

## A Neoplatonic Defence of Philosopher-Queens

(20 minute, parallel session)

When can late antique neoplatonists provide better arguments for a Platonic conclusion than Plato can? When they are arguing for female philosopher-queens!

Annas (1976) correctly points out that Socrates' argument at 454b–456a is far from convincing, and in fact provides the critic of Socrates' proposal with more ammunition with which to make his case. In this paper I consider how Theodore of Asine and Proclus defend Socrates' proposal for female guardians in the *Republic* (*in Remp.* I 236.1–257.7) It is a striking fact that neither of them regard the argument at 454b–456a as the central one. Proclus treats Socrates' remarks about guard dogs at 451d–e as the most important one. It is not, he claims, merely an analogy or an argument from example. Drawing on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1397b12, ff), he treats it as 'an argument from the more and the less' which he is able to supplement with premises concerning neoplatonic 'ranks of essences'. He treats the charge of inconsistency between the proposal concerning women and the principle of specialisation at 454b–456a briefly in about 30 lines. The objections that he spends more time over are interesting ones and clearly framed. First, that men and women belong to different kinds and, second, that even if they belong to the same species, then they have different virtues. Unlike Socrates' arguments, these arguments focus on the relevant qualification for being a ruler in Plato's ideal city – a wise and virtuous soul. Proclus also deals with the question of whether women's *bodies* make their souls vicious and, in general, whether psychic abilities supervene on bodily constitution. Theodore of Asine's views on this part of the *Republic*, preserved in a second short essay by Proclus, are equally interesting.

A detailed examination of the arguments of these neoplatonists is not only intrinsically interesting, it also provides an opportunity to test a hypothesis with conference participants. O'Meara (2003) – who is one of the few writers to discuss these passages in Proclus – entertains the possibility that Theodore's views on women were more radical than Proclus'. This may be so. If it is in fact so, I speculate that this is because Theodore's approach to the interpretation of Plato's dialogues does not follow Iamblichus' methodology. In particular, I argue that, unlike Proclus, the testimonia for Theodore paint a picture of someone whose interpretive practice does not attempt to synthesise everything in Plato into a consistent picture. Proclus, but not Theodore, felt constrained to reconcile the argument of *Republic* V with *Timaeus* 42b or with the *Laws*. This makes a difference to what one will say about the *Republic* passage.

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O'Meara, D. J. (2003). *Platonopolis : Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity*.  
Oxford, Clarendon.