. 268. This indication comes from his view of the divisions of philosophy. In ch. 264 he claims that philosophy (*officium totius philosophiae*) can be exhaustively divided into theory (*consideratio*, which he appears to use as an alternative to *contemplatio*, cf. Preface) and practical philosophy (*actus*), leaving out logic. Theory in turn is divided into 1) theology (*theologiam*), 2) physics (*naturae sciscitationem*) and 3) 'science' (*scientiam praestandae rationis*). Theology deals with the search for the divine and *pietas*. Physics focuses on the heavens and the causes of things, including the starting points of those things that have a beginning in time. 'Science,' finally, treats questions such as the cycles of time, numbers, and measure.

The best parallel for Calcidius' division is to be found in Alcinous' *Handbook* (*Didaskalikos*, chs 3 and 7). The basic division there amounts to theoretical philosophy (*theôretikê*), practical philosophy (*praktikê*), and dialectic (*dialektikê*), including logic in this context. Under the heading of theoretical philosophy, as in Calcidius, we find a) theology, which deals with the first causes, the unmoving and divine (ch. 3), and with the highest and most fundamental principles (ch. 7); b) physics, which covers the movements of the celestial bodies, the composition of the universe (ch. 3), the nature of the whole, the kind of living beings humans are, their place in the universe, whether there is a divine providence, whether there are other, secondary gods, and what the rapport is between humans and the gods (ch. 7); finally c) there is mathematics, with sciences such as geometry and the like (ch. 3), which examine planes and three-dimensional nature, as well as motion and impetus (ch. 7).

The most common division of philosophy in Antiquity, attributed even to Xenocrates,²⁸ but made canonical by the Stoics, is the one between logic, ethics, and physics.²⁹ This is the division which Macrobius, for instance, uses in the final paragraph of his commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. Calcidius too indicates that he is aware of it (185.4-5). But because such a division overlooks the radically transcendent side of reality, Platonists found fault with it in their ongoing squabble with the Stoics: for followers of Plato there is something beyond the study of nature as it is captured in physics. And so they came up with a range of strategies to

²⁸) F1 Heinze=Posidonius F88 Edelstein and Kidd.

²⁹) One of the best papers on this topic is P. Hadot (1979).

accommodate the problem. One such strategy is to borrow the distinction between practical and theoretical philosophy, and have the latter start with mathematics and extend beyond physics, so that it covers also theology. This is the strategy Alcinous and Calcidius adopt. According to another strategy, the transcendental dimension could be accommodated under logic as dialectic in the Platonic sense, by establishing a connection between logic in the more technical modes of the Peripatetic and Stoic approach, and Platonic ontology, as Macrobius does. Or one could simply add a level of theology or the 'epoptic' kind of knowledge, which refers to the advanced stage in a process of initiation.³⁰ The solution Porphyry uses to arrange his edition of Plotinus' *Enneads*, and the Christian Origen adopts too,³¹ is a combination of the latter two strategies, with the order ethics, physics, and 'epoptic' knowledge; it is simpler than Alcinous' and Calcidius' much more elaborate scheme.

Traces of the debate on the proper division of knowledge can also be found in passages such as Aulus Gellius' rendering of the Pythagorean curriculum through Taurus (1.9): the highest step of learning, after a range of preliminary studies (*his scientiae studiis ornati*), is physics, which, however, as in Stoicism, would embrace both the works of the universe (*mundi opera*) as well as its principles (*principia*). So, here it is the notion of physics itself that is adjusted, in order to cover a broader range of reality.

How does the division of theoretical philosophy into mathematics, physics, and theology help us to gain a better understanding of the structure of Calcidius' commentary? We could in effect distinguish the same three nearly equal parts in the commentary according to this division, which is 'pedagogical' in the sense that it would constitute a gradual progression from the basic and preliminary type of theoretical knowledge taught by mathematics, that is, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy (chs 8-118), over physics (chs 119-267), all the way up to the most fundamental principles of reality. Thus the first part of the commentary would be devoted to mathematics (the *artificiosae rationes*), the first half of

³⁰ Theon of Smyrna 14.18ff.; I. Hadot (1984), 71-72: 1) mathematics, 2) logic, politics, physics, 3) epoptic knowledge (in the sense of Platonic dialectic); Clement 1.28.176.1-3; Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* 382D-E.

³¹ *Comm. in Canticum* 75.5-27 Baehrens; see also his letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus, and Gregory *Oratio Panegyrica* 7-15, which does include logic/dialectic, but as a propaedeutic discipline; cf. Mansfeld (1994), 170.

the second part to physics, and the second half of the second part to theology, which Calcidius approaches from the angle of the question of matter (chs 268-355).

So, the schema would actually look as follows:

- A. Mathematics and the Universe
- Ba. Physics
- Bb. Theology, the principles of reality

The revised schema has many interpretive advantages: it explains why Calcidius skips Timaeus' opening speech, it helps us to see how mathematics relates to philosophy in Calcidius' approach, and it delivers a more elegant structure for the commentary. Let us take a closer look at each of these points in turn.

1. Calcidius' aim to cover theoretical philosophy in a specific, pedagogically motivated order accounts for his omissions of not only the preface of the *Timaeus* and the Atlantis story – a fact to which he himself draws attention (ch. 4) – but also, and this is much more striking, of Timaeus' opening speech. This speech can be considered a kind of philosophical prooimion, in which Timaeus makes the key distinctions that, arguably, provide the basis for his entire exposition, between being and becoming (27D5-29D3), between model and copy, and between different types of discourse. It is one of the most widely commented passages of the *Timaeus*, and was in itself sufficient to trigger influential debates such as the one whether the world has a beginning in time or not. Yet Calcidius omits this section without any acknowledgment, in spite of its being included in his translation. Waszink (xviii) and van Winden (14) suggest that Calcidius left this speech out because it did not require explanation in mathematical terms, but this suggestion is not plausible, if we take into account the prooimion's highly intricate nature and its central importance for Timaeus' exposition.

An alternative explanation is available. Given his pedagogical approach to the *Timaeus*, Calcidius could not have started his commentary with Timaeus' opening remarks: they represent too advanced a level of philosophical discourse, drawing as much as they do on ontology. Instead Calcidius picks up Plato's text at the discussion of the world body's composition, with a relatively basic point about mathematical proportions and numerical analogy. He postpones the treatment of themes related to Timaeus'

introductory speech until the third part of the commentary. In fact, at one point in his commentary, Calcidius explicitly tells us as much (ch. 107, 156.2-3). Here too a structural feature of the *Timaeus* helps to justify this exegetical strategy. Plato's *Timaeus* makes a fresh start with discussing his principles (47E3-49A6) when he adds the 'third *genos*,' the so-called receptacle, to being and becoming, and it is this feature of the Platonic account which Calcidius can put to use for treating the principles in one systematic exposition, in the closing part of his commentary.

2. One of Calcidius' important hermeneutical choices is that he considers mathematics as the first step in the curriculum of theoretical philosophy, rather than as a preparatory step. Whereas Theon of Smyrna gave his work a title referring to the material with which one had to familiarize oneself *before* tackling Plato's work, Calcidius builds these expositions into an actual reading of one of those works. Proclus, on the other hand, in his commentary on the *Timaeus* refers readers who need more help with mathematics to an *appendix*, now lost (probably titled συναγωγή τῶν πρὸς τὸν Τίμαιον μαθηματικῶν θεωρημάτων, Festugière 3, p. 60, n. 3; 34.1-2, see also 76.24ff.). The type of mathematics Proclus does include in his commentary never stands on its own nor simply precedes other forms of knowledge, but *simultaneously* relates to physics and theology (see e.g. 3.218.8-20 Diehl), to which he also refers as philosophy and 'reality' (τὰ πράγματα). Moreover, this higher-order type of mathematics – if we are allowed to call it this – clearly functions as an ontological bridge between physics and theology, or between sensible and intelligible reality, and hence Proclus' sequence would be physics, mathematics, and theology, not mathematics, physics, and theology, as Calcidius would have it.

3. The sequence of mathematics, physics, and theology in Calcidius' text yields a good transition at the start of the second part, on physics (ch. 119): Calcidius briefly alludes again to his discussion of the *artificiosae rationes* before moving on to the next level of discourse. This same theme of technical knowledge also happens to close the circle in the commentary's conclusion, however succinctly. At the end of his exposition, Calcidius again cleverly uses a couple of words from the *Timaeus* in which Plato's main character alludes to the expertise of his interlocutors: 'since you are well-schooled in the fields of learning (...μετέχετε τῶν κατὰ παιδείαν ὁδῶν) in terms of which I must of necessity proceed with my exposition, I'm sure you'll follow me' (53B7-C3, trans. Zeyl). This allusion echoes Socrates' earlier claim that, unlike the poets and the sophists, *Timaeus* and

his companions have the prerequisite knowledge to undertake the inquiry Socrates has requested (19D-20C). So, here too a relation between Calcidius as author (as a stand-in for Timaeus), his potential rivals (those bunglers who do not know their business), and his audience (Osius, presented as gifted), is elucidated from within the setting of the *Timaeus* itself. In his closing remarks Calcidius reemphasizes, quoting the Pythagorean Cebes, that the curriculum of philosophy consists of several steps culminating in its highest truth. Waszink and van Winden were right in noticing that Calcidius uses features of the *Timaeus* as structuring devices, but in addition to those features, his pedagogical order of inquiry also drives the commentary. For now let us hold on to the point that Calcidius uses the *Timaeus* as a vehicle for a comprehensive and step by step overview of what he calls theoretical philosophy.

II.ii. The *Timaeus* in Relation to Other Platonic Dialogues

Two Platonic dialogues appear to frame the structure of philosophy as Calcidius designs it in his commentary, the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*. The pedagogical approach to philosophy could, of course, be derived from the educational program which Plato develops in the *Republic*, and in his Preface Calcidius makes it very clear that he reads the *Timaeus* as a sequel to the *Republic*. But from Calcidius' point of view the sequential reading of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* also takes on an ethical coloring, which focuses on the moral and political dimension of justice. Whereas the *Republic*, Calcidius claims, deals with 'positive justice' in human matters (ch. 6: *iustitia quae versaretur in rebus humanis, positiva*), the *Timaeus* deals with natural justice, in the community of the gods (*naturalis aequitas, ... qua divinum genus adversum se utitur*). The notion of the universe as a city became prominent in particular with the Stoics, and although the *Timaeus* clearly comes with its own ethical agenda, that agenda ultimately was understood in a way that very much shaped the debate between Platonists and Stoics, as I have argued elsewhere:³² hence we find both Alcinous and Calcidius in their treatments of physics focusing on the question of divine providence in relation to a range of other divine entities, as well as to a human being's place in the ordered universe. The Christian Origen too draws attention to the connection between physics and ethics (*Comm. in*

³² Reydam-Schils (1999).

Canticum 75.20-21 Baehrens), but from a noticeably more Christian perspective (if the rendering in Latin is accurate): a proper knowledge of nature leads one not to use it contrary to the purposes ordained by the divine Creator. Simplicius moralizes physics in his introduction to his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* (4.17-5.26 Diels).

How does Plato's *Parmenides* enter into Calcidius' commentary? If the *Timaeus* takes over from the *Republic*, the *Parmenides* in turn would lift its readers to a yet higher level of discourse. He indicates that the *Parmenides* deals with a higher level of reality than the *Timaeus*, and uses the word *epoptica* to refer to the former, whereas he calls the latter *naturalis* (ch. 272). But *epoptica* – a term derived from the practice of initiation rites, as we have already seen above – is for Calcidius clearly a relative notion: thus a discussion of demons is of a *more epoptica* nature than one of the physical universe (165.5, 170.10 Waszink), just as 'matter' is a more advanced topic than corporeal reality (with the *naturalis/rationalis* distinction, 156.2-3 Waszink). Calcidius talks about the *Parmenides* as dealing primarily with the Forms and intelligible reality (ch. 272), addressing also such questions as the mode of participation of sensible reality in its intelligible counterpart (ch. 335: ... *quatenus res existentes idearum participant similitudinem*). According to a doxographical schema of Platonist interpretations of the *Parmenides* preserved by Proclus,³³ Calcidius (or his source) would then fall into the group of thinkers who interpret the *Parmenides* as dealing with ontological matters, rather than mere logic. Yet while providing an ontological reading of the *Parmenides* Calcidius appears not to take his interpretation beyond the level of intelligible reality, to the notion of a radically transcendent One, as Proclus himself and Neoplatonists do. This is where the Platonist Origen comes in, as I mentioned above, as an earlier Platonist for whom a position is attested that is similar to Calcidius' approach.

There is a catch, however, with assuming that Calcidius endorses a lower-level ontological interpretation of the *Parmenides*. Calcidius could be holding back because he addresses someone who is not an advanced scholar of philosophy. In doing this, he would conform to the Neoplatonist practice of adjusting his discourse's level to his addressee's abilities, not necessarily revealing all he knows. Apart from the fact that Calcidius then would go counter to his self-avowed principle of wanting to share

³³) *Theologia Platonica* 1.32-55 Saffrey and Westerink, *In Parm.* 630.15-645 Cousin.

knowledge – which is not impossible – this matter can only be resolved if we gain a better understanding of his views of the divine, and of the extent to which these views are in line with Neoplatonist theories of hypostases, but that is a topic for a separate inquiry.³⁴

We know that the pairing of the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* from Iamblichus onwards (second half 3d. c-4th c. AD) occupied a crucial position in an elaborate Neoplatonist curriculum for teaching philosophy in general and Plato's works specifically.³⁵ But according to that pedagogical arrangement, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* constitute the crowning and finishing course, the *Timaeus* in physics, and the *Parmenides* in theology or the highest form of knowledge. In other words, pupils following this plan of study would not delve into the *Timaeus* until they have reached a very advanced level of training. Calcidius, in contrast, uses the *Timaeus* as a kind of general handbook of Platonist 'theory' in a broader philosophical context, for an addressee who has limited experience with the material. As we have seen, his commentary treats key themes in an order that goes from more preliminary to more advanced. In addition to giving Osius access to Plato's truth, it also provides him with a compact history of philosophy in the doxographical sections.

We find traces of Calcidius' use of the *Timaeus* in earlier strands of Platonism, as in Diogenes Laertius' record (3.62) that 'some start with the *Timaeus*,' or in Albinus' reduced and basic curriculum of the *Alcibiades I*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Timaeus* (5), designed for a student with a serious commitment to philosophy (and the necessary prerequisite knowledge – *προτετελεσμένος τοῖς μαθήμασι* – one should add, in contrast to Calcidius), but not necessarily a member of a Platonist circle.

An addressee who, because of his cultural situation, did not have full access to the philosophical curriculum and Plato's works in Greek, would have needed an approach tailored to his specific needs. Some generations later in the Latin tradition, Macrobius will take this approach even further than Calcidius, by using an already existing Latin reflection on Plato's Myth of Er, namely Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, as a gate of entry to *all* of philosophy, ethics, physics and logic-dialectic. But to use the highly

³⁴ Cf. Dillon (1977), 401-408; Gersh (1986), 2: 439-445; G. Reydam-Schils, 'Calcidius on God' (forthcoming).

³⁵ A seminal article on this topic is Festugière (1971) [= *Museum Helveticum* 26 (1969), 281-296]. For a good summary see also O'Meara (2003), 61-65.

complex and cherished *Timaeus*, of all texts, as the vehicle for a more basic overview, as Calcidius did, could well have struck contemporary Platonists as a bold or even shocking move.

II.iii. Hermeneutics and Ontology

The difference between Calcidius' and Neoplatonist readings of the *Timaeus* runs deeper still than the issue of where the *Timaeus* would fit into a curricular sequence. Calcidius, on the one hand, has a strict sense of sequence; he rearranges the *Timaeus* so that each section of his commentary reflects a specific step in an ascent of theoretical knowledge. The Neoplatonist curriculum, on the other hand, is hermeneutically speaking much more complex because, in addition to positing a sequence, it also relies on a markedly synoptic approach. This synoptic mode of exegesis is anchored in a specific worldview.

In Porphyry's *Sententiae* (10) we find the most succinct rendering of a Neoplatonist notion that establishes the link between hermeneutics and ontology: 'everything is in everything, but in a mode that is proper to the being of each' (πάντα μὲν ἐν πᾶσιν, ἀλλὰ οἰκείως τῇ ἐκάστου οὐσίᾳ).³⁶ According to Iamblichus the approach goes back even to Numenius (ap. Stob. 1, 365.15 Wachsmuth). In ontological terms the notion implies that each level of reality in Neoplatonism – the so-called hypostases – reflects all the other levels but according to its own specifications. For example, the intelligible level of *nous* knows not only the Forms but also sensible reality, only not in sensible terms but in a non-sensible, intelligible manner, suited to its mode of being. In the Latin tradition Boethius would make this formula famous in his wording that things are known not according to their own nature, but according to the nature of the knower.³⁷

If we now transfer this ontological ground-rule onto hermeneutics and the Neoplatonist mode of interpreting Plato, it turns out that Plato's texts are read as revealing the very same feature. According to the Neoplatonists any given philosophical discourse is situated at a certain ontological level,

³⁶ But matters are never simple with our evidence about Porphyry's views: Proclus criticizes Porphyry for not following through consistently on the implications of this principle and the theory of hypostases, at *In Tim.* 2.352.5-8, 11-16 Diehl.

³⁷ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* 5.4.24-5, 6.1. The notion was crucial to Proclus, cf. e.g. *In Tim.* 2.352.5-8 Diehl, 11-16, *In Parm.* 965.10ff. Cousin.

but from that specific vantage point and in its specific mode it encompasses *all of reality*. Thus while the *Timaeus*' proper domain would be physics, it can also address issues of the physical world's connections to the divine and intelligible realms; the *Parmenides*, in turn, would have the highest level of reality as its privileged domain, but could encompass, so to speak, nature as well. The same applies to any section within a given work. As I have already mentioned, the mathematical sections of the *Timaeus* in Proclus' commentary point to a specific mode of existence, yet are not to be dissociated from physics and theology. The Atlantis myth is true both in historical and literal terms, as well as in its allegorical connections to higher reality (*In Tim.* 1.77.24-80.8 Diehl). Proclus interprets even the structural features of a Platonic dialogue in terms of the different levels of reality, so that each work becomes a universe in its own right (*In Alcib.* 10.3ff., see also *Anonym. Prolegomena* 4 Westerink). Moreover, what pertains to the relations between the different levels of reality and to those between philosophical discourse and reality also pertains to inter-textual relations: every section of Plato's work makes sense only from the vantage point of the work in its entirety; every work needs to be read in light of Plato's entire oeuvre, or even in light of all of philosophy and other cultural expressions such as Homer's poetry.

If we turn to Calcidius' commentary with this powerful Neoplatonist connection between hermeneutics and ontology in mind, it becomes apparent that he does not embrace the synoptic mode of exegesis. In terms of interpreting the *Timaeus* he argues explicitly against readers who blur the sequence of topics. Early on in the commentary, in a passage that functions as an important hermeneutical key to the entire exposition (chs 29-31), he disagrees with those who would interpret the World Soul's composition out of indivisible and divisible being in terms of Form and matter. Calcidius prefers the reading that indivisible being refers to a purely noetic type of soul, and divisible being to a basic root-soul (*anima stirpea*), which is the source of life and the inseparable companion of bodies (*inseparabilis corporum comes*). His motivation for this preference matters here, because he argues in terms of sequence. It would be absurd for Plato, Calcidius states, after having finished his discussion of the world body and having moved on to the higher level of soul, to retrace his steps and, given that matter is a condition for corporeality, to return to the topic of body. The over-the-top emphasis in Latin on the alleged absurdity of a meandering Plato is hard to translate:

primo omnium *praeposterum* esse... *rursum* ad *priorem* tractatum *retrorsum* iri, ut de silva et corporibus mundi formaque eorum tractatus *de integro* fieret et a genitura animae *recederetur*.

We cannot miss the point that Calcidius prefers a sequential reading of the *Timaeus* to a synoptic approach. A Neoplatonist reader would bring the entire *Timaeus* to bear on any given section. For Calcidius, by contrast, when one talks about body, or even more specifically, the four elements, one focuses on issues pertaining to that topic, and when one talks about soul, returning to a previous level of discourse is a sign of being muddled. Once Calcidius has moved on to the third part of his commentary, he can, without violating his own exegetical rules, introduce matter as one of reality's foundational principles, both because of his pedagogical schema and because Plato himself now introduces his 'third *genos*,' the receptacle, into *Timaeus*' account.

Together with his rejection of a synoptic exegesis, Calcidius does not adopt the ontological view underpinning Neoplatonist hermeneutics either. This becomes most explicit in his discussion of the relations between fate, human freedom, and divine providence (ch. 162). There he tells us that god knows each thing according to *its* nature, rather than to his own: *quod deus sciat quidem omnia, sed unumquidque pro natura sua ipsorum sciat*. The key difference with the Greek version of the formula, as well as Boethius' Latin rendering, is Calcidius' addition of *ipsorum*, which puts it beyond doubt that he has the nature of the things known in mind, not the nature of the knower, in this case god's, nature. So even the divine maker of the *kosmos* would have to respect the hierarchical structure of, and the ontological distinctions between, the different levels of reality. Such a position would become part of one of the most intense philosophical debates in Antiquity and beyond, about divine knowledge and human freedom.³⁸ In philosophical terms, there is a lot at stake here in this one line of Calcidius' commentary, and its meaning emerges only if we see how the claim relates to his view of the world and of the project of philosophy as presented by the exegesis in its entirety.

³⁸) Cf. Boethius *De Consolatione Philosophiae* 5.4.24-5, 6.1; Proclus *In Tim.* 2.352.5-8 Diehl, 11-16, *In Parm.* 965.10ff. Cousin.

Conclusion

If one brings Calcidius into the fold of the research on the commentary tradition, this hermeneutical study ends up largely confirming that Calcidius has strong affinities with so-called Middle Platonism. But it also brings out the distinctiveness of his authorial voice. Calcidius adopts a markedly first-person perspective, and highlights his importance as exegete in coming to the aid of his translation through the commentary. With exceptions such as Numenius, Philo of Alexandria, and possibly Origen, Calcidius expresses an overt hostility to the Platonist tradition, and presents his work as turning to Plato as the source of truth. He uses structuring devices from the *Timaeus* to organize his commentary, but also intervenes in the order of Plato's exposition to create a pedagogical sequence that takes the addressee from the more preliminary to the more advanced forms of theoretical philosophy, from mathematics, through physics, to theology and the foundational principles of reality. And, just as Calcidius' exegesis shows a marked preference for a sequential reading of the *Timaeus*, so even his god and Demiurge has to respect ontological differences in his divine reading of the universe – in a vertical sequence – and cannot adopt a full-fledged synoptic mode.

If Calcidius did in fact borrow his self-conscious first-person voice from a source, this would be one of the most peculiar instances of ventriloquism in Antiquity. But against this supposition emerges the very real possibility that Calcidius himself as author provided the interpretive framework and the continuity throughout the commentary. Not that this helped him much. In the later tradition, ironically, his work often came to stand simply for the views of Plato himself, and his name disappears behind that of the grand master.³⁹ He was such an effective cultural mediator, then, that he managed to erase himself.

³⁹ Dutton (2003), 193–194. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at a seminar at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in May of 2004, at a seminar in Classics at the Institut für Klassische Philologie of the University of Würzburg, during a research stay funded by a Humboldt fellowship, in the Spring of 2005, and at Bonn University, in June 2005. I would like to thank Béatrice Bakhouché, Luc Brisson, Michael Erler, Christoph Horn, Theo Kobusch, Carlos Lévy, Philippe Hoffmann, Jan Opsomer, Stefan Schorn, Ineke Sluiter, and Andreas Speer, as well as the editor and reviewers of this journal for their comments and suggestions. The remaining weaknesses are entirely mine.

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