

## The stable and dynamic universe and the power of similarity

“This therefore is I think prior to all other things apparent to those whose conceptions are not perverted, that everywhere, but especially in the divine orders, second progressions, are completed through the similitude of these to their proper principles. For nature and intellect, and every generative cause, are naturally adapted to produce and conjoin to themselves things similar, prior to such as are dissimilar to themselves. For if it is necessary that the progression of beings should be continued, and that no vacuum should intervene either in incorporeal natures, or in bodies, it is necessary that *everything which proceeds naturally should proceed through similitude.*”

Proclus, *Theology of Plato*, III, 1

“The progressions of beings however, are completed through similitude. But the terminations of the higher orders are united to the beginnings of second orders. And one series and indissoluble order, extends from on high, through the surpassing goodness of the first cause, and his unical power. For because indeed, he is *one*, he is the supplier of union; but because he is *the good*, he constitutes things similar to him, prior to such as are dissimilar. And thus all things are in continuity with each other. For if this continuity were broken, there would not be union.”

Proclus, *Theology of Plato*, VI, 2

### **The principle and first cause of all beings is *the good*. (proposition 12)**

The Platonic tradition understands that the only way that this first cause could possibly act as a cause is as a kind of overflowing of its superabundant self – for what else is there for the Good (or, if you like, the One) to give to its effects but itself? Nor can it initially use other instruments to produce effects – before the Good produces other things, of course, there is nothing else but its superabundant self. This is made clear in the proofs which accompany proposition 120:

“It is necessary, therefore, that the nature which fills other things, and which extends to other things the communications of itself should be super-plenary or exuberantly full. Hence, if a divine nature fills all things from itself with the good which it contains in itself, it is exuberantly full. And if this be the case, establishing first in itself the peculiarity which it imparts to others, it will extend to them the communications of super-plenary goodness.”

But while it overflows, it also remains as itself:

**Every cause which is productive of other things, itself abiding in itself, produces the natures posterior to itself, and such as are successive. (26)**

After the first principle, other true causes follow its pattern of superabundance:

**Every producing cause, on account of its perfection, and abundance of power, is productive of secondary natures. (27)**

The production of effects by causes is via similarity:

**Every producing cause gives subsistence to things similar to itself, prior to such as are dissimilar. (28)**

**Every progression is effected through a similitude of secondary to first natures. (29)**

But since the superabundance which is productive of effects is of goodness, every effect seeks to turn itself back towards its cause, and this again through similarity:

**Every thing which proceeds from a certain thing essentially, is converted to that from which it proceeds. (31)**

**All conversion is effected through the similitude of the things converted to that to which they are converted. (31)**

**Every thing which is converted according to nature, makes its conversion to that, from which also it had the progression of its proper hypostasis. (32)**

If then there are a chain of causes, passing on the goodness which is productive of effects (which then act as secondary causes), the reversion is back through the same similar links:

**Every thing which proceeds from certain numerous causes, is converted through as many causes as those are through which it proceeds, and all conversion is through the same things as those through which progression is effected. (38)**

The out-breathing and in-breathing of the universe is circular (and is simultaneous):

**Every thing which proceeds from a certain thing and is converted to it, has a circular energy. (33)**

**Every thing caused, abides in, proceeds from, and returns, or is converted to, its cause. (35)**

In the arrangement of things into specific orders all are subject to a rule that the highest entities of any particular order are conjoined to the lowest elements of the immediately superior order, and are so close in nature to those superiors as to be almost the same. In this way continuity is maintained even as the unfolding of goodness moves across the boundaries of the various order.

**Of all the things that are arranged in each series, such as are first, and are conjoined with their monad, are able to participate of the natures which are proximately established in the superior series, through analogy. (110)**

**Of every order those things that are first, have the form of the natures prior to them. (112)**

Thus goodness extends itself, not only through the whole of being, but even from that which is above being to that which is below being. And to behold this, is to contemplate an ineffable beauty.