



Damascius' Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles (AAR Religions in Translation)

By Sara Ahbel-Rappe

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Damascius was head of the Neoplatonist academy in Athens when the Emperor Justinian shut its doors forever in 529. His work, *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*, is the last surviving independent philosophical treatise from the Late Academy. Its survey of Neoplatonist metaphysics, discussion of transcendence, and compendium of late antique theologies, make it unique among all extant works of late antique philosophy. It has never before been translated into English.

The Problems and Solutions exhibits a thoroughgoing critique of Proclean metaphysics, starting with the principle that all that exists proceeds from a single cause, proceeding to critique the Proclean triadic view of procession and reversion, and severely undermining the status of intellectual reversion in establishing being as the intelligible object. Damascius investigates the internal contradictions lurking within the theory of descent as a whole, showing that similarity of cause and effect is vitiated in the case of processions where one order (e.g. intellect) gives rise to an entirely different order (e.g. soul).

Neoplatonism as a speculative metaphysics posits the One as the exotic or *extopic explanans* for plurality, conceived as immediate, present to hand, and therefore requiring explanation. Damascius shifts the perspective of his metaphysics: he struggles to create a metaphysical discourse that accommodates, insofar as language is sufficient, the ultimate principle of reality. After all, how coherent is a metaphysical system that bases itself on the Ineffable as a first principle? Instead of creating an objective ontology, Damascius writes ever mindful of the limitations of dialectic, and of the pitfalls and snares inherent in the very structure of metaphysical discourse.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This superb translation of *Damascius's Problems and Solutions Regarding First Principles*, with introduction and extensive notes, brings a classic text to the English reading public for the first time. Sara Ahbel-Rappe provides an invaluable guide for anyone interested in ancient thought to Damascius's critique of Proclus and to his articulation of a system of thought based on the Ineffable as first principle and sensitive to the limitations of metaphysical language."

--Kevin Corrigan, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Interdisciplinary Humanities, Emory University

"Professor Rappe brings Damascius' metaphysics closer to Greek-less readers than ever before, and *Problems and Solutions* will appeal to those tired of the over-confident tones of other Neoplatonists. After a sensitive introduction culminating with important material on Chaldaean and Orphic traditions, her labors have produced a translation with an effective balance of accuracy and readability, supported by scholarly notes as appropriate."

-- Harold Tarrant, Professor of Classics, University of Newcastle, Australia.

About the Author

Sara Ahbel-Rappe teaches ancient philosophy in the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Michigan. She is the author of *Reading Neoplatonism*. She is a former Junior Fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies and a former member of the School for Historical Studies, at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, as well as a recipient of a New Directions fellowship from the Mellon foundation.

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