

# Philosophy through Geometry

Merlin CCC, March 2022

## *Readings for Week 4: The Life of Intellect*

### Reading 1: Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 1025.<sup>1</sup>

Many are the wanderings of the soul: for one of these is in imaginations, another in opinions, and a third in the dianoëtic power. But a life according to intellect is alone inerratic. And this is the mystic harbor of the soul, into which Homer conducts Odysseus, after an abundant wandering of life.

### Reading 2: Plato, *Republic*, Book VII, 526c–527c.<sup>2</sup>

GLAUCON: Do you mean geometry?

SOCRATES: That very thing.

GLAUCON: As far as it relates to warlike affairs, it is plain that it belongs to us; for, as to encampments, and the occupying of ground, contracting and extending an army, and all those figures into which they form armies, both in battles and in marches, the same man would differ from himself when he is a geometrician, and when he is not.

SOCRATES: But surely now, for such purposes as these, some little geometry and some portion of computation might suffice: but we must inquire, whether much of it, and great advances in it, would contribute any thing to this great end, to make us more easily perceive the idea of the good. And we say that everything contributes to this, that obliges the soul to turn itself towards that region in which is the most divine of being, which it must by all means perceive.

GLAUCON: You say right.

SOCRATES: If therefore it compels the soul to contemplate essence, it belongs to us; but if it obliges it to contemplate generation, it does not belong to us.

GLAUCON: We say so indeed.

SOCRATES: Those then who are but a little conversant in geometry, will not dispute with us this point at least, that this science is perfectly contrary to the common modes of speech, employed in it by those who practice it.

GLAUCON: How?

SOCRATES: They speak somehow very ridiculously, and through necessity: for all the discourse they employ in it appears to be with a view to operation, and to practice. Thus they speak of making a square, of prolonging, of adjoining, and the like. But yet the whole of this discipline is somehow studied for the sake of knowledge.

GLAUCON: By all means indeed.

SOCRATES: Must not this further be assented to?

GLAUCON: What?

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1 Translated by Thomas Taylor. Proclus (412–485) was the head of the Academy in Athens from the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century until his death in 485.

2 Based on the translation of Thomas Taylor, somewhat modified.

SOCRATES: That it is the knowledge of that which always is, and not of that which is sometimes generated and destroyed.

GLAUCON: This must be granted; for geometrical knowledge is of that which always is.

SOCRATES: It would seem then, generous Glaucon, to draw the soul towards truth, and to be productive of a dianoëtic energy adapted to a philosopher, so as to raise this power of the soul to things above, instead of causing it improperly, as at present, to contemplate things below.

GLAUCON: As much as possible.

SOCRATES: As much as possible then, must we give orders, that those in this most beautiful city of yours by no means omit geometry...

### Reading 3: Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.8, §4.<sup>3</sup>

Individual souls, certainly, have an intelligent desire which consists in the impulse to return to itself, springing from the principle from which they came into being; but they also possess a power directed toward the world here below, like a light which depends upon the sun in the upper world, but does not begrudge its abundance to what comes after it...

[When it does not look toward the intelligible,] it is fallen, and is caught, and is engaged with its fetter, and acts by sensation because its new beginning prevents it from acting by intellect, and it is said to be buried and in a cave. But when it turns to intelligence, it is said to be freed from its fetters and to ascend, when it is started on the contemplation of reality by recollection. For in spite of everything, it always possesses something transcendent in some way.

Souls, then, become, one might say, amphibious, compelled to live by turns the life there, and the life here: those which are able to be more in the company of Intellect live the life there more, but those whose normal condition is, by nature or chance, the opposite, live more the life here below.

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by A.H. Armstrong, slightly modified. Plotinus (204/5–270) was a celebrated teacher of Platonic philosophy in Rome.