

Proclus

Ambrosia and Nectar

Translated by Thomas Taylor

Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *Proclus' Theology of Plato*. (Vol. VIII of The Thomas Taylor Series) From: The Prometheus Trust, 1995; [Bk. IV, xv, on "What the plain of Truth, and what the meadow are. What the unical form of intelligible nutriment is. What the twofold nutriment of the Gods in which is distributed from this intelligible food." pp. 259-61.]

After these things therefore, we may survey another triad pre-existing in this place, which also Socrates celebrates, *viz.* the plain of truth, the meadow, and the nutriment of the Gods. The plain of truth therefore, is intellectually expanded to intelligible light, and is splendid with the illuminations that proceed from thence. For as *The One* emits by illumination intelligible light, so the intelligible imparts to secondary natures a participation productive of essence. But the meadow is the prolific power of life, and of all-various reasons, is the comprehension of the first efficient causes of life, and is the cause of the variety, and generation of forms. For the meadows also which are here are productive of all-various forms and reasons, and bear water which is the symbol of vivification. And the nourishing cause of the Gods, is a certain intelligible union, comprehending in itself the whole perfection of the Gods, and filling the Gods with acme and power, in order that they may bestow a providential attention to secondary natures, and may possess an immutable intellectual perception of such natures as are first. Above however, the Gods participate of these uniformly; but in a divided manner in their progressions.

With respect to the nutriment likewise, one kind is called by Plato ambrosia, but the other nectar. "For the charioteer," says he, "stopping the horses at the manger, places before them ambrosia, and afterwards gives them nectar to drink." The charioteer therefore, being nourished with intelligibles, unically participates of the perfection which is imparted through illumination by the Gods. But the horses participate of this divisibly; first indeed of ambrosia, and afterwards of nectar. For it is necessary that from ambrosia, they should stably and undeviatingly abide in more excellent natures; but that through nectar they should immutably provide for secondary natures. For they say that ambrosia is solid, but nectar liquid nutriment; which Plato also indicates when he says that the charioteer places before the horses ambrosia and afterwards gives them nectar to drink. Hence the nutriment of nectar manifests the unrestrained and indissoluble nature of providence, and its proceeding to all things in an unpolluted manner. But the nutriment of ambrosia manifests stability, and a firm settlement in more excellent natures. From both these however, it is evident that the Gods both abide and proceed to all things, and that neither their undeviating nature, and which is without conversion to subordinate beings, is unprolific, nor their



prolific power and progression is unstable; but abiding they proceed, and being established in the divinities prior to themselves, they provide for secondary natures without being contaminated. Nectar and ambrosia therefore, are the perfections of the Gods, so far as they are Gods; but other things are the perfections of intellect, nature, and bodies. Hence Plato having assumed these in souls, calls the souls [which are nourished with these] Gods. For so far as they also participate of the Gods, so far they are filled with nectar and ambrosia. These however in their progressions have a bipartite division; the one indeed, being the supplier to the Gods of stable and firm perfection; but the other, of undeviating providence, of liberated administration, and of an unenvying and abundant communication of good, according to the two principles of the whole of things, which preside over a distribution of this kind. For it must be admitted that ambrosia is indeed analogous to bound, but nectar to infinity. Hence the one is as it were humid and not bounded from itself; but the other is as it were solid, and has a boundary from itself. Nectar therefore is prolific, and is perfective of the secondary presence of the Gods, and is the cause of power, of a vigour which provides for the whole of things; and of infinite and never failing supply. But ambrosia is stable perfection, is similar to bound, is the cause to the Gods of an establishment in themselves, and is the supplier of firm and undeviating intellection. Prior to both these however, is the one fountain of perfection, and seat to all the Gods, which Plato calls nutriment, and the banquet, and delicious food, as unically perfecting indeed the divided multitude of the Gods, but converting all things to itself through divine intelligence. For *δαις* [the banquet] indeed manifests the divided distribution of divine nutriment; but *θουνη* [delicious food] the united conversion of the whole of things to it. For it is the intellectual perception of the Gods, so far as they are Gods. But nutriment connectedly contains both these powers, being the plenitude of intelligible goods, and the uniform perfection of divine self-sufficiency.

