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Self-motion and reflection: Hermias and Proclus on the harmony of Plato and Aristotle on the soul

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A central puzzle of recent scholarship on late Neoplatonism has been to understand how what Richard Sorabji has called a ‘perfectly crazy position’, the thesis of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle, nonetheless ‘proved philosophically fruitful’²—whereas, for instance, the same philosophers’ perfectly crazy thesis of the harmony of Plato and Homer did not. In this chapter, starting from Hermias’ commentary on a passage of the *Phaedrus* which poses a difficulty for harmonization, I hope to shed some light on what the late Neoplatonists were asserting when they asserted the harmony of Plato and Aristotle, in general or on some particular issue (here the immortality of soul); on why they were inclined to make such assertions of harmony, and what they saw themselves as needing to do in order to defend them; and on why, in the process of defending them, they were led to conceptual clarifications which were in some cases of longstanding benefit to the conceptual store of philosophy. I will point to a surprising case of such a conceptual benefit resulting from Neoplatonic interpretations of this *Phaedrus* passage and its parallels in the *Timaeus*. While my central example will be from Hermias, the themes I am interested in are not peculiar to him, and I will also make use of other late Neoplatonic authors, especially Proclus. Hermias, and Proclus, to recall, were both students of Syrianus; at one point in Hermias’ commentary ‘our companion Proclus’ raises an *aporia*, and ‘the philosopher’—that is, ‘the professor’—

¹ This chapter was worked out in its essentials in 1987–88. I would have tried publishing it before, but nobody seemed to be interested. I am glad that the intellectual climate seems to have changed. I presented this paper at a conference at Cornell University in October 2006 and at the Bonn conference in June 2007, and an abridged version at FIEC in Berlin in August 2009. I am grateful to Charles Brittain for his excellent comments on my paper at Cornell, to audiences at all three conferences, and to friends including Marwan Rashed and James Wilberding for written and oral comments. This chapter has some overlap with Opsomer (2006), to which I have added some references, but the two papers are in origin entirely independent. (The overlap is chiefly with the first two pages of Opsomer’s article. On the issue of the ‘vehicles’ of the soul, his discussion on pp. 148–50 is deeper and more detailed than mine, and I simply defer to him.)

² Sorabji (1990a), 5.

replies (92, 6–10 Couvreur), which seems to imply that the commentary in general was drawn by Hermias from Syrianus' lectures.³

The late Neoplatonists—by which I mean the school that accepts Iamblichus as an authority, from Plutarch of Athens and Syrianus to Damascius and Simplicius—are all committed to at least a weak form of the thesis of harmony of Plato and Aristotle, and sometimes, as with Simplicius, to a very strong form of the thesis. At a minimum, these authors think that Plato and Aristotle share the same system of concepts, and that they can therefore legitimately call on Aristotle for conceptual clarifications or distinctions, or for arguments ultimately based on the definitions of these concepts, to fill in the gaps where Plato's meaning needs clarification or his theses need support. This does not imply that Plato and Aristotle agree on all doctrinal issues, or on all *applications* of these concepts, but they must agree on at least the *ordinary* applications of these concepts, and thus on the majority of philosophical issues; even if they disagree on isolated issues, even very important issues such as whether the first principle is a good-itself above *νοῦς* or a good-itself identical with *νοῦς*, these disagreements make sense only against the background of the broader agreement. As we will see, our authors present their Aristotelianized version of Platonism as a middle path between extreme Platonists who reject the use of Aristotle, and extreme Aristotelians who use Aristotle against Plato; since our authors are Platonists, they want to save Plato himself for this middle path, and they feel a strong gravitational pull toward reading Aristotle 'charitably' as well, saving Aristotle for the middle path (in general or on particular disputed questions) and blaming the anti-Platonist version of Aristotle on later Peripatetic interpreters.

To understand the late Neoplatonists' thesis of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle, in general or on some particular issue, we have to understand what they were denying—for the Neoplatonists were certainly aware of *tensions* or *apparent* contradictions between Plato and Aristotle. It is easy to assume that their difference from typical modern scholars was simply over whether these contradictions are real or merely apparent. But if we start with that assumption we will go badly wrong. In fact, the late

³ For what we know about Hermias apart from his *Phaedrus* commentary, and about his connections with Syrianus and Proclus, see Damascius, *Philosophical History* (or *Life of Isidore*) fragments 54–57, pp. 152–61 in Athanassiadi (1999). The connections were close. Syrianus intended to marry his young relative Aedesia to Proclus, but Proclus claimed a divine warning against his marrying, and Hermias married her instead. Proclus succeeded Syrianus in Athens, while Hermias moved back (with Aedesia) to his home city of Alexandria. After Hermias' death, Aedesia brought their sons, including Ammonius (later the teacher of Damascius and Simplicius at Alexandria), to Athens to study under Proclus. Damascius represents Hermias as learned and diligent and virtuous but unoriginal, which is nicer than what he says about many other philosophers. Bernard (1997), 13–19, points out that Hermias at 150, 24–151, 3 and 152, 3–25 cites from Iamblichus an interpretation of *Phdr.* 247c6–9 on the 'steersman' of the soul (elevating the 'steersman' above the 'charioteer') which contradicts Syrianus' interpretation of the same passage at *in Meta.* 4, 30–33, and furthermore that Iamblichus is presupposing a different text of the *Phaedrus* passage from Syrianus. It is plausible that Hermias is not taking his knowledge of Iamblichus from Syrianus, but rather supplementing Syrianus' lectures from a direct reading of Iamblichus' commentary (as Asclepius in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* supplements Ammonius' lectures from Alexander's commentary; in this sense see Steel (1978), 45, n. 49), but Bernard has not convinced me that Hermias' independence of Syrianus goes further than this. It should not matter for my purposes here.

Neoplatonists have a distinctive and interesting understanding of the tensions between Plato and Aristotle; their thesis of harmony can be understood only against the background of their understanding of the tensions, and it may be that their lasting contribution to the understanding of Aristotle consists in their understanding of the tensions, and not in their thesis of harmony.

For the sake of contrast I will start with a caricature version of a modern view of the differences between Plato and Aristotle. Perhaps no one would admit to actually believing this view, but it will sound familiar. According to this view, the fundamental difference between Plato and Aristotle is that Plato is more high-minded or other-worldly, that he is looking up, at a realm of things existing separately from matter, while Aristotle is more low-minded or this-worldly, that he is looking down (or straight ahead) at things whose essence is bound up with matter. This difference might express itself philosophically in at least three ways. First, Plato may be committed to the existence of some range of entities, existing separately from matter, which Aristotle does not believe in: these might be Platonic forms, the good-itself, the demiurge. Second, Plato and Aristotle might both believe in the same range of entities, but have different views about their ontological status, Plato believing that they exist separately from matter, and Aristotle believing that they are essentially enmattered. Thus we might say that both Plato and Aristotle believe in souls, and indeed they both believe that souls are incorporeal (where this is a negative judgment, that souls are not bodies), but Plato believes that souls can exist separate from bodies, and are therefore immortal, whereas Aristotle believes that souls are essentially inseparable from bodies, and are therefore mortal (more precisely, that the souls of mortal animals are mortal). We might also put the disagreement about the forms in this way: Plato and Aristotle both believe in forms, but Plato thinks that the forms exist separately from matter, whereas Aristotle thinks that they are essentially (and not just factually) enmattered. Third, we might say that while Aristotle too believes in a realm of things existing separately from matter—in his case the movers of the heavens—he is much less *interested* in this realm of things than Plato, and prefers to spend time describing the things down here, while Plato is interested in the things down here chiefly as a launching-point for contemplating higher things.

My point here is that while many modern scholars believe something more or less closely resembling this caricature, the later Neoplatonists do not believe anything even remotely like it. They think that the tensions between Plato and Aristotle arise not because Aristotle is more low-minded or this-worldly, but because he is in a way more high-minded: that is, he is protesting against improperly assimilating divine things to lower things by attributing to them predicates which could in fact be appropriately predicated only of these lower things. This could take place at several different levels: it could, for example, be a question of assimilating incorporeal things to bodies, or heavenly to sublunar bodies, or *νοῦς* to soul. Here are four examples of issues between Plato and Aristotle which the late Neoplatonists take in this way, with at least some justification:

(i) The *Timaeus* says that the heavenly bodies are made mostly of fire, with some admixture of air, water, and earth. Aristotle in *De Caelo* 1.2–3 rejects this description of the eternal and naturally rotating heavenly bodies, which would assimilate them to corruptible heavy and light sublunar bodies, and describes the heavenly bodies instead as being made of a fifth simple body, ‘more divine and prior to all these’ (1.2 269a32–3) or ‘having its nature as much more noble as it is distant from the things down here’ (269b15–17).⁴

(ii) The *Timaeus* describes the soul (of individuals or of the world) as being three-dimensionally extended, indeed coextended and ‘interwoven’ with the body, and as moving its body and being moved by its body in much the same way that one body moves another. Aristotle in *De Anima* 1.3 rejects this description of the soul and its activities, saying that it comes to much the same thing as Democritus’ account of the soul as a collection of little round atoms, constantly agitated and moving the body along with them. Against Democritus, Aristotle protests:

The soul does not seem to move the animal in this [sc. merely mechanical] way, but through some choice and thinking [sc. and therefore teleologically]. And [the?] Timaeus too physicizes [*φυσιολογεῖ*] that the soul moves the body in the same way [as Democritus holds], [that is] that through being moved itself it moves the body too, since it is interwoven with it. For after it has been constituted out of the elements [that is, being, sameness, otherness] and divided according to harmonic numbers, so that it might have a connate sensation of harmony and so that the universe might be locally moved with concordant locomotions, he bent back [*κατέκαμψεν*] the straight line into a circle; and having divided one circle into two attached at two [opposite points], he then divided one of them into seven circles, as if the motions of the soul were the locomotions of the heaven. (406b24–407a2)⁵

⁴ *DC* 1.3, using the premiss that the heavenly bodies are naturally moved around the center rather than toward it or away from it, infers a series of attributes, all of them expressed as *negations* of attributes that would assimilate the heavenly bodies to things down here, and including traditional attributes of the gods (immortal, unaging). There is a similar strategy in 1.9 278b21–279b3, applied to the things *beyond* the heaven, arguing that there is no body, motion, place, void, or time there, and that ‘the things there are not in place, nor does time age them, nor is there any change in the things stationed above the outermost locomotion, but rather, unaltered and unaffected, they spend all eternity having the best and most self-sufficient life’ (279a18–22). This is in part an internal critique of Plato’s description of the ‘supercelestial place’ (*Phdr.* 247c3). So too *DC* 2.1, against the ideas *either* that the heavenly bodies are heavy and need Atlas or a vortex to keep them up, *or* that they are made of fire (and therefore naturally move away from the center) and need a soul to constrain them to eternal circular motion: the latter option is argued to be unworthy both of the heavenly bodies and of the soul that would have to constrain them, like Ixion affixed to his wheel (284a27–35, with deliberate parody of the language of the *Timaeus*, esp. 36e3–5; see Simplicius’ attempt to show against Alexander that Aristotle was here attacking only Plato’s *apparent* meaning, in *DC* 376,5–379,17).

⁵ More generally, the *De Anima* denies that the soul is moved at all (except *per accidens* because it is in a body which is moved), against philosophers including Plato who had thought that the soul must be moved in order to move the body: Aristotle agrees that the soul must be *active* in order to move the body, but says that it has an *ἐνέργεια* that is not a *κίνησις*, and that it is only because we assimilate higher things to bodies that we imagine that they cannot be active without being in process of change. Similar considerations lie behind Aristotle’s rejection, in the ethical treatises, of Platonic claims that pleasure is a *γένεσις* or a *κίνησις*. I develop these points in Menn (2002) and ‘The Origins of Aristotle’s Concept of *Energeia: Energeia and Kinêsis*’, in progress.

(iii) The *Timaeus* describes the world-governing *νοῦς* as beginning to act after previous inactivity. *Metaphysics* Book 12 rejects this description on the ground that the first principle is essentially *ἐνέργεια*, and therefore can never be inactive, and also can never undergo change, such as from inactivity to activity. Only things which have matter and therefore potentiality could be as Plato describes.

(iv) Plato describes an eternal divine substance, existing separately from matter and motion, as a horse, another as a man, and so on. Aristotle rejects these descriptions—for example, on the ground that being a horse involves having various organs for various activities (nutrition, reproduction, locomotion, and so on), which make no sense for an essentially immortal and immovable substance. He turns against Plato the arguments which philosophers from Xenophanes to Plato had used against the poets' anthropomorphic descriptions of the gods, and he thinks that these inappropriate descriptions discredit Plato's claim to knowledge of divine things, just as they discredit the claims of Homer and Hesiod:

[The theory of forms] has difficulties in many places, but what is most absurd is to say that there are natures beyond those which are within the heaven, but to say that these are the same as the sensibles, except that the former are eternal and the latter are corruptible. For they say that there is a man-himself and horse-itself and health-itself, and nothing else, doing something close to those who said that there were gods, but in human form [*ἀνθρωποειδεῖς*]: for neither did those people [the poets] make [the gods] anything other than eternal men, nor do these people [the Platonists] make the forms anything other than eternal sensibles. (*Meta.* 3.2 997b5–12)

When the poets tell us that there are gods, and claim to have knowledge from the gods themselves, this is exciting; but when they actually describe the gods, the results are disappointing, and show that they do not really have knowledge of divine things, and are merely projecting the familiar human things (amplified and made eternal) onto the divine realm. So likewise,

those who speak of Forms in one way speak rightly by separating them, if indeed these are substances; but in another way not rightly, because they say that the one-over-many is a Form. And the reason is that they cannot tell what the substances of this kind are, the incorruptible [substances] beyond the individual and sensible ones: so they make these the same in species [or in form] with the corruptibles (for these we know), man-himself and horse-itself, adding to the sensibles the word 'itself'. (*Meta.* 7.16 1040b27–34)

Now the late Neoplatonists can take a range of different attitudes toward these Aristotelian criticisms (or what seem to be criticisms) of Plato. They are Platonists, and they always want to defend Plato. But most of them are also convinced, in most of these cases, that the predicate at issue would indeed be inappropriate if understood literally. (There are exceptions. Philoponus, at least at one stage in his career, thinks that the world-governing *νοῦς* did indeed begin to act in time, and that the heavenly bodies are indeed made of fire.) So they may take the option (i) of saying that Aristotle mistakenly thought that Plato meant literally a predicate that he in fact meant metaphorically, but that Aristotle's argument would be correct if Plato had meant it literally; or they

may say (ii) that Aristotle knew perfectly well that Plato meant the predicate metaphorically, but maliciously chose to pretend that Plato had meant it literally (and while this may seem implausible, there is a passage in the *Topics* where Aristotle seems to recommend precisely this style of argument: if your interlocutor has said, for example, that temperance is a harmony, ‘it is also possible to harass [*συκοφαντεῖν*] someone who has spoken metaphorically, as if he had said it in the principal sense: for the definition he has uttered does not fit the thing, for example, does not fit temperance: for every harmony is among sounds,’ *Top.* 6.2 139b32–8). Or, with more charity to Aristotle, they may say (iii) that Aristotle knew perfectly well that Plato meant the predicate metaphorically, and that he intended to refute not Plato, but only bad Platonists who took Plato’s metaphors literally; this is the option that Simplicius typically follows. One option which none of the late Neoplatonists seem to take, but which Themistius sometimes does, and which I think is often correct, is (iv) that Aristotle knows, or has a good hunch, that Plato did not mean the predicate literally, but suspects that Plato did not mean anything else precise by it either, so that Aristotle’s argument is intended not to decisively refute Plato but to force him to say precisely what he *did* mean.⁶ But whether or not this is what they *think* they are doing, the Neoplatonists, in unpacking what they see as the exact meaning behind Plato’s metaphors, are often led to make conceptual progress over Plato—certainly over anything that Plato tells us explicitly—and presumably this is just the kind of response that Aristotle intended to call forth in his Platonist interlocutors.

In describing these tensions between Plato and Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists’ attempts to harmonize them, it will help to introduce some Arabic terminology, and to say that Aristotle is criticizing (or appears to be criticizing) Plato for *tashbīh*. The terms I will use—which I hope will eventually become as familiar in English as ‘λόγος’ or ‘νοῦς’—have their original home in Islamic theological discussions, but seem to me to be more useful for describing the issues between Plato and Aristotle, as the late Neoplatonists understand them, than any terminology I know in either Greek or English.

‘*Tashbīh*’—literally ‘assimilation’—means in this context the improper assimilation of divine things to lower things, by attributing to them predicates which could in fact be predicated appropriately only of lower things.

⁶ Themistius has an interesting discussion of these issues as they arise in Aristotle’s criticism of the *Timaeus* for describing the world-soul as moved (in *DA* 1.3, cited above), in *DA Paraphrasis* 18, 30–19, 2 and 19, 17–20, 8. He offers various suggestions to defend Aristotle against the criticism that he is merely harassing [*συκοφαντεῖν*] Plato or *Timaeus* (20, 5–6); in particular, he says ‘that Plato does not think the soul is a body is clear from many passages in many of the dialogues he wrote. But Aristotle says that he is arguing not against Plato but against *Timaeus* who, whether he thinks that the circle [in the world-soul] is a body or whether without thinking that it was a body he [nonetheless] so described it, is accountable [*ὑπεύθυνος*—like a magistrate who must give accounts and respond to questions and criticisms], either for his opinion or for his expression, to those who choose, in philosophy and especially in problems of such magnitude, not to think one thing and say another; for it is desirable in such matters, by thinking and saying the same thing, to be clearer than the unclarity of the things themselves’ (19, 21–9).

'*Tanzīh*'—literally 'purification'—means in this context the purification of divine things from such improper assimilation, either by denying the predicates in question or by reinterpreting them in such a way that they are no longer inappropriate.

'*Ta'fīl*'—literally 'nullification'—the denial of divine attributes, is a possible result of such purification, in which there is nothing left to be asserted about divine things, either because we have denied the predicates in question or because we have reinterpreted them in such a way as to eliminate all content from them.⁷

There is a broad consensus in Muslim discussions (and in discussions within other religious communities in the Muslim world) that *tashbīh* and *ta'fīl* are both bad and that *tanzīh* is good: the problem is to find a middle way between the extremes of *tashbīh* and *ta'fīl*, describing divine things without either improper assimilation or vacuity; and furthermore to find a *principled* middle way, with a principled criterion for determining what predicates, in what meanings, are appropriately applied to divine things. Muslim thinkers—most prominently Fârâbî in his *Harmony of the Opinions of the Two Sages, the Divine Plato and Aristotle*—are aware that Greek philosophers were also concerned with these issues, and this is one reason why Fârâbî and others were interested in Greek philosophy; and I think that this is not a case of the Muslims' distorting the Greek texts by imposing alien concerns (although some over-enthusiastic distortions may have occurred), but rather of their being enabled to see something that is really going on in the texts by the presence of similar concerns in their own culture, which are generally absent in ours, to the general detriment of our understanding of Greek philosophy.⁸ There is, however, at least one important disanalogy between the Greek and Muslim contexts: the Muslims are monotheists, and so for them *tashbīh* means straightforwardly the improper assimilation of God to anything other than God, whereas for the Greeks there are gods or divine things at many levels, and so *tashbīh* can arise at many levels, as the improper assimilation of divine things at any level to what is below them. Nonetheless, the concerns are similar enough that the Arabic vocabulary (thus adapted) seems helpful.

Now, it is not just that the late Neoplatonists want to respond to Aristotle's criticisms (or apparent criticisms) of Plato because they are Platonists and always want to defend the founder of their school. They also want to respond to Aristotle because they genuinely share Aristotle's concern to avoid *tashbīh*, both for religious reasons and for scientific reasons. They think that defending Plato alone without Aristotle makes one liable to fall into *tashbīh* (this is what Simplicius thinks happened to Philoponus;

⁷ For an introduction to the Muslim discussion of these concepts, see Josef van Ess' article 'Tashbīh wa-Tanzīh' in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

⁸ Naturally we have compensatory advantages, such as knowing Greek and having more of the Greek texts and better understanding of their historical context. The ascription of the *Harmony* to Fârâbî is uncertain; it has been contested most recently by Rashed (2009). The treatise has been re-edited, with an Italian translation and a defense of its authenticity, by Martini Bonadeo (2008). There is an English translation in Butterworth (2001), 115–67. If the text is not by Fârâbî, it is by someone from the same milieu (Rashed suggests that the author may be Fârâbî's secretary Ibrâhîm ibn 'Adî); the issue will not affect my point here.

perhaps something like this happened in an earlier age, for example, to Plutarch of Chaeroneia). They want to make use of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's apparent position, together with a principle of charity, to establish an interpretation of Plato that will be free of *tashbîh*.⁹ At the same time, they think that defending Aristotle alone without Plato makes one liable to fall into *ta'fîl*, into having nothing left to say about divine things, either as they are in themselves or in their causal or epistemic relations to other things. Sometimes they suggest that this is what happened to Aristotle himself; at other times they argue that while Alexander of Aphrodisias fell into this error, Aristotle himself did not, that both he and Plato have found a principled middle ground between *tashbîh* and *ta'fîl*, and that they agree on the doctrinal content at issue, even though they may make different choices of what predicates (that is, what *words*) to apply to different levels of reality.¹⁰ (Let me stress that our authors do *not* resolve tensions between Plato and Aristotle by saying that Aristotle is the recognized authority on physics, and Plato on the divine intelligible realm. They take the tensions seriously, and try to resolve them, in both realms.)¹¹

⁹ This Platonist use of Aristotle arises in an attack on Stoicizing interpretations of Plato which would, notably, maintain that *voûs* is merely a certain kind of soul (or soul in a certain state): the Platonists make use especially of Aristotle's thesis of the priority of *ἐνέργεια* to *δύναμις* to argue that the first *voûs* must be an essentially actual *voûs*, whereas a soul can be intellectually active only through the causality of a prior actual *voûs*. If the divine *voûs* is pure *ἐνέργεια* it will also follow, against the Stoics, that it does not begin to act in time, that the objects of its thought are not the sensible things, and that the intelligible Forms are not eternal duplicates of the sensible things, but rather *sciences* or *νοήσεις*. This strategy of argument goes back to Alcinous and is developed extensively by Plotinus, who can be quite critical of Aristotle but gratefully accepts his aid against Stoics or Stoicizing Platonists; see Menn (1998), chapter 3. It is a mistake to trace the late Neoplatonist thesis of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle back to Antiochus of Ascalon: Antiochus is giving a very 'low', corporealizing reading of Plato, and attempting a three-way harmonization of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, in effect reading the *Timaeus* through Stoic physics, while Alcinous and Plotinus and the late Neoplatonists are using Aristotle to articulate and defend a 'high' anti-Stoic reading of Plato.

¹⁰ Fârâbî (or whoever is the author of the *Harmony*) sees issues of *tashbîh* particularly in the apparent disagreements between Plato and Aristotle about the existence of a divine creator or artificer of the world, and of divine paradigms of sensible things. Aristotle agrees with Plato that there is a divine cause of the world, and, since it exercises providence, it must contain paradigms of the things in the world; but Aristotle was trying to avoid language that would lead people to think that God produces the world out of a pre-existing matter or in a stage-by-stage temporal process (Martini Bonadeo (2008), 63–8, Butterworth (2001), 153–9), or that there are many worlds similar to this sensible world (Martini Bonadeo (2008), 69–75, Butterworth (2001), 160–5). Fârâbî specifically cites Ammonius' monobiblion arguing that Aristotle too believed that God was an efficient and not merely final cause of the world (now lost, but cited also by Simplicius, *in DC* 271, 18–21 and *in Phys.* 1363, 8–12; Martini Bonadeo (2008), 66, Butterworth (2001), 157): Ammonius' thought, taken up by Simplicius and Fârâbî, is that by reconciling Plato's doctrine that the divine *voûs* is the efficient cause of the sensible world with Aristotle's doctrine that the world is eternal, we can avoid the extreme of *tashbîh* that we would fall into by denying the eternity of the world, and the extreme of *ta'fîl* that we would fall into by saying that God is not an efficient but only a final cause of the world. Fârâbî takes Aristotle's efforts to avoid the *tashbîh* that would be implied by the apparent sense of Plato, and also the Neoplatonists' efforts to reinterpret Plato so as to defend him against the imputation of *tashbîh*, as models for the Muslim philosophers' efforts to avoid the *tashbîh* implied by the apparent sense of many passages in the Qur'ân, and to reinterpret these passages so as to defend them against the imputation of *tashbîh*.

¹¹ There is probably just one issue where the late Neoplatonists do see a tension or apparent contradiction between Plato and Aristotle as arising from Plato's being more 'high-minded': namely, the issue of whether the first *ἀρχή* is *voûs* (or, equivalently, the intelligible substance) or whether it is something higher than *voûs* (the good-itself of *Rep.* 6, identified with the one-itself of Aristotle's reports of Plato's teaching, and with the

Simplicius provides a good summary of the underlying issues as he sees them, as applied to two cases of apparent conflict between Plato and Aristotle:

If I may say my own opinion, it seems to me that in these matters [the question of whether the heavens are composed of a fifth body, of fire, or of a mixture of fire and the other standard elements] Aristotle had the same experience as in the case of the ideas: for in that case too it is clear that he grants that the causes of all things exist in God, and furthermore that they are distinguished [from each other: that is, it is not just a single undifferentiated divine cause of all lower things] since he says that there is a twofold order, one here and the other in the demiurge, with the order here arising from the order there, in the same way that there is a twofold order, one in the general and the other in the army, with one order arising from the other. And where there is order, there must certainly also be distinction. But he scrupled to call these causes by the same names as the things here, man or horse or any other of the things here, since most people's imaginations are easily carried away by names.

So too in this case he too would say that [the heavenly bodies] are composed of luminous and tangible substance and that the luminous predominates, but he would not say that they are [composed] of the things here that are such [that is, fire, which is the luminous substance down here, and earth, which is the tangible substance down here], but rather of their 'summits' [*ἀκρότητες*—that is, of the *highest* luminosity and tangibility, which Plato is willing to call 'fire' and 'earth', but Aristotle is not], as he makes clear by calling it divine and first, when he says 'so if there is something divine, as indeed there is, then the things that we have now said about the first [= highest] bodily substance have been said rightly.' And for this reason he consented also to call it a fifth substance, in order that we should put forth conceptions of it as of something entirely transcending [*ἐξῆρημένον*] the things here. (*in DC 87,1–17*)¹²

Here Simplicius seems to be taking for granted his account of the underlying issues in the case of the ideas, and using this case as a model to understand the issues in the text on which he is presently commenting, about the material composition of the heavenly bodies. In both cases Aristotle must admit Plato's premisses (the *Timaeus* uses the fact that bodies are visible (where visibility depends on light) and tangible in order to argue that they are composed of fire and earth, and of the two intermediate elements which are needed to bind these extremes into a compound), and so he should also admit

one of the first Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*). If Aristotle's highest *ἀρχή* is *νοῦς*, as it appears to be, this could be explained by saying that he did not see all the way up to the *ἀρχή* that is even above *νοῦς* (and that must be grasped by a power superior to *νοῦς*). But it might be more accurate to say, not that Aristotle was unaware of the one-itself and good-itself, but that he failed to *distinguish* it from *νοῦς*, with the result that he speaks in too 'low' a way of the first *ἀρχή* or good-itself by describing it as *νοῦς*, but also that he speaks in too 'high' a way of *νοῦς* by describing it as entirely simple. In any case, there is no suggestion that Aristotle did not recognize the realm of separate immaterial substance, or did not describe it in 'high' enough terms, or did not give it sufficient attention. At worst, the claim is that he failed to perceive what is *beyond* this realm. Simplicius tries to resolve this tension by saying that 'it is clear that Aristotle conceives something even above *νοῦς* and *οὐσία*, since he says explicitly toward the end of his book *On Prayer* that God is either *νοῦς* or something even beyond [*ἐπέκεινα*] *νοῦς*' (*in DC 485, 19–22*). There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this fragment—the *On Prayer* is in the ancient catalogues of Aristotle's works—and Simplicius is probably right that *ἐπέκεινα* is an allusion to the good *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας* of the *Republic*; but, unfortunately for Simplicius, there is no reason to believe that Aristotle is *endorsing* the second option.

¹² On the fifth substance see also Jan Opsomer's piece in this volume.

Plato's conclusions, but he preferred not to follow Plato in applying the names of things down here (fire, horse, and so on) to higher things, because of the danger of misleading 'most people', who would be led to represent the higher things as really similar to their homonyms here below. At the same time that Simplicius is arguing for a particular interpretation of Aristotle here, he is also implying a particular interpretation of Plato: when Plato spoke of a horse-itself, he meant only that the world-governing *νοῦς* is not an undifferentiated unity but contains an internal structure which is paradigmatic for the structure of the sensible cosmos (including something that structurally corresponds to the species 'horse' and through which *νοῦς* exercises providential governance over horses as part of the world-order); and when Plato spoke of fire and earth in the heavens he meant only the principles of luminosity and tangibility, not 'fire' and 'earth' in the sense of hot or cold dry bodies possessing natural movement away from or toward the center of the cosmos.

(You might wonder where Aristotle 'says that there is a twofold order, one here and the other in the demiurge, with the order here arising from the order there, in the same way that there is a twofold order, one in the general and the other in the army, with one order arising from the other'. Simplicius is of course taking this from *Metaphysics* 12.10:

We must also investigate in which way the nature of the universe possesses the good and the best, whether as something separate and itself-by-itself, or as the order [immanent in the universe itself]. Perhaps rather in both ways, like an army: for the good [$\tauὸ \epsilonὖ$] both is in the order and [is] the general [$\kappaαὶ γὰρ ἐν τῇ τάξει τὸ εὖ καὶ ὁ στρατηγός$], and more the latter: for he is not [sc. good?] on account of the order [of the army], but it on account of him. (1075a11–15)

But where Aristotle says that the *good* both is in the (immanent) order of the army, comparable to the immanent order of the cosmos, and is the general, comparable to the divine *νοῦς*, and that the order exists (or is good) on account of the general and not *vice versa*, so that the general (the divine *νοῦς*) is the good in the primary sense, Simplicius manages to construe the passage as saying that the *order* both is in the army and is in the general, and primarily in the general, in the battle-plan which he communicates to his troops; and this 'order in the general'—that is, the providential paradigm in the divine *νοῦς* for the order in the sensible world—would be what Plato meant by the world of separate forms.)¹³

¹³ Compare Proclus *in Parm.* 921,12–923,7 where the question of a plurality of divine forms paradigmatic of sensible things is framed as the question of divine providence over the sensible world, and Plato is represented as steering a middle course between Stoic *tashbīh* (denying the separation of the divine in order to defend providence) and Peripatetic *ta'fīl* (denying providence in order to defend the separation of the divine). Proclus does not name names, and thus leaves open the option of defending Aristotle by arguing that it was not he but only (for example) Alexander who fell into *ta'fīl* on the issue of providence, and this is the option that Simplicius will take up on the basis of providential-looking texts like *Meta.* 12.10. But to rescue Aristotle for providence, as Proclus and Simplicius understand the issue, is at the same time to rescue him for a plurality of paradigm-forms in the divine *νοῦς*.

But what about the soul, and specifically its immortality and separability from bodies? Surely here it is Plato who is more high-minded and other-worldly, and Aristotle who is more low-minded and this-worldly? But in fact the later Neoplatonists take this issue too as turning on *tashbih*. To see how they could do this, it is important to see that they do not take the question of immortality as a yes/no question. It is rather a question of how much is immortal, of how far down immortality extends. Everyone agrees that the divine *νοῦς* which is essentially *ἐνέργεια* is immortal and separate from body, and (almost) everyone agrees that the souls of plants are inseparable and mortal, and the question is where in between to draw the line:

Some people immortalize [*ἀπαθανατίζουσιν*—extend immortality] from the rational soul as far as the ensouled state, as Numenius; others as far as nature, as Plotinus in some places; others as far as the irrational soul, as among the ancients Xenocrates and Speusippus and among the moderns Iamblichus and Plutarch [presumably of Athens rather than of Chaeroneia]; others only as far as the rational soul, as Proclus and Porphyry; others only as far as *νοῦς*, for they corrupt opinion [they hold that it is corruptible], as many of the Peripatetics; others as far as the universal soul, for they corrupt the particular souls into the universal soul. (Damascius in *Phd.* I §177)¹⁴

Thus we must investigate immortality by asking which kinds of soul or parts of soul or powers of soul or activities of soul can exist separately from bodies, and which cannot. (Let me note that the question of whether some part of soul is immortal is not quite the same as the question of whether it exist separately from bodies: the later Neoplatonists in fact believe that there are some kinds of soul in a human being which are separable from the human body—what they call the ‘shell-body—but are inseparably attached to a pneumatic or luminous body which survives the death of the shell-body and transmigrates, bearing these souls with it, to a new shell-body. That said, I will ignore this complication for the rest of this chapter. My interest is only in what kinds or parts of soul are immortal by being separable from bodies, and it seems to me that the philosophically interesting question is anyway not immortality but separability or self-subsistence.¹⁵) It is, of course, an Aristotelian question whether a soul separated from bodies could sense, or be angry. Aristotle thinks that the only scientific way to determine whether some given kind of soul or part of soul can exist separately from bodies is to determine whether its activities can exist separately from bodies, which will in turn depend on whether these activities are activities of the soul alone or of the soul together with the body (or together with some particular bodily organ):

¹⁴ See Westerink (1977) for the text and for discussion of the two versions of Damascius’ commentary.

¹⁵ On the pneumatic and luminous vehicles of the soul, see now Opsomer (2006), 148–50, and the primary and secondary literature there cited. Proclus’ view seems to be that the sensitive (but not the vegetative) soul survives the death of the shell-body by remaining attached to the pneumatic body, which is transmitted to another shell-body in which the soul is reincarnated, but that only the rational soul, attached to the luminous vehicle (but not essentially dependent on it) is immortal. The sensitive soul and its pneumatic vehicle will perish after some number of incarnations, in the way that Cebes imagines the soul surviving some number of incarnations and then perishing, like a tailor surviving some number of cloaks and then perishing (but, in terms of the distinction I will draw below, the sensitive soul does not perish *per se* as Cebes imagines, but *per accidens* when the pneumatic vehicle perishes).

The affections of the soul also involve a difficulty, whether they are all common, and belong to the possessor [of the soul; that is, the soul–body composite], or whether there is any that belongs to the soul and is proper to it: to grasp this is necessary but not easy. Of the majority, it seems not to suffer or do any without the body, such as being angry or bold, [appetitively] desiring, in general sensing, but it is thinking [*νοεῖν*] that seems most likely to be proper [to soul]. But if this too is a kind of image [*φαντασία*] or not without an image, then not even this could be without a body. So if any of the actions or affections of the soul is proper, it would be possible for it to be separated; but if none of them is proper to it, it would not be separable. (*DA* 1.1 403a3–12)

And Aristotle concludes that sensation and imagination, and the passions of *ἐπιθυμία* and *θυμός*, and even most kinds of *νοεῖν*, are not proper to soul and so cannot be attributed to a soul separated from the body. This is reasonably described as *tanzīh*. It remains that it may well lead to *ta'fīl*; that is, to the conclusion that there are *no* remaining activities that could be attributed to a soul separated from the body, and therefore that the soul cannot be separated from the body, and that the soul of a mortal animal (as opposed notably to the souls of the heavenly bodies) is therefore mortal. The late Neoplatonists hope, by harmonizing Plato and Aristotle, to purify our descriptions of the separated soul, without reducing them to nothing; and Aristotle's method of investigating the soul's different activities seems to offer the hope of an objective criterion here.

The task of harmonizing everything in Plato and Aristotle about how far down immortality extends imposes a number of constraints. Aristotle says in *De Anima* 3.5 that 'this alone'—an essentially actual *νοῦς ποιητικός* – 'is immortal and eternal' (430a23), while Plato clearly asserts that at least some parts of the human soul are immortal. So they will have to interpret Aristotle in such a way that the *νοῦς ποιητικός* is a rational part of the human soul (more precisely that *some* *νοῦς ποιητικός* is a rational part of the human soul, since they will also admit that there is a divine *νοῦς* or reason-itself in which human souls participate); and they will have to interpret Plato in such a way that only the rational part of the soul is immortal. The difficulties into which the late Neoplatonists enter in interpreting the *De Anima* in this way are fairly well known;¹⁶ I want to concentrate instead on their difficulties with Plato. Now it is not especially difficult to interpret the *Phaedo* or *Republic* 10 in this way (it is easy enough to say that the *Phaedo*'s first argument is merely dialectical, and that the arguments from recollection and resemblance, and the argument that the soul is not a harmony, apply only to rational soul). The real problem will be the *Phaedrus*. *Phaedrus*

¹⁶ Perhaps the best survey of the history and difficulties of interpretations of the *νοῦς ποιητικός*, and particularly of the difficulties of interpretations that make it a part of the soul in order to rescue Aristotle for the immortality of (at least part of) the individual human soul, remains Jacobus Zabarella, *De rebus naturalibus libri XXX* (Frankfurt, 1617), columns 1007–42, esp. 1021–8. (This edition is accessible at Google Books.) If the *νοῦς ποιητικός* were part of the human soul, there would be something in us which is eternally actually cognizing and is identical with the immaterial objects that it cognizes. Thomas Aquinas, who takes the *νοῦς ποιητικός* = *intellectus agens* to be a part of the soul, like the Neoplatonists and for the same reasons, provides surveys of the difficulties against his own view in *Quaestio Disputata de Anima* article 5 and *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualitybus Creaturis*, article 10.

245c5 says that ‘all soul [*ψυχῆ παῖσα*] is immortal’, and the argument that it gives, from the soul as self-moving principle of motion, seems to have nothing to do with the soul’s rationality: it seems that if the argument worked, it would apply at least to all animal souls. It is thus one of the main burdens of Hermias’ commentary on this passage to show that Plato’s conclusion and his argument apply only to rational souls.

Hermias notes that it is controversial as to what Plato’s phrase ‘*ψυχῆ παῖσα*’ refers, and even how to construe the phrase. Plato might be asserting only the immortality of the world-soul, the soul of the All, especially if this is conceived as a whole of which individual souls are part. ‘*ψυχῆ παῖσα*’ would therefore be construed collectively rather than distributively, as referring only to the totality of souls; or perhaps more precisely it might refer to soul as a mass-term, so that while individual parcels of soul might perish by being merged or divided, no soul-stuff would perish. Posidonius seems to have thought something along these lines: Hermias says ‘Some people thought that the discussion was about the soul of the cosmos alone, since he says “*παῖσα*”, and since a bit further down he adds “or else the whole heaven and the whole [world of] coming-to-be would collapse and come to rest”;¹⁷ among these people is Posidonius the Stoic’ (*in Phdr.* 102,10–13). This would solve the problem of immortalizing irrational souls (although creating the opposite problem of eliminating the passage as a support for individual human immortality), but Hermias quite rightly rejects it, pointing out that Plato has said immediately before this passage that ‘we must first discuss the nature of soul both divine and human’ (*Phdr.* 245c2–4)—that is to say, of every rational soul—and that Plato goes on to infer the separability and immortality of each human soul.¹⁸ So Hermias construes ‘*ψυχῆ παῖσα*’ distributively. But then how do we avoid the view of those who ‘thought [the present passage] was about every soul without qualification, even the soul of an ant or a fly; among whom is Harpocraton: for he takes “*παῖσα*” as meaning “every soul”’ (102, 13–15). Hermias says, as an alternative, that it is only rational souls that are called ‘*ψυχῆ*’ without qualification:

¹⁷ πάντα τε οὐρανὸν πᾶσάν τε γένεσιν ξυμπεσοῦσαν στήναι, the usual ancient reading of 245d8–e1. Burnet’s OCT, following Philoponus and a correction in codex T of Plato, reads γῆν εἰς ἐν instead of γένεσιν.

¹⁸ A difficulty, however, is that Plato seems to infer the separability and immortality not only of each human *rational* soul, but also of the white and black ‘horses’, apparently representing *θυμός* and *ἐπιθυμία*, which on Hermias’ view ought not to be separable or to be included in Plato’s thesis of immortality. However, it emerges from Hermias’ discussion of the horses, 121, 32–125, 27, that the charioteer and the two horses are the *οὐσία* and Same and Different from which the demiurge makes souls in the *Timaeus* (35a1–b3); the Same and Different are powers, which have their activity or ‘motion’ in *νόησις*, so that they can be described as moving circles or as horses, whereas the soul’s *οὐσία* governs these powers without being moved *per se*, and so can be compared to a charioteer. Thus the charioteer and the horses (although Hermias admits several possible interpretations of them) are located within the rational soul, and so are rightly considered separable: *θυμός* and *ἐπιθυμία* are not the horses but only images of the horses in the irrational soul, and so are not being immortalized. The same harmonization of the *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* is in Proclus *in Tim.* 2.137, 2–7 and elsewhere; 2.306, 1–4 implies that some version of this goes back to Porphyry. See Steel (1978), 45–6 and 69–70 with n. 68, for a reconstruction of some Neoplatonic disputes about the charioteer and the horses. I thank Charles Brittain, in his comments on the version of this chapter that I presented at Cornell, for pointing out the problem and Hermias’ solution.

In general the ancients were in the habit of calling the rational soul ‘soul’ in the strict sense: for what is above it they call ‘νοῦς’, and what is inferior to it they call not ‘soul’ without qualification, but ‘irrational soul’ or ‘a mortal form of soul’ or ‘a secondary trace of life’ or ‘irrational life’, or also ‘ensoulment [ἐμψυχία] of the πνεῦμα’ or ‘life about the bodies’ or the like; but the rational soul they called properly and strictly ‘soul’. For indeed [Plato] calls the rational soul the ‘human being’ in the strict sense [in *Rep.* 9 588–9]. (102,20–26)¹⁹

Thus ‘ψυχὴ πάσα’ will mean ‘every soul’, but the distribution is only over rational souls: ‘so, to sum up, the discussion is about every rational soul’, and it is these that Plato is claiming are immortal (102, 26).²⁰

What, however, about Plato’s *argument*, from the soul as self-moving principle of motion? How can that be taken as applying only to rational souls?

Here Aristotle’s criticisms prove useful. Plato argues that it is distinctive of animals (or living things, ζῶα) that they move themselves, and that the soul is the distinctive principle belonging to animals or living things and not to anything else; he concludes that the presence of soul is what causes self-motion, and therefore that the soul is self-moving—indeed, that its essence is just self-motion, and that its self-motion enables it to be a principle of motion to other things. Aristotle agrees that it is distinctive of animals that they move themselves, and that the presence of soul is the cause of self-motion to the animals, but he rejects Plato’s inference that the soul must itself be self-moving. Rather, as Aristotle points out, the soul might be *unmoved*, an unmoved mover of the animal body, and the soul–body composite would be self-moving in virtue of having two components, one of which moves the other, and neither of which moves itself. This is certainly logically possible; but, as is apparent also from the argument of *Laus* 10 that the first mover must be self-moved, Plato either has never considered the possibility that something that is itself unmoved could set something else in motion, or else regards it as not needing refutation. Plato’s implicit argument might be the one later used by Sextus Empiricus, ‘what moves [something] is acting, what acts is in motion, therefore what moves [something] is in motion [τὸ γὰρ κινῶν ἐνεργεῖ τι, τὸ δὲ ἐνεργῶν κινεῖται, τὸ ἄρα κινῶν κινεῖται]’ (*Against the Physicists* 2.76), or, contrapositively, what is not in motion is not acting or *doing* anything, and therefore cannot move something else, since moving something is an activity. Against this, Aristotle will say that not every ἐνέργεια is a κίνησις, that only bodies can be in motion, and that if we are unable to represent incorporeal things as acting without

¹⁹ Hermias is probably taking the word ἐμψυχία, directly or indirectly, from Porphyry’s *Against Boethius*; see Porphyry F 248 Smith. Boethius was a Peripatetic who had denied the immortality of the soul, saying that it was something like a quality which depends for its existence on the body in which it inheres, and so perishes incidentally on the death of the body. Porphyry’s intention is to distinguish the ἐμψυχία, which is such a quality, from the soul, which is a self-subsistent substance and cannot perish in this way; see Ps.-Simplicius in *DA* 247,23–6, dependent on Porphyry. I owe these references to Karamanolis (2006), 291–7; see his whole discussion there of Porphyry’s *Against Boethius*. He also cites Porphyry-dependent passages of Olympiodorus and Philoponus; to which add Themistius in *DA Paraphrasis* 25, 23–27, 7, apparently a Peripatetic response to Porphyry.

²⁰ As Opsomer (2006), 137, notes, Proclus makes the same claim at *Plat. Theol.* 3.23, 16–25 Saffrey-Westerink. Opsomer notes the parallel with Hermias.

representing them as moving, this is because we are improperly assimilating them to bodies. The late Neoplatonists generally concede the possibility of *ἐνέργεια* that is not *κίνησις*, and say with Aristotle that the world-governing *νοῦς* is the first unmoved mover of the cosmos. But this does not prove that only bodies can be in motion, or, in particular, that soul is not self-moving. Thus Proclus, in *Elements of Theology* §14 and §20 and *Platonic Theology* 1.13, accepts *both* the argument of *Laws* 10 to soul as a first self-moved mover, *and* the argument of *Physics* 8 and *Metaphysics* 12 to *νοῦς* as a first unmoved mover: soul is the first of moved things, and *νοῦς* is prior even to that. And Proclus infers from soul's self-motion to its incorporeality (*Elem. Theol.* §15) and to its separability from bodies (§16) and thus immortality. But if Aristotle is right that we cannot infer from an animal's self-motion to its soul's self-motion, how do we know that the soul is self-moving, and thus incorporeal and separable and immortal?

But of course, Proclus and Hermias do not *want* to prove that all animals' souls are separable from bodies: such a conclusion would be an embarrassment. They agree with Aristotle that animals are not primitively self-moving (that is, that they are self-moving only because one component moves another), and that irrational souls are not self-moving at all; but they claim that *rational* souls are primitively self-moving, and therefore that the *Phaedrus* argument succeeds in proving their immortality. And, given the principle that Plato should be interpreted charitably, this means that Plato must have *intended* the argument to apply only to rational souls. Thus Hermias says that if we 'desire to learn more clearly what is the motion in the soul' of which the *Phaedrus* passage speaks, 'it is clear that it is none of the bodily motions, not even the ninth [that is, the motion which can move other things, but only when moved by something else, and cannot move itself, following the list of *Laws* 10 893–4], for these are not self-moved'. Indeed, Plato is not speaking even of 'all the motions proper [to soul] . . . such as volitions, opinions, spirited desires, appetites: for it is not always moved in respect of these, whereas we are looking for the motion that *always* belongs to it', since Plato speaks of this self-motion as being the *essence* of soul. Rather,

you might most of all grasp the soul's self-motion from its perfecting itself, and separate the rational soul both from the irrational soul and from nature by this [characteristic]: for it belongs to the rational soul to perfect itself and awaken itself and revert to itself [τὸ *ἑαυτὴν τελειοῦν καὶ ἀνεγείρειν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν εἰς ἑαυτήν*],²¹ which does not belong to any of the other [kinds of soul]; and [Plato's] saying 'about soul both divine and human', that is, about every rational soul and not about the irrational soul or about nature, fits with this interpretation. (Hermias *in Phd.* 114,10–27)

²¹ It is not entirely clear here whether the reflexive *ἑαυτήν* goes with only the first two verbs, in which case *ἐπιστρέφειν* is intransitive and means 'to revert', or whether the reflexive goes with all three verbs, in which case *ἐπιστρέφεισθαι* means 'to revert' and *ἐπιστρέφειν* is its causative. The Neoplatonists construe the verb in both ways: in Proclus *Elem. Theol.* §15ff. (which I will discuss below), *ἐπιστρέφειν* is intransitive 'to revert', but elsewhere 'to revert' is more usually the middle *ἐπιστρέφεισθαι* (with passive forms in the aorist). Hermias seems to prefer the middle construction, so the present passage may mean rather that the soul perfects itself and awakens itself and *makes itself* revert to itself. In what follows I will use both active and middle constructions without worrying too much about it.

And in truth there is some justification, not in the *Phaedrus* but in the *Timaeus*, for supposing that the soul's self-motion is always (when not distorted by external causes) a *circular* motion, and that this is always a *rational* activity. Thus 'the motion which is in [the thing] itself and [moved] by itself is the best motion, for it is the most akin to the intellectual [*διανοητική*] motion and to the [sc. circular] motion of the universe, whereas motion by another is worse' (*Tim.* 89a1–3). Our souls as the demiurge originally produced them, prior to incarnation and without the attachment of the irrational parts, revolve according to the 'circles of *νοῦς*', the circles of the Same and the Different, and, to judge by the passage just cited, these must be the soul's *self*-motions; then when the soul is plunged into the body, and motions are transmitted from the body to the soul, these rectilinear motions coming from without block or distort the soul's connate circular motions: 'violently shaking the circuits of the soul, they entirely blocked the circle of the same by flowing contrary to it, and they held it back from ruling and proceeding, and they shook up the circle of the different' (*Tim.* 43d1–4), so that the replacement of rational by irrational psychic activity is analyzed as the replacement of the soul's self-motion by motion from without, and thus of circular by rectilinear (or distorted quasi-circular) motion. In fact, there is justification in the *Timaeus* even for thinking that the soul's self-motion must be not merely rational thinking, but specifically rational *self*-thinking. Thus a plant

participates in the third kind of soul, which our account has established between the diaphragm and the navel, which has no share of opinion and reasoning and *νοῦς*, but of pleasant and painful sensation accompanied by appetites. For it goes through life being affected in all ways, but its origin has not given it by nature the ability, being turned in itself and about itself [*στραφέντι δ' αὐτῷ ἐν ἑαυτῷ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ*], repelling motion from without and exercising its own motion, to perceive and reason about any of the things that belong to itself [*τῶν αὐτοῦ τι λογίσασθαι κατιδόντι*].²² For this reason, while it is alive and not other than a living thing [*ζῶον*], it is fixed stable and rooted, on account of being deprived of being moved by itself. (*Tim.* 77b3–c5)

Here self-motion is what allows a soul to 'perceive and reason about any of the things that belong to itself—that is, to think itself—and this self-thinking is a (presumably circular) 'being turned in itself and about itself'; and, to a Neoplatonist reader, Plato, in speaking of the soul's being turned in itself and about itself [*στρέφεσθαι ἐν ἑαυτῷ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ*], is clearly referring to the reversion or turning to itself [*ἐπιστροφή εἰς ἑαυτήν*] which according to Hermias is distinctive of the rational soul, and which Hermias thinks the self-motion of the *Phaedrus* passage must also be referring to.

The late Neoplatonists are thus led, probably in part by these passages, to develop and defend the *Phaedrus* argument by saying that the only genuine primitive self-motion (that is, a self-motion that is not decomposable into one part of a thing moving another part) is *self-thinking* (more precisely, not just any act in which something

²² I am assuming that *τῶν αὐτοῦ τι* is the object both of *κατιδόντι* and of *λογίσασθαι*. It is not entirely clear whether 'by nature' goes with this phrase or (as I have taken it) with 'its origin has not given it'.

thinks itself under some description, but what we might call *reflexive* thinking—thinking whose content is essentially *de se*): this is the only genuine reversion to oneself [ἐπιστροφή εἰς or πρὸς ἑαυτοῖ], and whatever reverts to itself [ἐπιστρέφει or ἐπιστρέφεται εἰς ἑαυτό] is incorporeal and separable from bodies.²³

Proclus develops these arguments, without any explicit reference to texts of Plato or Aristotle, in *Elements of Theology* §§14–20. They fit here into the context of a general theory of the procession [πρόοδος] and reversion [ἐπιστροφή] of beings at all levels (as well as into a theory of the kinds of unity, motion, intellection, and so on, characteristic of beings at different levels). Every being proceeds from a cause at a higher level, and reverts to that cause; in some cases but not others, the thing reverts to its higher cause by first reverting to itself. §17 states that ‘everything which primarily moves itself reverts to itself [is πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἐπιστρεπτικόν]’; Proclus’ demonstration is mainly a clarification of what he means by the primary self-motion and by reversion. For something to be primarily self-moving is for it to move itself not by one part moving another, or by the whole moving a part, or by a part moving the whole; and ‘if one and the same thing moves and is moved, it will have the ἐνέργεια of moving [κινεῖν] toward itself, being motive of itself; and what it has its ἐνέργεια toward is what it has reverted to’. §§15–16 argue that if something reverts to itself—that is, moves itself in this primary way, directing its ἐνέργεια toward itself as a whole—then it must be incorporeal (§15), and furthermore must have an οὐσία separable from all body (§16). What directs its ἐνέργεια toward itself as a whole must be incorporeal because all bodies are divisible, and ‘what is divisible is not in contact with itself, the whole with the whole, on account of the separation of the parts, different parts being situated in different places’ (§15). The claim of §16—that such a self-reverting thing must have an οὐσία separable from all body—is stronger than the claim that it is incorporeal, since there are other incorporeals (that is, things that are not bodies), such as qualities and enmattered forms and natures, which have their subsistence through matter and therefore cannot exist in separation from a bodily composite. But the demonstration of Proposition 15

²³ Sometimes ἐπιστροφή εἰς or πρὸς ἑαυτό is used for what is not precisely knowledge of oneself, but knowledge of objects insofar as they are present within oneself, rather than at lower or higher levels. But this is not ἐπιστροφή εἰς ἑαυτοῖ in the strict sense (as it is sometimes said, not τελεία ἐπιστροφή), and does not entail separability in the same way. Thus the pseudo-Simplicius (Priscianus Lydus), commenting on Aristotle’s thesis in *DA* 3.2 that we perceive through sight that we are seeing, says (following Iamblichus) that in human beings even the senses are somehow rationalized, and become capable of self-knowledge or ἐπιστροφή πρὸς ἑαυτά, but they know only their ἐνέργειαι, not their οὐσία or δυνάμεις, and they are not strictly self-moved, because these ἐνέργειαι (and thus their knowledge of the ἐνέργειαι) arise only when they are moved from without by sensible objects; and thus it cannot be inferred that the senses are separable from bodies, although they are capable of such ἐπιστροφή only because they somehow bear the image of the separable rational soul. Philoponus in *DA* 124, 29–125, 31 has a threefold distinction between souls (or soul-parts or soul-powers) which ἐπιστρέφουσι πρὸς ἑαυτάς through self-knowledge as if moving in circles: those which proceed out on a straight line and return by the same line bent back on itself, and those which simply proceed out and do not return. Although he does not develop the point, perhaps the second class know their ἐνέργειαι but not οὐσία or δυνάμεις. But others preferred to say that it is the common sense or the rational soul that knows the ἐνέργειαι of the senses. On this controversy, see [Ps.-]Philoponus in *DA* 462, 26–467, 12.

shows not merely that the self-reverting thing is not a body, but also that its activity of self-reversion does not take place through the mediation of a bodily organ, since any bodily organ, being extended, would be unable to revert as a whole to the whole of anything. As the demonstration of Proposition 16 puts it,

what reverts to itself, being other than body, has an activity which is separated from body and is not through a body [as an organ] or together with a body, if indeed [sc. as the demonstration of Proposition 15 seems to have shown] the activity and that to which the activity [is directed] have no need of body . . . [and] it is impossible, if the *οὐσία* is inseparable from bodies, for the activity [which proceeds] from the *οὐσία* to be separable: for in this way the activity would be superior to the *οὐσία*, if the *οὐσία* is in need of bodies, while the *ἐνέργεια* is self-sufficient, belonging to itself and not to bodies.

Now while this argument that what reverts to itself has its *οὐσία* separable from body of course does not cite the *Phaedrus* (the *Elements of Theology* is proudly logically independent of anything outside itself), it is clear that Proclus intends it to be a version of the *Phaedrus*' argument from the soul's self-motion to its immortality (or, as Proclus would see it, to its separability from bodies, from which immortality is a corollary), since Proposition 20 describes the soul as what is primarily self-moving and 'moved by itself, moves the other things', and since Proposition 17 says that what is primarily self-moving reverts to itself. But he also intends it to be a version of the *Phaedrus* argument that is scientifically rigorous, and that proves the separability and immortality of only the rational soul, not of the soul of any self-moving animal; and it will achieve this by responding to Aristotle's challenge and proving the separability and immortality of some kind of soul in the way that he insists it be proved, by finding an activity of that kind of soul (in this case the rational soul's activity of self-reversion through self-thinking) and showing that that activity does not take place through a bodily organ (*De Anima* 1.1 403a3–16, cited above, and cp. 2.1 413a3–9). Thus an Aristotelian challenge is taken here as a means for purifying both the form of a Platonic argument and the content of its conclusion.

Hermias does not work out all of this in the careful way that Proclus does in the *Elements*, distinguishing precisely what follows from what. But he too thinks that the *Phaedrus* argument applies (and, for Hermias as a commentator, it is important that Plato *intended* it to apply) only to rational souls, and only to a strict sense of self-motion which is characteristic of rational souls, and which he describes as reversion to oneself; it is reasonable to suppose that he would fill this out Proclus' way, saying that a thing reverts to itself when it directs its causal activity toward itself as a whole, explaining that only this is primitive self-motion, and arguing that bodies cannot act in this way because of the separation of their parts, and that anything that does act in this way has an *ἐνέργεια* and therefore an *οὐσία* separable from bodies, and is therefore immortal. And this would offer an explanation of why, according to Hermias, 'the ancients were in the habit of calling [only] the rational soul "soul" in the strict sense' (cited above), so that Plato could say that 'every soul is immortal' when he has shown only that every

rational soul is immortal: Plato says that ‘moved by itself’ is the *οὐσία* and *λόγος* of the soul (245e2–4), and if only rational souls are strictly self-moved, only rational souls are strictly souls. (Hermias notes that the argument will not apply to things that are not *primitively* self-moved: ‘what Aristotle says is self-moved, the animal, is not what is now being put forward for investigation: for, the animal being composed according to him out of something unmoved and something other-moved, he says that the whole is self-moved’, in *Phaedrum* 105,15–17.) Other so-called souls will not be proved immortal by the *Phaedrus*, and presumably Hermias does not think that they are proved immortal by the *Phaedo* either: presumably some of the point of using phrases like ‘ensoulment [*ἐμφυχία*] of the *πνεῦμα*’ or ‘life about the bodies’ (Hermias as cited above) rather than ‘soul’ is to suggest that these are not self-subsistent substances in the way that a soul proper is, but rather are attributes of bodies, perhaps caused by souls but having their subsistence through the bodies and essentially dependent on the bodies, like the attunement of a lyre. Simmias’ objection to the earlier ‘proofs’ of immortality will be correct in this case, and Socrates’ reply to Simmias will fail, although it will succeed in the case of rational souls. (To impose some terminology, we can say that Cebes is suggesting that a soul might perish *per se*, in the way that self-subsistent substances do, while Simmias is suggesting that a soul might perish *per accidens*, when its underlying subject perishes or otherwise changes, in the way of enmattered forms, which according to Aristotle do not properly perish, but exist at one time and fail to exist at another time, because the composite substance has perished. The reply to Cebes would work for all souls, none of which perish *per se*, but the reply to Simmias would work only for souls which are self-subsistent substances and therefore cannot perish *per accidens*, and Hermias and Proclus will presumably say that this holds only for rational souls.²⁴ Proclus argues that ‘everything that reverts to itself is self-constituted [*αὐθυπόστατον*]’ (*Elements of Theology*, Proposition 43), which means at least that it is a self-subsistent substance and cannot perish *per accidens*, but in fact Proclus wants more: it ‘provides itself with being’ (*ibid.*), being ‘simultaneously cause and effect’ (Proposition 46), and therefore ‘if it perishes it will depart from itself and will be separate from itself; but this is impossible’ (*ibid.*). ‘It will depart from itself [*ἀπολείψει ἑαυτὸ*] echoes *Phaedrus* 245c7–8, ‘only what moves itself, since it does not depart from itself [*ἄτε οὐκ ἀπολείπον ἑαυτό*], will never cease to be moved’, and suggests that Proclus is

²⁴ So, for example, Ps.–Simplicius in *DA* 247,23–6, commenting on *DA* 3.5 430a23 ‘only this is immortal and eternal’: ‘he wisely adds “and eternal”, as Plato in the *Phaedo* adds “and indestructible” [88b5–6 and 95b9–c1, and then especially 105e2–106e3], in order that we may not think, like Boethus, that the soul, like the ensoulment, is immortal in the sense that it does not remain when death comes, but rather departs and perishes when death comes to the animal’. We can say in such cases that the argument against Simmias does not succeed, since the soul might perish as the attunement does, or that while the argument against Cebes succeeds in showing that the soul cannot admit death and must therefore either depart or perish when death comes to the animal, it does not succeed in showing that the soul does not perish in some way other than by dying, namely by perishing *per accidens* when its underlying subject dies. So too at greater length Damascius, in *Phd.* I 430 and following, replies to Strato’s *aporiai* against the argument against Cebes, and explains why, given that the soul is a substance and does not have its existence parasitic on some underlying subject, its being immortal entails its being indestructible.

reinterpreting the argument from the soul's self-motion as pointing to a deeper argument from the soul's self-existence, an ontological status which again will be distinctive of what reverts to itself, the rational soul.)

Hermias and Proclus say some further things—at least indirectly—about the soul's reversion to itself, which are interesting for what they show both about our philosophers' strategies in reading Plato, and because they seem to have had an important influence on later philosophy. Recall that Plato in the *Timaeus* describes the kind of motion which a plant-soul does not have, which would enable it to 'perceive and reason about any of the things that belong to itself', as a self-motion in which the soul is 'turned [στραφέν] in itself and about itself' (77b–c cited above); presumably this motion would, unless distorted by external causes, be a circular motion, since 'the motion which is in [the thing] itself and [moved] by itself is the best motion, for it is the most akin to the intellectual [διανοητική] motion and to the motion of the universe' (89a1–3 cited above); the demiurge had given to the world '[the motion] which is most in accord with νοῦς and φρόνησις: for which reason, bringing it around in the same [manner] and in the same [place] and in itself, he made it to be moved turning [στρεφόμενον] in a circle' (32a2–4). The Neoplatonists will, of course, interpret this language of στρέφειν in terms of their theory of the soul's ἐπιστροφή to itself; and this will give them a key to interpreting Plato's talk of the demiurge's construction of the circles of soul in the heavens, which Aristotle had ridiculed in a passage we have already cited:

[The?] Timaeus too physicizes [φυσιολογεῖ] that the soul moves the body in the same way [as Democritus holds], [that is] that through being moved itself it moves the body too, since it is interwoven with it. For after it has been constituted out of the elements [that is, being, sameness, otherness] and divided according to harmonic numbers, so that it might have a connate sensation of harmony and so that the universe might be locally moved with concordant locomotions, he bent back [κατέκαμψεν] the straight line into a circle; and having divided one circle into two attached at two [opposite points], he then divided one of them into seven circles, as if the motions of the soul were the locomotions of the heaven. (*De Anima* 1.3 406b26–407a2)

As usual, the Neoplatonists agree that if Plato had meant this description literally it would be absurd, and they use Aristotle's criticism, together with the principle that Plato should be interpreted charitably, to try to find a higher meaning in what Plato said. Proclus goes even further than Aristotle in working out the absurdities that Plato would be involved in had he meant this literally:

We must not accept the account of some who say that the shape of soul is really like this, composed of two circles. For if they have no breadth, how is it possible [for the demiurge] to cut one of them when it has no breadth? And if they are rings, how is the soul which is composed of them interwoven throughout, from the center to the furthest heaven? For how would the rings be extended throughout the whole spherical body? In addition, if they are bodily, [Plato] would be asserting a body outside the universe and also producing a void, since the circles would surround the sphere on some sides, as in armillary spheres, and although they are circles they would receive depth together with the body in being extended from the center to the furthest [heaven]. So we must consider this lifegiving shape of souls to be without shape or extension, if

we are not going to fill both ourselves and Plato's consideration with much folly, in the way that Aristotle too interpreted it, taking the soul to be a magnitude on account of the circle, and demonstrating that if it is like this it cannot be intellectual, since *νοῦς* is indivisible and intellectual of intelligibles which are indivisible. In addition, if it were like this it would be only divisible and not also indivisible, although its substance was also indivisible as well as being divisible [by the demiurge's list of ingredients]: but whether it is a circle or a ring, it would contain only the divisible nature and in no way the indivisible. (*in Timaeum* 2.249, 31–250, 19 Diehl)

Proclus' positive alternative (2.248, 8–249, 31) is, as we would expect from him, very complicated, with a higher meaning corresponding to every detail of the text. Without entering into all the details, we can concentrate on the most important points: why the demiurge first lays the soul out in straight lines (we can ignore the question of how many lines), and then bends them back into circles. As it happens, these are issues which both Proclus and Hermias address, apparently in complete harmony. The straight line and its bending-back into a circle signify the procession [*πρόοδος*] and reversion [*ἐπιστροφή*] of soul:

I think it has become clear from what has been said that the discourse [of Timaeus] has manifested through the straight lines the procession [*πρόοδος*] of [the] soul and the life which proceeds from its substance and is providential over other-moved things. And I deem it fitting to explain correspondingly also the bending-back [*κατάκαμψις*] into circles. For since the reversions [*ἐπιστροφαί*] are immediately continuous with the processions, recalling the things that have proceeded back again to the same, he says that the straight lines have been bent back into circles. And since the vital aspect of the soul is intellectual and directed toward returning and unwinds the intelligible multiplicity, it returns again to the same [starting-point]; and since the soul moves other-moved things [while? by?] being turned [*ἐπεστραμμένη*] toward itself and moving itself; for all these reasons the circular [shape or motion] is appropriate to it. [2.248, 11–23; cp. 2.244, 15–17, 'the straight line makes clear the procession [*πρόοδος*] of psychical life from superior things, and the bending-back [*κατάκαμψις*] into a circle makes clear its intellectual turning [*στροφή*].]

Hermias shares this interpretation, and he shares Proclus' concern to explain why Plato says that the straight lines *have been bent back* into circles. Plato must of course be talking about simultaneous aspects rather than about successive states of the same thing, and so he must be saying that both rectilinear shape or motion and circular shape or motion belong to the same soul, rather than (as one might expect) divine souls being purely circular and human souls being purely rectilinear.

The soul's motion in a straight line toward [the world of] coming-to-be is a translation, and its circuit of the forms and unrolling [= making discursively explicit] and return to the same [starting-point] is a rotation. So one might more appropriately assign rotation to divine souls and translation to ours; but you can see *both* motions in divine souls as well. For, he [Plato] says, the demiurge took the straight lines and bent them back [*κατέκαμψε*] into a circle; so it is clear that the souls' circular bending [*κάμψις*] and *νόησις* is not without the straight; for being moved purely in a circle he assigns to *νοῦς* alone [sc. and not to any kind of soul: so *νοῦς* itself would be described as shaped or moved purely circularly, the most divine and rational kind of soul as a

straight line that has been bent back into a circle]. (Hermias *in Phdr.* 107,16–23; cp. Proclus *in Tim.* 2.248,23–249,4)

The exegetic phrase ‘circular *κάμψις* and *νόησις*’ is striking: *κάμψις* or *κατάκάμψις* has become a standard metaphor that can be immediately unpacked as referring to the soul’s reversion to itself in reflexive thinking.

I have spoken of ‘reflection’ or ‘reflexive’ thinking, and in conclusion I would like to examine the origins and original significance of the vocabulary of ‘reflection’ for the soul’s cognition of itself or of its own acts. The word ‘reflection’ in this sense is perhaps most familiar from Locke, but the modern philosophers take it from the scholastics: Thomas Aquinas is the first writer I know to use *reflectio* or *reflexio* as something like a technical term, and it is possible that later scholastics all take it from him, but also possible that it was already in common scholastic use in his time. It is worth asking where the word, as we find it in Thomas, comes from: in particular, is it a translation of some Greek or Arabic word, or is it a new coinage in scholastic Latin?

As it turns out, there is no one simple answer to this question, because Thomas uses the word in different senses—sometimes for things that the later philosophical tradition would not think of as ‘reflection’—and the word has different back-histories in different senses. Thomas speaks, notably, of the soul’s ‘reflection on the phantasm [*reflexio in phantasma*]’; that is, the soul forms universal ‘intelligibles’ or concepts when the agent intellect acts on phantasms in the imagination in such a way as to abstract them from matter and from the (individuating and so on) conditions of matter. But our intellect is able to think not only about the universal essence of X, but also about a concrete individual X; it is not as if only the sensitive powers have intentional attitudes toward a concrete individual X, and the intellectual powers do not. However, the intellect is not able to do this without the assistance of the sensory powers and their organs: ‘the intellect knows the nature of the species or essence directly by stretching itself out [*cognoscit . . . directe extendendo seipsum*], but it knows the singular itself by a kind of bending-back [*per quamdam reflexionem*], inasmuch as it turns back upon the phantasms [*redit super phantasmata*] from which the intelligible species are abstracted’ (Thomas *in DA* #713). Now in this context the back-history of the word *reflexio* is easy to see (that is, the linguistic origin of the word is easy, even if details of interpretation are not). Aristotle says, in the passage on which Thomas is commenting, that the soul, or perhaps the intellect, judges (concrete individual) flesh by one thing, and ‘by something else, either by something separate or as the bent line [*ἢ κεκλασμένη*] is to the same line when it is stretched out [*ἐκταθῆ*], judges the essence of flesh’ (*DA* 3.4 429b16–18); the Latin translation that Thomas cites translates *κεκλασμένη* as *circumflexa*. As Thomas interprets it, the intellect when it is like a line ‘stretched out’ (*extensa*) judges the essence of flesh, and when it is like a line ‘bent back’ (*circumflexa* or *reflexa*) it judges concrete individual flesh.²⁵

²⁵ This passage of *DA* 3.4 is highly controversial, and I think Thomas’ interpretation is wrong. But this is a long story and not directly relevant here. I discuss the issues in an unpublished paper, ‘From *De Anima* 3.4 to *De Anima* 3.5’.

This, however, seems quite different from the notion of ‘reflection’ as the soul’s knowledge of its own substance or acts, and it seems very hard to see how this notion could have been derived from *De Anima* 3.4 on ‘bending’ [κλάζειν]. Thomas’ use of *reflexio* in this latter sense (the sense taken up by the moderns) seems to correspond rather to Greek uses of ἐπιστροφή. But the standard and natural translation of ἐπιστροφή is *conversio*, or alternatively *reditus*: scholastic writers before Thomas (going back to Augustine) use *conversio* rather than *reflexio* for the soul’s turning to think itself (or to think God, and perhaps other things), and in fact Thomas himself often uses *conversio* in this sense. Why would Thomas, when he is speaking of what a Greek philosopher would call ἐπιστροφή, and when he is immediately or at some remove following Greek models, often choose to substitute *reflexio* for *conversio*? Thus far I have come across only one text where Thomas uses *reflexio* or a cognate, in the self-knowledge rather than the *reflexio in phantasma* sense, where he is following a piece of translation-literature that actually uses *reflexio* or a cognate, rather than *conversio* or *reditus*. This is in his commentary on the *De Anima*, in the passage which we have now seen twice, where Aristotle ridicules the demiurge’s construction of the world-soul, in straight lines bent back into circles. The text as Thomas reads it says ‘*aspectum rectum in circulum reflexit*’ (‘he bent back the straight ray into a circle’, translating τὴν εὐθνωρίαν εἰς κύκλον κατέκαμψεν, *De Anima* 1.3 406b31), and Thomas, being unusually sympathetic to Plato in the face of Aristotle’s critique, explains what Plato really meant by this language that Aristotle is ridiculing: ‘for in the soul we must consider first the straight ray [*aspectum rectum*], according to which it looks directly [*aspicit directe*] at its object; and then afterward it turns back in a circle [*reditur in circulum*] inasmuch as the intellect bends itself back upon itself [*reflectit se supra seipsum*]’ (Thomas in *de Anima* #102). Thomas must be taking this from some Neoplatonic source, perhaps a commentary on the *De Anima*, which spoke of κατάκαμψις, becoming *reflexio* in Latin—this is an entirely standard Neoplatonic exegesis, both of the *Timaeus* passage and of the *De Anima* passage.²⁶ As far as I have been able to tell, it is this metaphorical use of *reflexio*

²⁶ Apart from Proclus and Hermias this exegesis is in, notably, Philoponus in *DA* 124,29–125,31, and, with far less detail, Ps.-Simplicius in *DA* 40,3–17. Thomas’ source is not Calcidius, who translates κατέκαμψεν εἰς ἐν κύκλω as *curvavit in orbem*. Nor is it Gerard of Cremona’s translation of the *Liber de Causis*, which uses *redire*, or William of Moerbeke’s translation of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, which uses *converti*; see Thomas’ commentary on *Liber de Causis* 15, which discusses both of these texts. With Thomas here compare Albert on the same passage in the *De Anima*, in his *De Anima* (in the Bonn Albertus-Magnus-Institut *Opera Omnia* v. 7, pt. 1, Münster, 1968), 33, 49–34, 14, esp. 34, 2–14; but *reflexio* and its cognates do not become standard terms in Albert as they do in Thomas. (Albert cites the verb in connection with self-knowledge in his *Metaphysica*, *Opera Omnia* v. 16, pt. 2 (Münster, 1964), 491, 4–9 and 31–46, but I have scarcely been able to trace it otherwise.) The Latin version of Averroes’ *Long Commentary on the De Anima* (Averrois Cordubensis *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima Libros*, ed. Stuart Crawford, Cambridge, Mass., 1953; English translation, with fragments of the Arabic, in Taylor (2009)) says *incurvavit rectitudinem* (1.45,9 and 1.45,41), and is not Thomas’ source for the term *reflexio*. But Averroes does say ‘he curved back the line and made it a circle, in order that it might understand [*ut intelligat*]’ (1.45, 48–9 Crawford), and again ‘the action of the intellect according to them [= the Platonists?] is likened to a circle because it turns back on itself and understands itself [*revertitur supra se et intelligit se*]’ (1.46,14–16 Crawford), and this may have been a spur to Albert and Thomas. Averroes must in turn ultimately be drawing on some Neoplatonic source.

that lies behind Thomas' use of the word for a psychic act, when it is not being used in the *reflexio in phantasma* sense. The word 'reflection' in the psychological sense is of course very common these days, and when people think about it at all they generally seem to assume that it is an optical metaphor. It is clear that the history of the word is very complicated, and optical metaphors certainly do enter into it at some stage. But as far as I have been able to find so far, the original metaphor that lies behind the psychological meaning is of the demiurge laying out the world-soul in a giant X in the heavens, and then bending the arms of the X back into circles. And this is as good an illustration as any of how the Neoplatonists' challenge of explicating the intellectual content of Plato's corporeal-sounding metaphors, in order to defend him against accusations of *tashbīh* and to provide a way of talking about divine things that avoids the opposite errors of *tashbīh* and *ta'fīl*, led them and others following them to conceptual work, including the development of philosophical terminology, with a lasting impact on what it was possible to say about rational souls and other incorporeal things.

The part of Philoponus' commentary which William of Moerbeke discovered in the margin of a manuscript of Themistius' paraphrase, and which he translated alongside Themistius, uses *reflexit* in the literal account of what the demiurge is supposed to have done (line 10), and then in explaining the allegorical meaning, without using the word *reflexit*, says that Timaeus 'speaks of a circle as a symbol of intellectual activity, for the circle converges on itself and begins from itself and ends in itself, as the intellect too returns to itself [*ad seipsum convertitur*] and contemplates itself', lines 76–9 = Philoponus in *DA* 117, 36–118, 1 (Verbeke (1966), Appendix I, pp. 121–31). Themistius' paraphrase of *De Anima* 1.3 does not provide much help, but in his paraphrase of 3.4 on the line bent back or stretched out he says 'Plato compares the activities of *voûs* to circles, the well-rounded and the straight [for this contrast see *Timaeus* 37b6–c3], Aristotle to a line straightened out and bent' (96, 27–9). This may have led Thomas to look for a common concept of *reflexio* as *ἐπιστροφή* (whether to ourselves or to the phantasm) in both passages.