

The Gods and Being in Proclus¹

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One of the most distinctive developments in late antique Platonism is the conception of a domain 'beyond' Being. The 'supra-essential' (*hyperousios*), however, is often treated by modern commentators on Neoplatonic thought as a mere annex of ontology. Thus, A.C. Lloyd sees in the supra-essential a structure identical to the structure of Being and argues that there is no reason to think of the class of supra-essential entities, namely the henads or Gods, as constituting "a kind of 'alternative' or 'parallel' system ... behaving differently from the rest of reality which is forms."² Conceived in this way, the term "supra-essential" comes dangerously close to mere hyperbole; it does no work. In particular, this reading has difficulty in explaining the novelty of content on every plane of Being, which cannot simply represent an analysis or division of the concept of unity.

The fundamental flaw in this reading lies, the present essay shall argue, in its failure to accord sufficient systematic weight to the henads, the only entities for whom the beyond of Being constitutes, so to speak, their native habitat. Any reading that underestimates the systematic function of the henads inherently runs the risk, as well, of hypostatizing the One Itself. Jean Trouillard, although having developed an henology striving above all to prevent the One appearing as one thing, a singular substance, or item of some kind, undermines his efforts by virtually effacing the henads when he says of them, "L'hénade n'est pas une entité, mais un passage, qui ne peut se définir que par ce qu'elle produit,"³ reducing them to "des puissances immédiates de l'Un."⁴ On the one hand, it is hard to imagine the author of the first book of the *Platonic Theology* endorsing this conception of the Gods; on the other, it virtually renders the One a subject with potencies.

The question of according the henads their proper systematic function concerns the very meaning of negative henology. Is the point of denying unity, autarchy, causality, etc. to the One to exalt it, or rather that to predicate these of the principle of individuation is *incoherent*? Trouillard ends up

1. I am grateful to W.J. Hankey for his helpful comments and suggestions on this essay.

2. A.C. Lloyd, "Procession and Division in Proclus," 35.

3. J. Trouillard, *La Mystagogie de Proclus*, 201.

4. *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus*, 95.

with a problem not unlike those who would attempt to generate the procession of Being through division. Trouillard states of procession as a whole that “Son modèle est la dérivation que Proclus appelle *kath’hupobasin* (par marche dégressive), qui est la génération des parties par le tout, en précisant qu’il s’agit de parties totales que le tout contenait de façon indistincte.”⁵ But *hupobasis* is specifically rejected by Proclus as a model for the procession of Being as a whole: at *Plat. Theol.* II 7. 50. 20–22, for example, he denies that “the procession of the whole of things” takes place through “diminution [*huphesin*], rather than a superabundance of goodness.”⁶ *Huphesis* here is none other than the *hupobasis* of *In Parm.* 746 to which Trouillard refers, where it was defined as the production by a monad of things “as if from the entirety of their natures but *diminished* for particular instances, their specific character being preserved but becoming more partial in them,” like, e.g., intellects from Intellect. *Huphesis* is also the relationship between more “universal” and more “specific” henads, and therefore the “procession” from the One to the henads cannot be like that from, e.g., the intelligible to the intelligible-intellective Gods.

But neither, Proclus explains, can the henads come about by *proödos*, that is, “by a change in essence, as in the case of the production of the procession of images from paradigms” (*ibid.*),⁷ for this mode of causation does not even exist among intelligibles, much less supra-essentials: “the forms are called *paradigms* of beings, while Being is cause, and not paradigm, of all that comes after it; for paradigms are causes of things differentiated [*diêrêmenôn*] in their Being and which have essences characterized by difference [*diaphorous*]” (*Plat. Theol.* III. 52. 2–7). The henads cannot proceed from the One either by *hupobasis* or by *proödos*, for either of these imply some sort of *decline*, and there is no decline from the One to the henads. Indeed, if the One ‘declined’ from unity to multiplicity, we would need to posit some passive principle as responsible for this multiplication, and the very rigor of Proclus’ monism will not permit this.

This essay argues that only by recognizing the concrete individuality of the henads, not as logical counters, but as *unique individuals* and the real agents of the causality attributed to the One, can the true significance of procession in Proclus be grasped. On this interpretation, procession in the primary

5. *Mystagogie*, 112f.

6. *Théologie Platonicienne*. 6 vols. Ed. and trans. H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–97. Translations mine.

7. References to the *Parmenides* commentary are to the pagination in *In Platonis Parmenidem*. Ed. V. Cousin. Paris: Durand, 1864. Reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1961, except when followed by a ‘K’, signifying pagination in Klibansky’s edition of the Latin portion; translations from *Proclus’ Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*. Trans. J.M. Dillon and G.R. Morrow. Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1987.

sense is from one *mode of unity* to another: namely, from the polycentric manifold of autarchic individual henads to the monocentric unity of forms. Distinct organizations belong to the ontic and the supra-essential, and the ontic organization is emergent from the supra-essential through a dialectic immanent to the nature of the henads. The polycentric henadic organization, because it is an organization of unique individuals, is irreducible to ontology for the latter only treats of forms, that is, of universals. The independence of theology (that is, henadology) from ontology in Proclus is thus a matter of its *structural difference*.

This reading necessarily begins in recognizing that ontology in Proclus is underdetermined with respect to its content, which has been noted by a number of commentators, but not accounted for. Lowry, for instance, discerns “the tension between the logic and the content of the Procline philosophy,”⁸ and that in fact the logic of the *Elements of Theology* is “inadequate to its content.”⁹ The problem lies in the henads, their individuality and plurality: “Substantially, they do not differ—to one another they are indifferent. What then is it in their immanent principle which divides them? This ... is the question of wherein lies the productivity of the One.”¹⁰ To find the solution, however, will require going beyond the boundaries of the geometrical structure of the *Elements*. Lloyd, for his part, acknowledges an irreducible “empirical element” which “is needed to complement the non-empirical philosophical system.”

The two together constitute Neoplatonism. But the content of personal experience cannot be derived from the Neoplatonists’ philosophical system. It is an unpredictable gift from their gods. Otherwise it would have been applied to the universal soul, and the hypostases would have been ‘telescoped’ to a degree unacceptable to orthodox Neoplatonists ... For the same reason, we can give no final reply about the uniqueness of particular humans. We know neither which angels, demons and heroes ascend to the One nor how often. They write no books.¹¹

Lloyd displays here a tendency common in the literature, evident in Trouillard as well, to find the locus of the problem of uniqueness and individuality at the level of the individual *soul*, hence Lloyd imagines the empirical element in the system to be drawn from “personal experience.” Lowry, however, recognizes that the problem is ultimately and properly located rather at the level of the henads: individual souls are a synthesis of universality and individuality inas-

8. J.M.P. Lowry, *The Logical Principles of Proclus’ Stoicheiôsis Theologikê as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos*, 85.

9. *Ibid.*, 78.

10. *Ibid.*, 77f.

11. A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, 126.

much as they receive one nature from the forms and another from the Gods. Furthermore, the Gods may not write books, but Homer, Hesiod and other ‘theologians’ do; and for Proclus the mythology and iconography associated with the Gods originates directly from the Gods themselves.¹² Hence it is this *cultural* content which actually constitutes the “empirical element” in his system. The complement to philosophy in Proclus therefore is not so much phenomenological, as Lloyd posits, but hermeneutical.

It was with respect to *symbola* and *sunthēmata*, the ‘symbols’ and ‘tokens’ of theurgy, that the existence of an ‘alternative or parallel system’ criticized by Lloyd was first recognized, notably by Smith, who made his case on the narrow but secure basis of a small number of passages (in particular *Eclogae de philosophia chaldaica* V) that mostly concern the reversion of the soul according to symbols/tokens and forms respectively.¹³ What has not been appreciated in these parallel systems, however, is in just what they differ and the significance of this for the Neoplatonic metaphysics. Symbols and tokens, for all their richness of culturally-determined content, are, from an ontological—and hence necessarily *universal*—viewpoint, indifferent ciphers. Indeed, this is what caused some to label as ‘irrationalism’ the whole tradition of Neoplatonism beginning from Iamblichus. But what if this very transition from content to form actually expresses the nature of procession, and in a manner thoroughly rational?

The fundamental difference between *henadic* and *ontic* modes of unity is to be found in the two sorts of manifold constituted by henads and beings/forms.¹⁴ The henads are *all in all*, whereas the forms *participate in* each other. These two structures, as permutations of the broad axiom stated in *El. Theol.* prop. 103, “All things are in all things, but in each according to its proper nature,”¹⁵ are routinely conflated by commentators, despite the fact that Proclus could not be clearer about *contrasting* them at *In Parm.* 1048. Lloyd, for example, states that “all in all” at *In Parm.* 1048 “means the relation which Plotinus found among the categories and which implied that motion is at rest, rest is in motion, being is at rest, in motion, other, and so on with all the categories” (167).¹⁶ But this is clearly exactly the sort of relationship attributed to Being, Life and Intellect in *El. Theol.* prop 103 and categorically

12. See, e.g., Proclus’ remarks on divine inspiration in his *Cratylus* commentary, §71, §87.

13. A. Smith, *Porphyrus’ Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition*. On the notion of the ‘parallel series’ see also E.P. Butler, “Offering to the Gods: A Neoplatonic Perspective.”

14. On which see E. P. Butler, “Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold.”

15. *The Elements of Theology*. Ed. and trans. E.R. Dodds. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963. Translations generally modified.

16. Lloyd, *Anatomy*, 167.

distinguished from the “all in all” of the henads in prop. 115: Every God is above Being, Life and Intellect “for if these three, though mutually distinct, are each implicit in the other two,” by prop. 103, “then no one of them can be a pure unity, since each contains all.” The very manner in which forms are all in all categorically distinguishes their mode of existence from that of the Gods because each form *implies* the others. Each form is therefore *mediated* in its very being, whereas the all-in-all of the henads renders the individuality of each more robust: “the individuality of each of them [the henads] is a much more perfect thing than the otherness of the Forms,” (*In Parm.* 1048). This is the essential difference between a polycentric manifold and a holistic totality (what Neoplatonists sometimes refer to as a *plêrôma*).¹⁷ What goes for the forms themselves applies *a fortiori* to their participants, who are mediated in their very being since they are what they are purely through something else.

The henadic and the ontic organizations do not simply rest in static opposition, however, since the latter arises from the former; this is the sense of procession. The fact that the Gods, though themselves supra-essential, are active *within* Being, means that there is an ontological as well as a strictly theological perspective on them. Proclus is well aware of this distinction between two ways of speaking of the Gods, as we read at *In Tim.* I, 303,¹⁸ where, in commenting on the passage from *Tim.* 28c which states that “[i]t is difficult to discover the maker and father of this universe, and when found, it is impossible to speak of him to all,” Proclus remarks that

someone may say, do we not assert many things about the demiurge, and about the other Gods, and even of the One Itself? To which we reply, we speak indeed *about* them [*peri autôn*], but we do not speak *of each of them him/herself* [*auto de hekaston*]. And we are able indeed to speak *scientifically* [*epistêmonikôs*] of them, but not *intellectually* [*noerôs*].

The distinction here is between, on the one hand, the familiar concept of *epistêmê*, which is always of the species or class, and on the other hand a *noêsis* of *particular* henads or Gods—i.e., with proper names. Indeed, one finds that Proclus when speaking ‘philosophically’ refers to *classes* (*taxeis* or *diakosmêseis*) of Gods, but quotes ‘theologians’ (e.g., Homer, Hesiod, ‘Orpheus’) for data about particular Gods as empirical evidence for the conclusions arrived at through philosophical dialectic.¹⁹ The possibility of treating of the Gods by

17. On the Neoplatonic notion of *plêrôma*, see S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 83–86.

18. *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*. 3 vols. Ed. E. Diehl. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–06. Reprint, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965. Translations mine.

19. Bodëüs finds a similar pattern in Aristotle’s approach to theology, which “is for Aristotle, as for Plato, the business of the poets ...” (*Aristotle and the Theology of Living Immortals*, 218):

classes, ‘taxonomically,’ as it were, rather than individually, allows the Gods to be treated ‘scientifically,’ that is, ontologically.

This distinction of discursive registers has fostered misunderstandings of Proclus’ theology due to the sharp difference between a text like the *Elements of Theology*, which contains the names of no particular Gods and speaks of henads only in universal terms,²⁰ and the commentaries or the *Platonic Theology*, which substantiate the abstract doctrine with respect to the henads with a wealth of concrete material from (mostly Hellenic) ‘theologians.’ Hence the structure set out for the *Platonic Theology* at *Plat. Theol.* I 9. 8–19 carefully distinguishes between (1) the doctrines concerning all the Gods in common, (2) the doctrines concerning “the universal classes [*holas taxeis*] of the Gods,” and (3) the particular Gods mentioned by name in Plato’s works, “in relation to the universal genera [*hola genê*] of the divine ranks [*tôn theiôn diakosmôn*].”

At *In Tim.* I, 364, Proclus states that “every God is essentialized [*ousiôtai*] in being a God, or rather is supra-essentialized [*hyperousiôtai*], but there is not anything which is participated by him/her; because the Gods are the most ancient and venerable of all things.” We cannot grasp the significance of rejecting a participatory relationship between the henads and the One, however, until we have recognized its *positive* corollary, namely, that the most appropriate way of conceiving of the first principle is as standing for *each God*, rather than for the class of Gods, as would be the case for an ordinary monad. In this lies the distinction between the polycentric henadic manifold and any formal manifold. Thus *Decem Dubitationes* X. 63²¹ informs us that “according to existence” the One is “each God, since each of them is

Aristotle “appeals to traditional opinion concerning the gods as a means of reasoning about his philosophical object, rather than using the study of this object so as to produce philosophical judgments about theological opinions” (*ibid.*, 41).

20. There are actually two axes of purely formal determinations of the henads in the *Elements*, the one corresponding to the monads of the ontic series (props. 161–65), the other consisting of the functional characteristics given in props. 151–58. Charles-Saget, I believe correctly, reads the latter classification as reflecting that by which “le divin ... garantissait ... la possibilité du système qui le dit” (*L’Architecture du divin*, 250). The classes of deities enunciated in props. 151–58 “renvoient bien à l’économie générale du système,” (*ibid.*, 251) and “présentent donc, sur le mode religieux, les axiomes du système proclien,” which are: “qu’il y ait un principe,” corresponding, we might say, to each deity prior to any classification; “qu’il y ait un engendrement à partir de ce principe,” corresponding to the classification of deities as *gennêtikon*; “que tous les engendrés s’accomplissent selon leur perfection propre, accomplissant ainsi celle de l’ensemble par eux constitué,” corresponding to the classification of deities as *telesiourgon*; and “que cette perfection se maintienne pure de toute altération,” corresponding to the classification of deities as *phourêtikon* (*ibid.*, 252).

21. *Trois études sur la providence*, ed. and trans. Daniel Isaac. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977–1982. Translation mine.

one and good existentially.” The terminology here corresponds to prop. 65 of the *Elements*, which states that “all that subsists in any fashion is either according to cause, in the mode of a principle; or according to existence [*kath’huparxin*]; or according to participation, in the mode of an image.” To contemplate something *kath’huparxin* is to conceive it “in its own station [*kata tèn heautou taxin*], neither in its cause nor in its resultant”; but *kath’huparxin* the One is *each God*. Thus the One, when contemplated *in its own station*, is not an hypostatized One Itself, but *each God*—not all the Gods together nor a cause distinct from them. The distinction between the perspective which takes each God individually and that which treats of the Gods in classes or taxonomically is thus grounded in the very nature of the First Principle and is, I would argue, the key to grasping the real, meaningful distinction between Being and the supra-essential.

The locus for the opposition between the supra-essential and ontic domains is the inherent opposition in each God between *huparxis* and *dunamis*, ‘existence’ and ‘power.’ This is the initial gap which widens at each stage of procession as Being acquires determinacy. Thus Damascius (*De Princ.* I. 118. 9–17)²² speaks of the distinction between *huparxis* and *dunamis* in “the First” as the “minimum distinction” (*hêkista prosdiōrismōn*). The *dunamis* or ‘powers’ of the Gods are explained at *Plat. Theol.* III 24. 86. 7–9 to be themselves “supra-essential, and consubsistent with the very henads of the Gods, and through these <powers> the Gods are generative of beings.” At the same time, however, Proclus also opposes the powers of the Gods to their *huparxeis*. For example, we read at *In Parm.* 1128 of things which “are knowable and expressible as pertaining to the powers of the Gods, not to their existences [*tais huparxesin autais*], in virtue of which they possess the characteristic of being Gods.”

As is stated in the passage from *Plat. Theol.* III 86, the powers of the Gods are that through which the Gods produce Being/being(s). Insofar as there is an *opposition* between the Gods and their powers, it seems reasonable that this should stem from the connection which exists between the *powers* of the Gods and the *classes* of beings. This opposition in fact underlies the distinction between the two ways of speaking about the Gods, the one which is ‘philosophical’ and the other which is peculiar to ‘theologians,’ because it is by virtue of their universalizable potencies that the Gods incline, as it were, toward Being, and this latent opposition within the henadic individual is the engine driving the procession of Being. Thus *In Parm.* 74K explains that “positive propositions apply rather to the monads of kinds of being, for the power of generating things is in these. The first principle is before

22. *Traité des Premiers Principes*. 3 vols. Ed. and trans. L.G. Westerink and J. Combès. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986–91.

every power and before assertions,” in which note the juxtaposition of *kinds* of being with *powers*. This text is making the same distinction as *IP* 1128, which opposes the *huparxeis* of the Gods to their powers. For not only are the Gods generative of beings through their powers, but through their powers they themselves can be treated *like* beings—grouped into classes, for instance, which generally under Platonic logic would imply that the members of the class participate in, and are subordinate to, a monad expressing the unity of that class. I have argued elsewhere that Proclus resists placing the henads under these constraints in part because it would tend toward *unifying* them, when in fact their ‘being-Gods’ consists precisely in their irreducible ‘existential’ individuality. In this light, the powers of the Gods form the link not only between the Gods and Being, but also between a discourse concerning unique individuals (‘theology,’ in the sense of what mythographers do) and a discourse concerning *kinds*.

The two most salient characteristics of the henads are, first, that they are ‘all in all,’ which is to say all in each, and, second, their consummate individuality and autarchy. Indeed, these are simply two sides of the same coin. The individual *being* is an individual, albeit to a lesser degree, insofar as it possesses only abstract parts. The supreme individuality, however, that possessed by henads, is such that not just the other henads, but *all of Being* too is present in *each* henad. Thus at *In Tim.* I, 308 Proclus says that “each of the Gods is the universe, but after a different manner,” and again at I, 312 that “each of the Gods is denominated from his peculiarity [*idiôtês*], though each is comprehensive of all things.” Again, at I, 209, we read that “all beings are contained by the Gods and reside in their natures.” Not only beings, ontic particulars, are contained by the henads, but the ontic hypostases themselves, Being, Life, and Intellect, are also contained by each henad: “the Gods do not subsist in these [Being, Life and Intellect], but prior to them, and they produce and contain these in themselves, but are not defined in them” (*Plat. Theol.* I 26. 114. 20–22).

The *pre-positing* of the procession of Being in each of the Gods is operative through their ‘providence’ (*pronoia*): “Every God in his/her own existence [*huparxis*] possesses the providence [*pronoiein*] of the universe [*tôn holôn*], and the primary providence is in the Gods” (*El. Theol.* prop. 120). In an important discussion Gersh stresses the correspondence between *pronoia* among the Gods and mortal ‘belief’ (*pistis*).²³ Belief and providence “are clearly to be viewed as complementary aspects of the irreducible element of ineffability in the causal process as a whole ... belief represents the ineffable element interpreted primarily from below and providence the same element

23. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 115–19.

viewed from above.”²⁴ But this “ineffable element” is not simply irrational or, as Gersh characterizes it, a manifestation of ‘mysticism.’ Rather, there is a quite rational bond between the *pistis* prior to *epistêmê* and that which is inferior to *epistêmê*. Proclus, as usual, in opposing these two senses of *pistis* (see, in particular, *Plat. Theol.* I 25. 110. 17–22) is also affirming the causal relationship between the two.²⁵ Gersh recognizes that the link between the *pistis* of the Gods and that of sensible particulars, i.e., the second stage of perception in the Divided Line of *Rep.* 511e, lies in the emphasis placed by later Neoplatonists on “the rapprochement between the simplicity of matter which is below form and the simplicity of the gods which transcends it,”²⁶ but does not discern the crucial element these two modes of existence have in common, namely particularity—sensible particulars insofar as they fall below *infimae species*, the Gods insofar as their supra-essential individuality *transcends* universality. *Epistêmê*, which is cognition of the universal, is therefore bounded on both sides by a kind of knowing pertaining exclusively to individuals, and these are the two kinds of *pistis*.

It is on account of *pistis*, Proclus explains, that “all the Gods are united [*sunhênôntai*] and gather together [*sunagousin*] uniformly [*monoeidôs*] around one center both their universal powers [*tas holas dunameis*] and their processions” (*Plat. Theol.* I 25. 110. 14–16). What is the function that *pistis* is said to perform here among the Gods themselves? In what must they ‘believe’ and toward what do they dispose themselves ‘uniformly,’ literally, according to one form? It is that to which the universality inherent in their powers and processions, which both pertain to classification, is ultimately referred, namely the individuality of each God, which as irreducible is perceived immediately by each in a founding moment of *pistis*. In a discussion of universal attributes of the Gods drawn from the *Phaedo*, Proclus says of the ‘uniform’ (*to monooides*) that it “pertains most of all to the divine monad at the point at which Being first emerges, in which ends every participated genus of henads, for the One is prior to these” (*Plat. Theol.* I 27. 118. 20–23).

The One here is not something subordinating the Gods, but that in virtue of which the Gods *have something to give* to Being. Schürmann expresses the stakes of the proper understanding of the One when he remarks that “l’alliance entre apophatisme métaphysique et onto-théologie éclipse la découverte phénoménologique dont est née l’hénologie négative.”²⁷ For Schürmann, “l’hénologie négative accomplit ce que la théologie négative ne

24. *Ibid.*, 118.

25. Note also the significance Proclus accords to Plato’s use of *pisteuein* at *Parm.* 141e, at the culmination of the First Hypothesis (*In Parm.* 42K).

26. *Ibid.*, 116 n. 179.

27. R. Schürmann, “L’Hénologie comme Dépassement de la Métaphysique,” 337.

peut jamais accomplir.”²⁸ For ‘negative theology’ the One is “l’étant suprême dont nous ne savons pas ce qu’il est, mais seulement qu’il est,”²⁹ while the One of Plotinus and *a fortiori* of Proclus “ne désigne aucune réalité transcendante, aucune chose—et, en ce sens, rien.”³⁰ Steel similarly wishes to mark the distinction between Neoplatonic metaphysics and “onto-theology”³¹ as well as distinguishing the former from negative theology, that is, “a negative discourse whereby one expresses through negations what the divine cause is.”³² In Proclus, Steel asserts, we have instead a “negative dialectic” which “only aims at removing all discourse, negations as well as affirmation,” together with a positive theology of the divine classes. But what is the meaning of the transition from negative dialectic to positive theology? It is neither a question of a negative theology which would share with ‘onto-theology’ the attempt to disclose a supreme being according to philosophical categories, nor a speechlessness before ‘mystic union.’ Rather, the henological negations come into their rational significance by distinguishing henadic individuality from ontic unity, instead of as the determination of one supreme subject.

We will not lapse into hypostatizing the One if we accord to the henads the full systematic weight that they have for Proclus; but this is lost in recourse to concepts like negative theology and mystical union out of place in a thinker whose theology is fundamentally *positive*. Mystic union contradicts the manner in which Proclus consistently portrays engaging with the divine as an encounter *between individuals*, as at *In Tim.* I, 212. 19–26, which explains that in the performance of “divine works” it is necessary to withdraw from other pursuits so that “*alone*, one may associate with *the God alone*, and not attempt to join oneself to the One with multiplicity. For such a one would do the opposite, and separate himself from the Gods.” Here the opposition of unity and multiplicity evidently applies to the integrity or dispersion of the individual, not to some unity into which individuals would be annihilated, nor is the ‘unity’ of the divine in any way a matter of one God instead of many. Similarly, at *Plat. Theol.* I 3. 15. 24–16. 1 the soul is urged to “incline herself toward her own unity and the center of her entire life, laying aside the multiplicity and diversity of the powers of every kind in her” in order to elevate herself to “the highest outlook [*periôpê*, *Politicus* 272e5].” Here again, the rhetoric of unity against multiplicity refers, not to reducing the number of entities involved, but to those entities’ integral individuality.³³

28. *Ibid.*, 334.

29. *Ibid.*, 337.

30. *Ibid.*, 334.

31. C. Steel, “Theology as First Philosophy: The Neoplatonic Concept of Metaphysics,” 21.

32. *Ibid.*, 20.

33. K. Corrigan, “‘Solitary’ Mysticism in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-

Understanding the essence of henology as lying in individuation rather than in abstract unity grounds procession. The ‘providence’ of the Gods, a pre-thinking (*pro-noein*) of the whole of Being, lies in the supra-essential or ‘existential’ individuality they possess; indeed, it is a direct *consequence* of that individuality, because the latter entails that the whole of Being be pre-positing in each God, lest the universality accorded to Being in relation to *beings* be allowed to usurp the autarchy of each God—the Gods “are present to everything, transcend all things alike, and contain all things, while being dominated by nothing they contain” (*Plat. Theol.* I 19. 92. 25–93. 1). *Each* of the Gods is “the Best” (*to ariston*; *Plat. Theol.* I 19. 89. 4); therefore the desirable (*to epheton*), around which “all beings and all the Gods dispose their essences, powers, and activities” (*Plat. Theol.* I 22. 102. 12–14), though for beings it may lie outside themselves, is for the Gods nothing other than themselves: “nor does s/he [each God, see *hekastos* at l. 21] pass into something better, for what could be better than the best?” (*Plat. Theol.* I 19. 89. 25–27). It suffices to establish truth in the universe that each God is true to him/herself. Whereas, for Leibniz, each monad is a unique perspective on a single universe (*Monadology*, 57), for Proclus, the universe is *constituted* in the first place out of the manifold of unique henadic ‘perspectives’. “All things are solely from the Gods, and genuine truth is in them, who know all things unitarily [*heniaiōs*],” (*Plat. Theol.* I 21. 99. 1–3), that is, as individuals themselves, on account of which “the Gods cognize all things ... not like the intellect, which knows the particular by the universal and nonbeing by being, but each immediately [*autothen*], the universal and the particular alike, even atomic individuals, the infinity of future contingents, and matter itself” (*Plat. Theol.* I 21. 98. 7–12).

The *pistis* of the Gods, therefore, far from collapsing the system into irrational ‘mysticism,’ is the ultimate epistemic precondition without which there is nothing but an utterly circular idealism devoid of meaning because no procession really takes place. This is the trap the interpretation according to ‘negative theology’ or ‘mystical union’ falls into. Trouillard, for instance, sees the “autonomy of the intellect” as “guaranteed” by “le processus cyclique” according to which “la fin n’est autre que le principe”;³⁴ but this autonomy is purchased at the cost of divorcing ontology from what is, for Proclus, its ground. From a purely ontological perspective Being does indeed form just such a circular or holistic system, but this is exactly why Being and its hypos-

Dionysius,” discusses such texts, although he does not mention the passage above from the *Timaeus* commentary, and while his concerns and the scope of his inquiry are quite different from my own, similarly concludes that the language of unity in them pertains to “the uniqueness of identity” (35).

34. *Mystagogie*, 103.

tases are not henads (*El. Theol.* prop. 115). This is the emptiness of ontology without theology, inasmuch as theology for Proclus is not a set of universal propositions about the nature of divinity but an empirical and pluralistic welter of myths, rituals, names and iconography.

To return, however, to the technical formulations which articulate this concept of the relationship between the supra-essential and Being, Being is a dependent moment of each God prior to the Gods' activity, in which and through which Being acquires qualified self-sufficiency as that which "receives a multiplicity of henads and powers which are mingled into one essence" (*Plat. Theol.* III 9. 40. 7–8).³⁵ Would not this mean that Being (and Life and Intellect, and hence the world itself) are multiplied at their source as many times as there are henads? After all, the henads do not participate in these hypostases; the hypostases participate in the henads.

Here the distinction between the modes of unity exhibited by henads and by beings (including the hypostases themselves), which is reflected in the distinction between the modes of discourse appropriate to 'theologians' and 'philosophers' respectively, assists us. The multiplication of Being and the other ontic hypostases as contained in each of the henads does not pluralize the hypostases *essentially* or *formally* because the instances of Being and the rest in each of the Gods share the same *formula*. Just as the multiplicity of participants beneath these hypostases, posterior to their essence, does not affect their *specific* unity, neither do the many henads prior to them—and prior to essence altogether. From another point of view, the many henads in which Being is anteriorly contained do not pluralize it because the henads, due to the nature of the First Principle and its difference from other monads, do not form a manifold structured in the same way as ontic manifolds. This is the reason for what would otherwise be a paradoxical statement by Proclus, namely that "a multiplicity [*pléthos*] of henads is discernible first in the first rank of the intelligible-and-intellectual" (*In Parm.* 1091). This statement implies that the intelligible Gods, whom Proclus treats in the third book of the *Platonic Theology*, do not constitute a multiplicity *per se*. The reason for this becomes apparent from remarks he makes in the latter text concerning the nature of these Gods and of the three 'intelligible triads'.³⁶

The intelligible triads represent the articulated structure of Being Itself. Being in the broad sense encompasses Being in the narrow sense, namely the intelligible *qua* intelligible, as well as Life (that which is at once intel-

35. For a discussion of the difference between the self-sufficiency, or autarchy, of the Gods and the self-constitution of intelligibles, see D.G. Maclsaac, "The Origin of Determination in the Neoplatonism of Proclus."

36. On the relationship between the henads and the intelligible triads, see E.P. Butler, "The Intelligible Gods in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus."

ligible *and* intellectual, *noêsis*, the ideal form of thinking in its fulfillment) and Intellect (that which orients itself toward the intelligible as such). The latter are all, of course, Being too, and hence unfold from, and *as*, aspects of Being Itself. The three ‘aspects’ of Being which are the roots, so to speak, of the three hypostases are the three intelligible triads. In explaining the relationship between the three intelligible triads and the Gods, Proclus states that “the first triad is an intelligible God primarily, that which comes after it, an intelligible-intellective God, and the third, an intellectual God” (*Plat. Theol.* III 14, 51. 9–11). The intelligible triads represent the individual deity who is a member of these classes, but *prior* to the constitution of the classes themselves, which is the significance of ‘primarily’ (*prôtôs*) here. This is really the *only* sense in which the three intelligible triads could refer to *three Gods*, when Proclus has explicitly stated (at the aforementioned *In Parm.* 1091) that a *plêthos* of Gods is first present in the intelligible-intellective order.

It is significant in this respect that the intelligible-intellective order is where the activities of a *pantheon* first become evident, and where mythological hermeneutics begin in earnest, as manifest particularly in interpretations of *Phaedrus* 246–48. Prior to this we are only concerned with the properties of each individual henad, and not with the activities of particular classes of Gods. The first order of classification, the intelligible order, concerns only the most general attributes of the Gods as such, attributes nevertheless not as general as the attribute embodied by the One, namely, the attribute of being *unique individuals*.

Classificatory orders of the Gods subsequent to the intelligible order, that is, beginning with the intelligible-intellective, involve *relations* among Gods and hence are the site for Neoplatonists’ mythological hermeneutics.³⁷ The progressive constitution of Being by successive divine orders has its *telos* in the emergence of the very determinations which make it possible to (retrospectively) treat the Gods through classes or kinds in ‘philosophical’ discourse.³⁸ Once the space of relations among the Gods is fully articulated, the problem of the multiplication of Being in each deity no longer arises, for the transition has been accomplished from supra-essential individuality to *formal* unity, the unity of species. One might say, to construct a novel but typical Neoplatonic triad, that there is a sense in which the Gods *contain* the

37. Mythological identifications for the intelligible order in Proclus or Damascius (e.g., in the second part of *De princ.*, vol. III) refer to an order of intelligible Gods in a *narrow* sense corresponding to the narrow sense of Being as explained above. One might also observe that where the Orphic Phanes is understood to be operating as the third intelligible triad, or intelligible intellect, it is in virtue of his relationship to Gods of the intellectual class.

38. Compare D.G. MacIsaac, “Projection and Time in Proclus,” 101: “[I]n bringing these works [viz., the philosophical corpus of Proclus] into being, the dividing thought which is *dianoia* simultaneously brings into being the philosophical terms which it employs.”

intelligible, *both contain and are contained* in the intelligible-intellective, and *are contained* in the intellectual—albeit intellectual form ‘contains’ them only with degrees of specificity; hence the richness of content embodied in myths give myths the status for Proclus of virtual theophanies.

The relationship between the henads and their immediate (i.e., highest) participants, and thus the relationship in the most direct sense between the Gods and Being, is discussed in some complicated passages from Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* which have troubled commentators, but which can be elucidated from the present perspective. *El. Theol.* prop. 135 posits that for each henad there is some being that participates it immediately, and that “the participant genera of beings are as many as the participated henads.” But as Dodds points out in his commentary (p. 272), it is unclear what *genè* these might be. Moreover, when Proclus stresses that “there cannot be two or more henads participated by one <being>,” nor “one henad independently [*dièrèmenôs*] participated by several <beings>,” he appears to flatly contradict himself (as noted by Dodds, p. 282) because props. 162–65 refer unequivocally to a *class* of henads participated by *to ontôs on*, a *class* of henads participated by the unparticipated Intellect, and so forth. How can 135 and 162–65 be consistent?

If open contradiction is to be avoided, the participation of the hypostases of 162–65 in their respective classes of deities must *not* constitute the participation in the first place or immediately of two or more henads by a single being that is rejected in 135. How could the multiplicity in question in the latter propositions not be of the kind that is ruled out in the former? One possibility is that, e.g., *to ontôs on* participates, not in a multiplicity of deities of the intelligible class, but rather in *any single deity in that class*, in accord with the remarks of Proclus about the intelligible triads quoted above (*Plat. Theol.* III 14. 51. 9–11). A multiplicity of henads could only be participated by a single being insofar as the being in question is a universal and the multiplicity is supra-essential, i.e., not ontologically determined. Nor could a single henad be ‘dividedly’ (*dièrèmenôs*) participated by more than one being, because as the primary participation is participation in the Gods, the differences between participants at this level could only come from participating different Gods. For “as the distinctive characters [*idiotêtôn*] of the henads vary, so the beings whose nature is identified with theirs [*sumphuomenon*] cannot but vary also” (prop. 135). And since we are dealing here with *ontôs onta*, ‘real beings,’ there can be no question of the beings proximately participating in a God being only numerically different.

That two terms cannot be on the same level, so to speak, as participants of a henad, but rather must assume a hierarchical disposition, implies that deities from different cultures would not simply represent different names

for the same God or Gods. For Proclus, in his commentary on the *Cratylus*, explicitly rejects a hierarchy of languages which would make one more divine than another (*In Crat.* § 71).³⁹ This brings us back to the question of the two ways of speaking about the Gods, which correspond to the two ways of linking henads to beings, one which is many-to-one, a class of deities to an hypostasis participating them, and the other which is one-to-one, one deity to one hypostasis. Corresponding to the former, the link between many henads and one hypostasis, there is the multiplicity of national pantheons, the Gods of whom are intellectually or functionally comparable, but irreducible to particulars participating common forms and differing only in their ‘matter’ (Proclus categorically rejects Plotinian ‘intelligible matter’ at *Plat. Theol.* III 9. 40). When it is a question, however, of the multiplicity of, say, intellectual Gods *within a single pantheon*, there can be no notion of a multiplicity participated by a *single* ontic principle, for as we can see from Proclus’ own *Platonic Theology*, when a given pantheon is subjected to philosophical interpretation, there is always a formal unit, a ‘monad,’ strictly speaking, expressing the position of each deity within the singular *logos* of the pantheon.

It is anachronistic in some respects to speak of a concept such as cultural difference in relation to Proclus. But cultural difference is a manifestation of the problem of particularity, and it is on account of his concern for getting *that* right that Proclus can have something interesting to say about the former. *El. Theol.* prop. 149, for instance, demonstrates on the one hand that the total number of Gods must be *finite*, but on the other hand that there can be no absolute determination of *how many* Gods there are. It is not a question, to phrase it in modern terms, upon which ontology can have any purchase. For Proclus’ teacher Syrianus, similarly, there can be no knowledge for the “partial soul” of the actual number of Gods, save that the number is on the one hand finite, and on the other hand not *less* than the number of *classes* of beings (*In Metaph.* 914b3–6).⁴⁰ There cannot be *fewer* Gods than there are classes of beings, for the real articulation in Being is furnished by divine activity and the differences within the given pantheon; but the determination is not reciprocal, and neither the total number of deities nor the total number of pantheons is delimitable any further than to finitude. Similarly, at *In Tim.* III, 12 we read that the number and nature of the Gods is known to the Gods themselves “divinely” while the *Parmenides* “teaches us in a human manner and philosophically,” and philosophical knowledge

39. *In Platonis Cratylum commentaria*. Ed. G. Pasquali. Leipzig: Teubner, 1908.

40. *Syriani in metaphysica commentaria*. Ed. W. Kroll. In *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, Vol. 6. 1. Berlin: Reimer, 1902.

remains for Proclus knowledge of the universal and of the particular purely as an instantiation of the universal.⁴¹

It simply does not make sense that Syrianus and Proclus would claim that the number of Gods was not humanly knowable if that number could be determined by the number of ontic hypostases. The henadic manifold must not be denumerable in this fashion; instead, it consists of just those Gods who *happen* to exist, and who have revealed themselves cultically, most likely in numbers well beyond those of a single pantheon. As such, there is nothing to authorize that the *comparison* of deities belonging to different pantheons proceed to their *conflation* with one another. We can see that Proclus thinks this way, not merely from the eclecticism of his personal practice as attested by Marinus, but first-hand from the way he approaches this question in his *Cratylus* commentary (Pasquali, 32.9ff): *If a certain deity may be called by the Greeks Briareus, but differently by the Chaldeans, nevertheless... the counterfactual conditional making it clear that this would not be something up to a philosopher to determine in the first place.*⁴² Accordingly, the only case in which Proclus unequivocally identifies a God of one nation with that of another is in acceding to the anecdotal identification of the Egyptian Goddess Neith with the Hellenic Athena in Plato's *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 21e), and this is presented as a matter of testimony. The Saïte, Proclus remarks, "perhaps conjecturing [*tekmaïromenos*] this from the great agreement of the lifestyle of the citizens [of Athens] with Her [Neith] or perhaps also perceiving from the telestic art and hieratic works that there was an allotment [*klêrouchia*] of this kind" (*In Tim.* I, 140. 22–28).

And so when Proclus posits, in introducing the third intelligible triad at *Plat. Theol.* III 14. 49, that "there are not more beings than henads, nor more henads than beings, but rather each procession of Being participates the One," we will understand this not as determining the total number of henads, but as determining that no *procession*, that is, no *class* within Being, is to be conceived as arising in the absence of divine illumination. This means that each hypostasis must have at least one henad whose activity is specific to it. Soul, for instance, as a novel hypostasis relative to Intellect, cannot merely be the product of the activity of intellectual Gods manifesting on a lower level, but must possess its own class of deities who guarantee it a direct

41. Van Riel, "Les Hénades de Proclus sont-elles Composées de Limite and d'illimité?" 422 n. 30, unlike most commentators, notices that "le nombre exact des hénades n'est connu qu'aux dieux," but does not seem to see the significance for Proclus' ontology of this *ontologically* undetermined supra-essential multiplicity grounding Being Itself.

42. J. M. Dillon, "The Magical Power of Names in Origen and Late Platonism," 210, paraphrases this passage while unfortunately eliminating the counterfactual phrasing explicit in the Greek.

divinization. Even where a member of such a class is a deity active on higher planes of Being as well, Proclus secures the new phase of that deity's activity with reference to a *mythic* disjunction. In the case of Zeus, for example, who is active on both the intellectual and infra-intellectual planes, the difference is marked by the difference between Zeus *qua* sovereign of the whole cosmos (Zeus *qua* intellectual God) and as one of three Gods dividing the sovereignty (Zeus *qua* hypercosmic God), i.e., a mythical distinction supports the ontological distinction (*Plat. Theol.* VI 8. 34–42).⁴³ This sort of hermeneutic is no mere allegorical subtlety; Proclus negotiates in this way an ontological relationship between myth and reason. The very facticity of myth enables it to function as an instrument of unique, supra-essential divine individuals. The significance of myth in Proclus thus is not of a ladder for the soul to climb up to the truth, to be kicked away after this 'demythologization.' Rather, myth retains its existential excess relative to the universality of the concept, the "superabundance" of the Gods (*El. Theol.* prop. 131) in recognition of which the philosophical system limits itself.

Returning to the distinction between the theologian's and the philosopher's ways of speaking about the Gods, we can say that the participation of moments of Being in single henads, as per *El. Theol.* 135, refers to the former, for this is the narrative, so to speak, of Being's divinization, while the participation of moments of Being in classes of henads, as per *El. Theol.* 162, belongs to the latter. Just as an individual must, according to Proclus, encounter one deity at a time in order to encounter that deity in his/her true profundity (*In Tim.* I, 212), so too philosophy is divinized in the exegesis of singular pantheons, as Proclus carries out with the Hellenic pantheon in his *Platonic Theology*, despite the fact that his biographer Marinus attests to an eclecticism in Proclus' personal religious practice (*Vita Procli* 19).⁴⁴ Philosophy, the kingdom of the universal, reaches out to individual deities and particular pantheons to be divinized because the transition from being to *huparxis* is the transition from formal or specific (sortal) unity to individuality. The threshold between the realm of form and that of *huparxis* is therefore a gateway into the factual and the unique as the domain of revelation.

According to *El. Theol.* prop. 138, Being is the "first and highest of all the participants of the divine character [*tês theias idiotêtôs*] which are thereby divinized [*ektheoumenôn*]." We may be specific about what Being means here. It is not unparticipated Being, the monad or hypostasis of Being, for this participates in the *class* of intelligible Gods, and therefore not one-to-one.

43. There are numerous other examples; see, e.g., the way that Proclus uses the incommensurable myths about Persephone being spouse either of Zeus or of Hades (*Plat. Theol.* VI 11. 50f; *In Crat.* §150, p. 85.18–23).

44. *Vita Procli.* Ed. J. F. Boissonade. Leipzig, 1814. Reprint, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1966.

Rather, this highest participant is the Mixed of the *Philebus*, which is radical Being, the third or synthesizing moment of the first intelligible triad.⁴⁵ “Every God begins his/her characteristic activity with him/herself,” and establishes first in him/herself the character [*idiotêta*] s/he bestows upon participants (*El. Theol.* prop. 131); with respect to the first intelligible triad, each God is at once in his/her supra-essential existence the agent of the mixture *and also* the mixture itself as primal or radical Being, a kind of ontic doubling of the God’s own supra-essential individuality. Being is in the first place each God’s mirroring of him/herself. Thus Proclus, characterizing procession in abstract terms, states that “the One and Being generate *a second henad conjoined with a part of Being*,” and Being “generates a more partial being suspended from a more partial henad,” this being the division, *diairesis*, of the One and the distinguishing, *diakrisis*, of the One and Being (*Plat. Theol.* III 26. 89. 22–26), the generation of a “second henad” together with a more partial being referring to the emergence of specific levels of Being from the activities of the Gods.

The kind of ‘division’ that Proclus speaks of here cannot be adequately represented by a Porphyrian tree. However, that does not mean that it is not rational, a mere external multiplication. Proclus does not offer an account of the coming-to-be of many Gods from one God. Rather, he takes the existence of the Gods as primordial givenness, and offers an account of how ontic unity, which is of a formal nature, comes to be out of henadic unity, which is of an individual, ‘existential’ nature. The transition from henadic to ontic unity takes the whole of the *Platonic Theology* to accomplish but is, on the most universal plane, accomplished in the first intelligible triad, which contains the formula according to which each God is present to Being. The dialectic of Limit and the Unlimited which yields as its result Being and all of the subordinate hypostases, arises from the two primary aspects of each deity. We may characterize these two aspects, Proclean ‘Limit’ and ‘Unlimited,’ insofar as they are determinations of Being, as particularity and universality, which emerge from the original distinction between the *huparxis* and the powers of each God, Damascius’ “minimum distinction.” And so it is not because of the Unlimited, for instance, that there are many Gods, or because of Limit that their number is finite. This would be the worst sort of category mistake insofar as it is only because the Gods, the primary units or individuals, first apply these principles to themselves that we can speak philosophically about their natures. Reaching this far, reflection attains the point at which *epistêmê*, by recognizing its limitations, becomes the witness to its own origins, and

45. Damascius regards Being as the “first *hênômenon*,” distinguishing it thus as ‘unified’ from the ‘unitary’ (*heniatos*) henads; compare *El. Theol.* prop. 6, “Every manifold is either *ex hênômenôn* or *ex henadôn*”—that is, either ontic or henadic.

thus comes into as much self-sufficiency as it is coherent for it to possess. In short, it recognizes itself in the moment of pre-ontological reflection of the ultimate existents.

Terezis states that because Proclus “places forms at an inferior level compared to that which they possess in Plato’s work,” he “relativizes Platonic ontology,” and the “precedence of the One and the henads over Being” makes Proclus “a representative of an era when mysticism dominated and rituals prevail.”⁴⁶ Terezis sees a trade-off here. On the one hand, Proclus “gives a theological orientation to his work and aims at including classical ontology into his theological henology, so that every ontological foundation is completely impossible without its permanent reference to henological preconditions.” But despite “relegating” the forms to an inferior plane, Proclus does thereby concede to forms “an actual content and remains within the orbit of a consistent realism.”⁴⁷ There is much more to it than this, however. Proclus, far from being a prisoner of his era, can even speak to us today insofar as he challenges the presumptive mutual entailment of *content* and *relativity*. The plurality, uniqueness and individuality of the henads does not need to be reduced to uniformity in order to provide a ground for ontology; they provide this ground by virtue of the dialectic of particularity and universality immanent to them. Nor does ontology become the handmaiden of some particular dogmatic theology, since in recognizing the factual plurality of pantheons and revelations, it is subordinated not to one, but to the many. Ontology is thus emergent from theology just as Being is from the Gods; but neither is reducible to the other.

46. C.A. Terezis, “Proclus on Henads and Plato on Forms: A Comparison,” 165f.

47. *Ibid.*, 166.

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