THE INTELLIGIBLE GODS IN THE PLATONIC THEOLOGY OF PROCLUS

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The Platonic Theology is the culminating work of Proclus' long career and one of the defining works of late antiquity, but it has had few modern philosophical admirers. The exception, and an important one, is Hegel, who clearly drew inspiration from the Platonic Theology for his Science of Logic, and who draws his admiring account of Proclus in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy largely from his reading of this work. Nevertheless, the Platonic Theology has received far less attention from philosophers than it might have. A key reason for this neglect, I suggest, has been the inability to perceive in the procession of the divine orders as presented in the Platonic Theology a unifying logic akin to that in the Science of Logic. Such is the judgment of Hegel himself, who, despite his overall high praise of Proclus in the Lectures, characterizes the dialectic of the Platonic Theology as "external".

If the procession recounted in the Platonic Theology is, fundamentally, simply the multiplication of an hypostatized One, then Hegel would be correct, and Proclus' system lacks an inner logic. Moreover, on such an interpretation, causality in Proclus' system as a whole would be mystified, which would contribute to the perception of this grand edifice of Neoplatonic thought as little more than a highly developed form of irrationalism. The present essay, however, offers an interpretation of Proclus' system in which the procession of Being begins not from an hypostatized One, but in the manifold of individual, supra-essential henads, treating this procession not as a simple passage from unity to multiplicity, but as a transition from one mode of unity to another. In a previous essay, I have discussed the difference between the modes of unity of the henads and of beings; the present essay argues that the Platonic Theology exhibits the emergence of the latter mode of unity from the former.

The beginning of the procession of Being cannot be from "the One", because there is, in a most important sense, no such thing: the first principle is not, in itself, a cause. The beginning, rather, is from the henads. This is why the Platonic Theology is a theology. The Gods constitute Being, and do so simply by virtue of being-Gods. The Platonic Theology is not therefore about the creation of the Gods, but about their nature, and how this nature determines the nature of Being. The aspect of the Gods from which the procession of Being begins, and which drives it throughout its several stages, I argue, is their individuality. That is, the meaning I propose for the statement that the procession of Being begins

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1 "Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold," Dionysius 23 (2005), 83-104.
from the One is that Being proceeds from individuality as such. The procession of the divine orders as presented in the Platonic Theology will lack a unifying logic so long as the procession of the divine orders from the One is seen as the genesis of the Gods from the One. Rather, the Platonic Theology is an account of the emergence of Being from the Gods, which is a passage from existence to essence, *huparxis* to *hupostasis*. Being emerges from an existing divine manifold through the objectification of the existential individuality primordially possessed by each God *qua* God, with each successive plane of Being reflecting a stage in the ordering, or *diakosmēsis*, of this divine manifold. This process begins in earnest in the Platonic Theology's third book, which concerns the intelligible Gods.

Being has a wide and a narrow sense in Proclus. In the wide sense, it refers to everything that is, excluding only the two kinds of nonbeing: privations, which fall short of existence, and the Gods, from whose superabundant existence Being radiates. In the narrow sense, Being refers to that in relation to which all other beings as beings orient themselves, the intelligible as such, and is distinguished therefore from Intellect, which thinks that which is, and from Life, the intellective medium connecting intellect and the intelligible. Being in this narrow sense has the structure of three triads, of which the first triad represents primary Being, Being *qua* Being as it were, while the second and third triads are Life and Intellect as implicit within Being, that is, Life and Intellect as modes of Being. In this way the structure of Being in the wide sense is explained by the structure of Being in the narrow sense. But what explains the differentiation of Being into just such modes of Being? For this, we must look to the first intelligible triad, which contains the nuclear structure of Being, so to speak.

The first intelligible triad is Limit, the Unlimited, and Mixture, the terms of the intellectual method Plato presents in the *Philebus*. Being is therefore in the most fundamental sense—which is at the same time the most universal sense because all the modes of Being unfold according to it—Limit, the Unlimited, and Mixture. But we can state it more narrowly, for Proclus explains that Being *per se* is the third moment, Mixture. And he is unequivocal that this means that Being is a product. For while the God "exhibits" [*deixai*] or "reveals" [*ekphainein*] Limit and the Unlimited, the God "makes" [*poiein*] the mixture through these two *archai* (*PT* III 9. 36.12-19). The significance of giving Being the status of a product is not lost on Damascius, who criticizes Proclus in this regard (*DP* III 109ff/R. I, 285); it is, indeed, one of the most profound differences between the two Platonic successors. For his own part, however, Proclus approaches the

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2 On the One as principle of indissociation in Plotinus, see recently A. Labecki, "The One and the Many: Part II: The Many," *Dionysius* 25 (2007), pp. 129-152.

3 Note that Damascius, in his commentary on the Parameides, characterizes the explanation of the triplicity of the intelligible (*to noëon*) by virtue of the triplicity of substance (*ousia*) as a "more theological" (*theologikōteros*) mode of explanation (*In Parm. 17. 4-6/R. II, 14).