

# Damascian Negativity

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The remarkable aporetic of the very notion of a first principle in the opening pages of Damascius' *magnum opus*, issuing in the positing of an absolutely negative primary pseudo-principle, has attracted more attention from modern scholars than any other aspect of Damascius' system. The present essay, however, is concerned neither with 'the Ineffable' as an impossible entity, nor with Damascius' supposed skepticism in positing it. Indeed, if there is a skeptical moment in Damascius, it is not upon this subject that one would be thrown, but upon *alterity*, upon theophany, upon the henads, the Gods giving themselves to Being, and if anything were to be lost to the abyss of ineffability, it would be our confident insight into *why* the Gods solicit our knowledge of Them.<sup>1</sup>

This essay argues that Damascius' 'Ineffable' makes explicit the Platonic logic of units already operative in the Proclean doctrine of henads, but in a fashion that clarifies the unique and aporetic position of the principle of individuation itself. But there is more to the Ineffable than this. Distributing the negativity of the first principle throughout the system itself, as Damascius does when he recognizes that each thing is ineffable in some respect, possessing the ineffability peculiar to itself, enacts the causality of this principle in every principle and on every plane of Being. The nature of the first principle distributes itself to every other, so that transcendence, for Damascius, comes to be understood as the crisis of totality, the impasse giving structure to the intelligible world. Furthermore, Damascius' doctrine regarding the first principle also clarifies the status of 'unparticipated' or 'imparticipable' as it pertains to the henads, resolving an

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1 Referring here to Damascius' statement that the Gods, through the intelligible intellect (the third intelligible triad), offer themselves to the intellect as "object of desire", rather than through conventional participation (*IP* I 19.23-5).

ambiguity in Proclus and identifying this property with the withdrawal from Being concomitant with the causal activity of the Gods. In turn, by explicitly according an unparticipated phase to the activity of the henads, Damascius also clarifies the ambiguous status in Proclus of the intelligible order of the Gods.

#### I. INEFFABILITY AND UNITY

The Damascian Ineffable must to some degree be grasped not so much as a discrete principle, but rather as expressing the absolute negativity of the One, principle of unity or individuation. Because it must bear the weight of the impossibility of reifying the principle of individuation as an individual or unit in its own right, in one respect 'the Ineffable' can scarcely be regarded as a principle in itself, and Damascius certainly does not encourage us to think of it in this fashion except heuristically. In another respect, however, it does function like a principle, with effects at every level of the procession of Being, for there is in each thing some ineffability (*DP* I 25.3).<sup>2</sup> In similar fashion, Proclus speaks of that which is ineffable in the nature of each being (*PT* II 8 56.20).<sup>3</sup> A particular aspect of this distributed ineffability is noted by Damascius (25.4-6): wherever there is *transcendence*, as of the One over Being, Being over Life, or Life over Intellect, the former is "more ineffable" than the latter. 'Ineffability', then, displays characteristics of the procession as a whole, with hierarchical and anti-hierarchical moments, just as the hierarchy of ontic principles is complemented by the direct constitution of each plane of being by its appropriate class of Gods.

Each thing is 'ineffable' in its uniqueness, which is essentially a refusal of the separability of attributes. Insofar as all of the attributes of a thing are treated as belonging solely to it, and hence as non-identical with similar attributes in any other, then

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2 *DP*: Citations of *De principiis* are by volume, page and line number in L.G. Westerink & J. Combès, *Damascius: Traité des Premiers Principes*, 3 vol. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986-1991).

3 *PT*: Citations of the *Platonic Theology* are by volume, chapter, page and line number in H.D. Saffrey & L.G. Westerink, *Proclus: Théologie platonicienne*, 6 vol. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968-1997).

that thing, no matter how complex in one regard, is absolutely simple or uniform in another. Insofar as knowledge and discourse require universal terms, this atomic individual is 'ineffable'. The correspondence between unity and ineffability is thus evident. In turn, some things are more ineffable than others. The lesser ineffability of the latter terms in the ontic chain is given simply inasmuch as the latter posit themselves *relative* to the former, this very relativity rendering them less ineffable. In this fashion, even if we were to evacuate all semantic content from the terms in the series, and thus render them all completely 'ineffable' ciphers, the simple successor relation would generate a diminishing 'ineffability' for the later terms in the series: if we can say nothing at all about A, about B we can say at least that it makes reference to A, and about C that it makes reference to A and B.

In this fashion the Ineffable embodies the very essence of the hierarchical relationships that Damascius frequently problematizes in the procession of Being. Thus one of the key insights in the aporetic of totality that opens the *De principiis* is that "the things that come *after* the principle are not, in the straightforward sense, 'all things'" (DP I 1.10-11)—that the *eminence* of a putatively totalizing principle vitiates the very totality of which it is to be the cause. (I shall have more to say about the status of 'totality' in particular in the second section of this essay.) Later in the text, Damascius determines that "nothing is composed of existence [*hyparxis*] and participation [in that *hyparxis*]" (DP II 41.15-16), inasmuch as this would render existence equivocal, analogous in one fashion to the matter of the composite, in another to its form. It is not only hylomorphic relationships about which Damascius is quite strict in this fashion, but any relationships involving hypostatized form, as can be seen, for example, in the discussion concerning "suspended" (*sunêrtêmenon*) substance near the beginning of the surviving portion of his commentary on the *Parmenides* (IP I 3-7), which relegates reversion upon form, in the strict sense, to infra-intellectual "channels" (*ochetoi*) (5.19-22).<sup>4</sup> The status of suspended

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4 IP: Citations of Damascius' Parmenides commentary are by volume,

substance relative to the henads is central to the recurring issue in Damascius concerning the relationship of ‘vehicle’ and ‘rider’ as applied to Being and the henads, respectively:

Should one say, along with the philosophers, that the intelligible is [constituted by] the One preceding and Being following, the latter co-unified with the former as much as possible? One ought to say that if they say this indeterminately [*adiakritôs*], then we agree, for [reciprocal] determination begins in [the hypostasis of] Life. But if they mean it in the sense that one is ridden, while the other rides, these [viz., rider and vehicle] are in any case distinguished from one another; but this [distinction] is peculiar to the Intellect, as they recognize, celebrating the reversion of Intellect upon itself [...] (DP III 126.14-21)

The philosophers in question are speaking indeterminately, in the sense of lacking precision, but as Damascius almost punningly points out, they are also speaking about the One and Being—that is, the henads, on the one hand, and the substances they ‘ride’ on the other—which initially lack reciprocal determinacy (*diakrisis*) in relation to one another. If the henads and Being cannot be reciprocally determined, as occurs first in the hypostasis of Life, with the emergence of intelligible-intellective ‘space’, then one may in any event establish a hierarchy of *indetermination* between the Gods and Being.

The inability to encompass hierarchical relationships in an overarching intelligible structure determines Damascius’ conception of the relationship between the elements in the Mixed. Damascius considers, but rejects, at least in certain respects, considering the Mixed or radical Being as an assemblage or ‘syzygy’ (*syzeuxis*) of cause and effect, like that of craftsman and tool, or paradigm and image, for “such an assemblage consists only in a certain type of relation [*schesis*], not in a coordination according to substance [*syntaxis kat’ousian*]” (DP II 47.14-18). The specific relevance of this insight to the Mixed will be discussed further below. What matters at this point is Damascius’ persistent recognition that these relationships, in the last analysis, can be hierarchical or they can be intelligible, but

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page and line number in L.G. Westerink, J. Combès & A. Ph. Segonds, *Damascius: Commentaire du Parménide de Platon*, 4 vol. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997-2003).

they cannot be both. This is why they are traced back ultimately to a principle that is eminent, but absolutely negative in character.

'Ineffability', then, is transcendence generally: the transcendence of each thing in its uniqueness, which is a transcendence relative to *everything else*, and the *particular* transcendences relative to a hierarchical—and hence ontic—organization. But ineffability is so closely tied to unity that Damascius rejects the notion of a distinct *participatory* structure for the Ineffable, rejecting in particular "that every God is ineffable before [being] one, the way [s/he] is one prior to [being] substance" (*DP* I 26.1-2). Ineffability thus appears as a dependent moment of unity (individuality) as such; why, then, treat it separately?

For Proclus, too, ineffability is peculiarly associated with supra-essential, henadic unity. Thus, in a discussion of the functions of the three intelligible triads, which "mystically announce the completely unknown causality of unparticipated primary deity" (*PT* III 14 50.16-18), Proclus explains that the first triad announces "the ineffable unity of it", the second its "preeminence over all powers", and the third its "engendering the totality of beings" (50.18-20). These three functions explicate the three moments of the first intelligible triad: Limit or Existence (*hyparxis*); Power; and Mixture or Intellect. They also, however, announce the specific transcendence of the supra-essential henadic individual with respect to each of these moments. The henad, as ineffable unity, transcends determinacy (limit), as well as two forms of totality: the relational continuum of powers or divine attributes, and the totality of beings as constituted by the *expression* of divine powers. Ineffability is also linked to unity in Proclus' account of the relationship between the first principle and the third moment of the first intelligible triad, the Mixed, which parallels the relationship between the henad as operative first principle and the three intelligible triads, while also expressing the cooperating causality of ontic principles: the Mixed, which is the root of Being, "has first, from the God, participation in ineffable unity and in a universal hypostasis", while it "draws from Limit existence, uniformity, and

a stable character [*monimon idiotêta*],<sup>5</sup> and “from the Unlimited, power and the latent presence of all things in it” (PT III 9 37.23-28).

In the systematic interpretation of the Proclean intelligible triads, as I have explicated it at length elsewhere, each intelligible triad is a dimension of henadic activity, an interpretation which follows from the fact that the henads operate all the causality attributable to the One.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, one should understand “primary and unparticipated deity” (PT III 14 50.17-18) as a *phase of divinity*, that is, of the Gods as such, rather than hypostatize it as a “first God”. Hence, Proclus speaks at *In Parm.* 1049<sup>7</sup> of unparticipated multiplicities among those dependent upon each henad, and props. 161, 163 and 164 of the *Elements of Theology* specify unparticipated Being, Intellect, and Soul respectively as participants of the appropriate classes of Gods. Damascius would evidently refrain from reifying a discrete unparticipated deity as such; instead, he speaks universally of unparticipated henads. Proclus does not speak in this fashion, though he and Damascius share, I would claim, common intentions. Damascius does not seem, at any rate, to wish to treat this as an entirely novel doctrine: “The *unparticipated henads* are completely united with the participated henads, which is why we call the same ones now participated, now unparticipated, on account of the wholly inexpressible and indistinguishable unity [of them]” (IP I.2.17-20).

Damascius may not have felt that he was necessarily in conflict with Proclus on this point, though *prima facie* Proclus does not

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5 See further below on the *idiotês*, the character peculiar (*idios*) to each henad, as the henad’s primary activity or product, with the *idiotês* of each class of being that participates the henad, insofar as these are *general* characters, as subsequent and derivative activities.

6 The One is not a creator or producer and is superior to causality (PT II 9 57.16-17; 59.14-16, 24), and the positive corollary of this is that the three primary modes of causality all subsist in the intelligible Gods (60.26-28), that is, in the three intelligible triads, which express the causal activity of all Gods as such.

7 In order to avoid confusion with Damascius’ *Parmenides* commentary (IP), references to Proclus’ will use *In Parm.* They refer to page numbers in the Greek text and, where necessary, line numbers in Steel’s edition (2007-9). Translations are from Morrow and Dillon 1987.

permit of “unparticipated henads”.<sup>8</sup> In a context where Proclus feels it important to stress the autonomy of the henads, he can speak ambiguously, as at *IT* III 204.18-21, when he speaks twice of encosmic Gods who are “unparticipated”. Editors have sought to clarify, plausibly enough, that he means here only unparticipated by bodies; but in any case it is clear that Proclus speaks as he does out of a concern to elevate Gods who, he stresses, although possessing a “vehicle” (*ochêma*, 204.9) or “icon” (*agalma*, 6), are nevertheless each in themselves “indivisible and one” (8). These are Gods posited somewhat provocatively as like us: “For if with respect to us, the human is twofold, one within, <existing> according to the soul, the other shining forth, which we see, much more must both these be asserted of the encosmic Gods; the God in them being twofold, one unseen, and the other appearing” (204.10-13). These are Gods who, exceptionally, are at once truly Gods and truly participants, whereas strictly speaking Gods do not *participate* anything (*ET* prop. 118; *IT* I, 364). Accordingly, the demiurge, speaking to the encosmic Gods, “calls them Gods of Gods, as being participated by other, visible Gods” (204.21-3). It is in effect because the encosmic Gods have a part of them which truly participates, which is truly ontic (viz. *ousia*, 9), that it is appropriate as well in a certain respect to say that part of them is *unparticipated*, even without qualification, as a causal negation of the participation in their nature, and as a function of the extremes embodied in the nature of the encosmic Gods, in the ranks of which a God might in effect worship another who is in this sense “God of a God”.

Elsewhere the issue of the relationship between the henads and the unparticipated seems for Proclus to involve a certain complementarity. At *IT* II 122.3-8, he speaks of “the series of the Gods”, prior to which is “the unparticipated henad, from which this series discloses itself.” One might assume that Proclus refers here to the reified One as the sole ‘unparticipated henad’, but

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8 Van Riel 2017 speaks twice of “unparticipated henads” in Proclus (pp. 91, 92) without offering textual support for what must be regarded as a strong claim. Cf. Van Riel 2010, p. 682, which appears, albeit somewhat ambiguously, to affirm the same position. See the discussion below.

this is rendered ambiguous when he goes on to state that “It is necessary that there be unparticipated prior to participated forms, and prior to the unparticipated *the henads of these*”, which seems to express that henads are, by nature, prior to the unparticipated as such, which would have the corollary that they possess the property of imparticipability in a prior sense, as causes of that state of being. By explicitly stating that the same henads are in one respect participated, and in another respect unparticipated, Damascius acts to clarify what he could well have recognized as a potential source of misunderstanding in Proclus’ free use of formalizations regarding the first principle: Damascius wishes to affirm that “unparticipated deity” pertains to a phase of the activity of *each henad*, and not to some other entity.

There is further support for reading Damascius’ intervention here as clarification more than innovation in *ET* prop. 23, in which Proclus affirms that “all participated hypostases are linked by upward tension to unparticipated existences [*hyparxeis*].”<sup>9</sup> In Proclus the opposition between *hypostasis* and *hyparxis* denotes the opposition between the realm of being and the supra-essential generally; but as “Every God is participated, except for the One” (prop. 116), the participation beings enjoy in the henads is not incompatible with an unparticipated dimension to the Gods’ existential nature. Prop. 123 explains more fully that “All that is divine is itself ineffable and unknown by anything secondary because of its supra-essential unity, but conceived [*lêpton*] and known [*gnôston*] through its participants; hence only the First [Principle] is completely unknown, being unparticipated.” The One’s ineffability and imparticipability here is a characteristic of divinity distributed among all the henads as well; but whereas the henads are known in one respect and unknown in another, the One is unknown as such. Each henad is unknown because of that ineffable individuality in which all of the attributes by which the henad is known partake immediately of the same

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9 *ET*: Citations of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* are to proposition number in E.R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), translations occasionally modified.



uniqueness as the total henadic individual; the One Itself, on the other hand, is unknown because *there is nothing to it*, it has no formal content because it does not produce any, except just insofar as *units* produce, or simply *are*, such content themselves. That is, the grounding of intelligibility in 'the One' is nothing other than its grounding in the positivity of units, of unitary existents themselves. And this is what it means for a henad to be participated, namely, to produce what is knowable about it. Instead of treating 'imparticipability' as a sort of vain eminence attributed to a reified One Itself, we need thus to understand the *reasons* why something is unparticipated, in some respect or absolutely.

Damascius resorts to the un-Proclean formulation of "unparticipated henads" in order to disambiguate the status of the quasi-class of "intelligible Gods": "Connascent with the simply-one and first cause of all things is engendered the multiplicity that is unparticipated and as similar to it as can be, namely the intelligible genus of the Gods ... the latent organization [*diakosmon*]" (DP III 107.15-20), to which compare Proclus' formulation, in which "the intelligible genus of the Gods transcends unitarily [*heniaiôds*] all the other divine orders [*diakosmôn*] ... It transcends both universal and particular intelligibles and preexists all objects of intellection as an unparticipated and divine intelligible" (PT III 28.100.4-11). Damascius, more succinctly, will refer to the henads' "ineffable plurality" (IP IV 71.13-14). The reason for the peculiar status of the ultimate, intelligible 'class' of Gods is that, as Damascius well recognizes, the One is not a monad participated by the henads, which would yield the normative class structure of a monad and its participating manifold, but is instead 'connascent' (*syngenes*) with them. This is the very sense of 'unitary' transcendence: the intelligible 'class' of Gods is not some class in addition to the other classes of Gods, it is the 'class' of each God *as herself immediately the All*. Damascius, by treating the 'unparticipated' nature of this quasi-class distributively, clarifies the nature of unitary transcendence as such, and makes certain, in addition, that we cannot mistake his 'unparticipated henads' for a further class of Gods by stating explicitly that the same henads are

sometimes called participated, sometimes unparticipated.

Eric Perl has argued, in sympathy with an interpretation of the henadology going back to Trouillard, that the henads should be effectively reduced to the beings participating them, to the event or experience of their participants.<sup>10</sup> This interpretation, which depends upon the notion that “an unparticipated henad would not be a henad, but would be just ‘the One itself’”, would be rendered impossible if the notion of unparticipated henads in Damascius is anything but a clear break with Proclus. If the latter doctrine can be understood in any way as merely *explicating* Proclus, then the idea that henads are only individuated by their participants, rather than possessing a supra-essential mode of individuation—which would upend Proclus’ system, treating effects as the causes of their own causes—would be indefensible. Now, as remarked in a footnote above, Gerd Van Riel has affirmed in two recent publications the continuity between Proclus and Damascius with respect to unparticipated henads. But there are ambiguities with Van Riel’s account, beyond the simple question of clarifying the basis for attributing an unparticipated phase to Proclus’ henads, which would seem to require something akin to the subtle arguments I have offered above.

First, though removing in this fashion the linchpin of the interpretation according to which the henads are reducible to their participants, Van Riel still affirms that “they are distinguished as ‘henads’ on the basis of their effects, i.e., the classes of being that depend on each of them” (Van Riel 2010, 682). Second, the doctrinal change Van Riel does acknowledge in Damascian henadology, namely the change in the understanding of the procession of the henads and their constitution of Being away from what Damascius terms as the idea that the henads ‘ride’ upon Being as a vehicle (*ochêma*), has the effect, in Van Riel’s view, that the “specification” of the henad is no longer “given by the specific being upon which the henad rides”, but rather

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10 Perl 2010, 180f.

that the specificities of the beings that depend on a henad are not the result of the element of 'being' in the combination (the henad in itself remaining identical with the One), but they are caused by the previous One-Being as such. If, for instance, the material gods (which is a class of the encosmic, sublunary gods) operate in matter, then their characteristic of being 'material' is not derived from the being on which they operate (as Proclus would have it), but from their very own characteristic as a henad. For everywhere in reality, every characteristic stems from the divinity ... So it is the henad that brings forth the characteristic of being, and not vice versa, the being that specifies the nature of the henad. (683)

In this fashion, Van Riel attributes to Damascius alone the view that—if we accept along with Van Riel that the henads are, for Proclus as well, both unparticipated and participated—we would in fact have to attribute to Proclus also.

Prop. 116 of the *Elements of Theology* is cited as demonstrating that the henads are in effect events of their participants. It is not difficult to discern in this reading a modern predisposition to view religious experience, not with respect to its *objects*, but primarily as a type of *subjective* experience. But just what are the 'participants' in question in this proposition? Proclus argues that the unity in the henad is participated by what is not-one *in it* (22-3), and therefore what we are speaking of in the first place when we speak of the henads being participated, is that participation *internal to each henad* whereby the God, who is 'self-complete' (*autoteles*) *qua* God (23-5), creates for herself, first and foremost, her own identity; for as we read in prop. 131, "Every God begins his characteristic activity with himself" and "has established first in its own nature the peculiarity [*idiotêta*] of its bestowals."<sup>11</sup> No position that we take relative to this

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11 I have modified Dodds' translation here to make clear that what he translates as the 'distinctive character' of the henad's 'bestowals' is the technical term *idiotês*, which Proclus explicitly treats as irreducible either to *heterotês*, 'difference' or to *diakrisis*, 'distinction': "the individuality [*idiotês*] of each of them [the henads] is a much more perfect thing than the otherness [*heterotês*] of the Forms" (*In Parm.* 1048.18-19); "the primal henads and their communion with and distinction from one another, of which we are wont to call the one peculiarity [*idiotês*], the other unity [*henôsin*], distinguishing them thus also by name from the sameness and difference manifested at the level of Real Being" (1049.24-26). Morrow and Dillon translate *idiotês* here as 'particularity', but this is both etymologically and systematically misleading, inasmuch as *mereology* is precisely definitive for Proclus of the ontic, as opposed to the supra-essential

proposition, then, is going to accomplish the desired disappearance of the many Gods in a single Godhead. Indeed, prop. 116 concludes with the ringing affirmation that “Every God is thus participated” (26-7), not ‘Every God except the One’. And it is this moment of henadic *self-production* where Damascius makes his fundamental and unambiguous intervention in Proclus’ system, by demanding that we see in this product, the ‘Mixed’ or ‘Mixture’ that is the third moment of the first intelligible triad, not the transition from the supra-essential and henadic to the ontic, but a third supra-essential moment in the articulation of the existential henadic individual. Just as the individuality of each henad is secured by Damascius prior to procession by explicitly affirming an unparticipated phase for it, so too *within* the very procession of being Damascius wishes to ensure that we understand that the primary participation of the henad is not the participation of beings in an ontic class property, but the presence to Being of a unique, positive individual.

Instead of continuing to pursue monotheistic apologetics through the interpretation of polytheistic Platonists, it is high time that we recognize and appreciate the value of the extraordinary metaphysics of individuality which is being worked out between Proclus and Damascius. Perl worries that if the henads are individuals prior to participation by beings—and he explicitly means here the classes of beings, not the primordial ontic ‘footprint’, so to speak, of the henad *qua* being (and, indeed, Being)—that it will “undermine not only the coherence of Proclus’ system by regarding the Gods as individuals prior to being participated, but also the rational coherence of reality itself, by making being dependent on a merely ‘given’, ‘factual’ multiplicity of First Principles” (183). But he does not recognize that the dialectic immanent to henadic individuality supplies the sufficient ground of Proclus’ metaphysics,<sup>12</sup> and that, moreover, should we abandon this ground, there is no other or better one to be put in its place. Rather, we shall merely narrow the scope of Platonic metaphysics,

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domain (*ET* prop. 66).

12 See the account of the unfolding of this dialectic in the reading of Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* Books III, IV, and V in Butler 2008, 2010, and 2012.

ceding any grasp whatsoever of positive individuation. One must ask, again, whether there is not a trace here of the motive to secure for Christianity alone and originally the salvation of the individual as such, leaving philosophy bereft of any purchase upon what is not form or species? On Perl's preferred interpretation, there will be nothing inscrutable about a God, reduced to a mere type; and correspondingly, no ineffable uniqueness to anything, just repeatable form, on the one hand, and noise, on the other.

Unity is linked to ineffability for Proclus and Damascius alike because the inability to isolate and abstract any attribute or property from the matrix of the unique henadic individual affords no formal grasp of these individuals, *only* existential presence. In this respect, the most systematically fruitful designation of ineffability in Proclus may be his characterization of the manner in which the Forms are derived from the divine classes as "unknown and ineffable to us" (*IP* 803.13-14). Between the orders of theurgic *symbola* or *synthêmata*, the "symbols" or "tokens" constituted by the activity of unique deities,<sup>13</sup> on the one hand, and the order of concepts constituted by the activity of dialectic, on the other, there is a transitional moment Proclus finds relatively opaque. This opacity, little remarked upon in Proclus, becomes strongly thematic in Damascius, who strives to theorize it from every possible side, and to pursue it to its most primordial basis.<sup>14</sup>

## II. INEFFABILITY AND TOTALITY

Another aspect of the aporetic which opens the *De principiis* is its critique, based upon established principles of Proclean metaphysics, of the notion of a *totalizing* principle as such. Damascius here pursues radical consequences that are, however, implicit in Proclus' doctrine of the henads as a totality of unique, and hence

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13 Note, in this respect, that the "ineffability" of *ET* prop. 123 extends beyond the Gods to things merely "divine" (*theia*), i.e., beings taken into relationship with the Gods, but which are surely knowable in some other respect. The Apis bull, for example, may be "ineffable" with respect to his deity, but would be knowable with respect to his bovinity.

14 See further on this Butler 2013.

untotalizable, individuals, and henadology is thus indispensable to understanding the proper significance of Damascius' dialectic.

Damascius' dialectic results in a totality which can neither be understood as the product of a singular principle, and hence inferred from that principle, even for an ideal knower; nor as the mere effect of all things, with a collapse into empiricism and relativism. Instead, totality must be grasped through the irreducible process of emergence, within the unitary manifold of the henads, of the immanent ontological principle of unification, and beyond this, of the intellective and finally psychical power of reflection upon this cosmogonic process.

Damascius' dialectic of totality in this fashion takes in a wider scope than the concept of totality in Proclus, which has a narrower intension than the concept of wholeness.<sup>15</sup> Proclus thus subordinates totality to the integrity of the henadic individual presented as intelligible object, leaving the totality of the system itself ambiguously determined. Damascius takes the bull by the horns, and renders explicit the system's grounding in a divine process in which factual divine subjects actively objectify *themselves*.

Damascius begins his inquiry with the problem of totality, specifically, its relation to *principle*. *Ta panta*, 'all things', are not presented at the outset as problematic, and so his problem is not whether, or why, there is something rather than nothing, but rather the integrity of totality, by virtue of which we say *to p̄n*, the All. Indeed, whereas Proclus preferentially uses *to p̄n* in discussing the determination of totality, which emerges through the intellective activity of the Gods (i.e., in the third intelligible triad), Damascius shows a marked preference for *ta panta*. This terminological choice echoes in turn in his characterization of the second principle in the first intelligible triad, which is for Proclus either the unlimited (*apeiron*) or power (*dynamis*), as 'the many

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15 One of the few real infelicities of the otherwise excellent translations of Damascius' corpus by Combès and Westerink is the failure to render consistently the technical distinction between forms of *holos* and of *pas*, admittedly difficult in French.

(things)', *ta polla*, in preference to the singular terms. Proclus, by contrast, in his discussion in the *Platonic Theology* (PT III 20 67-73), while drawing on the *Sophist* (245a-d), which uses both terms, uses exclusively *to pān*. Nor does Proclus avail himself here of *pantotês*, 'totality', though he frequently uses *holotês*, 'wholeness', to refer to the determination characteristic of the second intelligible triad (the activity of the intelligible-intellective Gods).

Damascius, for his part, while largely eschewing *to pān*, does use *pantotês* in a context (DP I 1.14) that helps to elucidate his choice: "Nothing therefore manifests itself outside of all things; for totality [*pantotês*] is a certain boundary [*horos*] and a comprehension [*perilêpsis*] as well, in which the principle is the upper limit, while what comes last from the principle is the lower limit; all things therefore are with the(ir) limits [*meta tōn peratōn*]," (1.13-16). 'Totality', then, is a quality possessed by *ta panta*, all things, but because the principle is *among* all things, it cannot secure the unity of *to pān*. What secures the unity of totality, rather, is a *reflection* or *intention*, *ennoêsis*, in which the principle is immanent: "The many beings of which there is a single coordination, these we call 'all things'; so that the principle too is among all things. And in general we call 'all things' *simpliciter* whatever we conceive [*ennooumen*] in any fashion, and we conceive the principle as well" (2.3-6). We find this association between *to pān* and *ennoêsis* again below: "All things are seen somehow at once in multiplicity [*en plêthei*] and in a certain distinction [*en tini diakrisei*], for indeed we do not conceive [*ennooumen*] the All [*to pān*] without these" (2.21-23). The references to *ennoêsis*, however, should not lead us to think that totality is dependent upon *human* intentionality. Damascius surely has in mind the relationship between the demiurge and the paradigm as presented by Proclus, who says of the totality (*to pān*) in the third intelligible triad that "It is looking upon [*apoblepôn*] this that the demiurge of the All [*pān*] organizes the sensible All, determining the visible <All> by means of that intelligible All, and <organizing> time according to intelligible wholeness", i.e., the second intelligible triad (PT III 20 72.25-73.3). This cognitive gaze of a God upon another God is

the primordial divine relationship, and establishes the reciprocal space in which mediated intellectualive multiplicity proceeds.

The synoptic unity of the All, *to pān*, therefore, is always dependent upon some *disposition* of a manifold. Note, in this regard, that ‘all things’, *ta panta*, is not an infinity: “And ‘all things’ would be a delimited many [*polla ... peperasmena*]; for all things would not exactly be *infinite* things [*ta apeira*]” (1.11-13). There are two basic types of manifold, according to Damascius, which we may characterize as diacritical / differential, on the one hand, and radical plurality, on the other. Damascius proceeds to explain (2.23-3.2) that the unified or monad is at the head of the diacritical or differential—that is, the intellectualive—organization, while the One is at the head of the Many, *ta polla*, which is synonymous with the ‘multiplicity’ of the previous passage, and that the One is simpler than the monad. Totality, then, cannot be simplified beyond the distinction between the henadic and ontic domains, the former corresponding to the radical multiplicity of *ta polla*, the many henads constituting the polycentric manifold, and the latter to the differential, mediated multiplicity of passive subjects of unity, unified entities (*hênômena*). The totality that lies beyond this distinction is *anarchos* and *anaitios*, without principle or cause (2.11-12); Damascius establishes as its pseudo-principle the Ineffable, which “one must call neither principle, nor cause, nor first, nor prior to all things, nor beyond all things, and scarcely then must one proclaim it to *be* all things; nor, in short, must one proclaim it, conceive it, or conjecture it at all” (4.15-18).

The critical moment for the relationship between totality (*to pān*) and all things (*ta panta*), comes with the following argument: “Everything [*pān*] must be either principle, or from principle; and so all things [*ta panta*] are either principle or from principle” (2.12-14). But it cannot be the case that all things are from a principle, because the principle not being included among the totality, the totality is not totality, and therefore the principle is no principle—or at any rate, it is not a totalizing principle. Nor can it be the case that “something would proceed from all things as from a principle ... as the product of all things” (2.16-18). So all things can neither



be principle, nor be from principle, nor, as a corollary, can one reason from *to pân* to *ta panta*. Absolute totality cannot possess the unity of a cause, or of an effect, and so in a certain respect, it fails to signify at all. But what is the consequence of the failure of the inference from *to pân* to *ta panta*, from the necessary characteristics of each individual to the necessary characteristics of *all of them*, as a collective? We could only expect to apply such an inference to individuals each of whom *adequately expresses* the totality, among whom, that is, one does not treat some as causes and some as effects.

Such a totality, in fact, could only be the totality of henads, or perfect individuals; and this is the key to the whole opening problematic of Damascius' work. The proper totality, the only one which can truly consist of *all things*, can only ever be all things taken now in this fashion, now in that fashion: "When we simplify all our thought in regard to all things, we will not categorize all things in the same fashion, but in at least three ways, in a unitary mode [*heniaiôs*], in a unified mode [*hênômenôs*], and in a multiplied mode [*peplêthusmenôs*], thus from one and with respect to one [*aph'henos kai pros hen*], as we customarily say" (3.14-18). The Aristotelian structure of *pros hen* equivocation is applied here to the modes of totalization, so that the focal mode is *unitary totalization*. 'Unitary' is a technical term applying always to the henads; hence, this mode of totalization refers to positing totality in the manner of the polycentric henadic manifold, in which all terms are contained in each term, but there is no single term that totalizes the set for all. The 'unified' mode of totality, by contrast, refers to the ontic totality, the totality composed of Being and beings, and it has a monocentric structure. The 'multiplied' mode, as we saw above, can be collapsed into the 'unified' mode as its dependency, but Damascius treats it here as irreducibly separate, most likely because he privileges the Unified as the site of the procession of Real Being (*to ontôs on*) in immediate conjunction with henadic activity, such that it is only with the emergence of diacritical, intellectual being that the purely ontic hypostasis is achieved. This purely ontic multiplicity is termed by him 'multiplied' because in it all multiplicity is treated as produced from abstract unity, chiefly as declined from

forms. Hence, it is 'multiplied' from some 'unified', that is, from an ontic hypostasis. There is no principle for the production of the unitary or henadic manifold from an abstract unity.

Henads are the only kind of entities that can embrace totality, because all the other henads, and all of Being as well, subsist in *each* henad. They are the only entities who could, so to speak, stand in for everything, for the universe, and allow it to be determined through them, grasped through them, the only entities for whom one could, in principle, reason from the characteristics of *every one of some specific kind* to the character of *all things together, as such*.<sup>16</sup> If the characteristics of henadic multiplicity are not sufficient to determine the totality, then it must remain, in the ultimate sense, undetermined.

Damascius begins from what Proclus has provided, and Proclus has not provided a determinacy of henadic totality as such. For Proclus, the totality belonging to each henad is supra-essential, that is, pre-ontic; but the *determination* of totality arises in the third intelligible triad, which is an intellectual God.<sup>17</sup> It arises, therefore, as part of a discrete organization, a *particular* ontology. The intellectual plane, the plane of the eidetic as such, is the site of an eidetic reduction which is the goal or *telos* of the activity of the Gods on this plane—as too is the very being of the *teleological*, the formally goal-directed. It is here, in other words, that the circle of speculative thought closes, where the emergence of universality from the existential-factual is enacted. But it is enacted between two deities belonging explicitly to the same pantheon, that is, to the same intelligible-intellectual continuum.<sup>18</sup> Demiurge and Paradigm thus belong to a common totality, but a totality that is narrower in scope than the divinity of each. This can already be deduced from Proclus' account, but Damascius makes it explicit: there is no expressible totality of *all the Gods*, totality being expressible solely through *each one*.

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16 The henads are thus the only possible *homoioimerous* constituents of the totality. On *homoioimerous* and *anhomoioimerous* procession in Damascius, see Butler 2013.

17 Cf. Butler 2012.

18 On the nature of intelligible-intellectual multiplicity, see Butler 2010.

In stating the problem that “Everything [*pān*] must be either principle, or from principle; and so all things [*ta panta*] are either principle or from principle” (2.12-14), Damascius shows that a simple (i.e., pre-intellective) totality of all the Gods cannot serve as an expression of the unity of all things, and therefore that there is no simple unity of all things either. For either we conceive the henads purely as principles, and then we cannot say what they have produced *all together*, henadic production being either singular, in the sense that each God has produced all things, or, in the intellective organization, in determinate configurations, as, for example, the things that we may say the Olympians have done together, or some subset of them, as when Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades divide the Kronian sovereignty. Or if we conceive the henads all as coming from some principle—i.e., the reified ‘One Itself’—then they are not a totality in any case, but merely a manifold constituted by the activity of some discrete principle, and this simply leads to the twofold disposition of totality (2.24-3.2), or the threefold disposition (3.17), for if we do not accept the focalized polycentric totality, then there is no getting around the opposition between a principle and its effects, once we have reduced this opposition to its most elemental, namely the unified and the principle of unity. And no set of entities will be better candidates, for everything after the henads has a more complex relation to principle.

The dialectic of totality in Damascius also determines his notion of infinity in the sense of the “infinite multiplicity” (*apeiron plēthos*) of the *Parmenides* (143a2). Damascius speaks of this infinite multiplicity as “infinite because it has no limit that is not manifold, but is everywhere [*pantachou*] many, only without the *every*-where, for it is rather in *many* places [*pollachou*]; nor is the in-many-places something other in relation to the many <things> alone” (II 209.23-210.2). The infinite, like totality, is in this fashion subordinated to ‘the many <things>’, *ta polla*, which is the radical but finite multiplicity of the henads. Thus “The Many <things> are the all <things> [*ta panta*] of the One, themselves also accomplishing the hypostasis of such a one, as do the parts of a whole, or the elements of something having elements” (II 207.22-208.1). The ‘Many’ are

the totality belonging to some one, that is, some unit conceived holistically, a relationship which resembles, but is not identical to, that pertaining to parts of a whole or elements of a 'unified' being.

The only true example of this sort of multiplicity is the henads, for all of the henads are 'in' each, but clearly not like parts of a whole or like essential constituents, for we cannot *deduce* the rest of the Gods from any one, though we may indeed in a very different sense *experience* all the Gods in each one, in the one-to-one of the highest devotion, when we, coming to be alone, associate with the deity as herself solitary (*IT* I, 212). This inclusion which is yet not inherence is, as we have seen, the ultimate totality for Damascius, insofar as he countenances one. This included totality is present in the henad as a continuum of powers, because the totality of henads is the potency of each: "How then can the One and the Many <things> be a single nature? Because *the* Many [*to polla*, singular, instead of *ta polla*, plural] is the infinite power [*apeirodunamon*] of the One ... the all <things> is an all-embracing act of the One" (III 136.22-24). The unity of the Many things lies solely in the presence of all of them in each one, not in a totalizing one—hence we must be speaking, in the strict sense, of the many henads, for this is exactly the structure of the henadic manifold. Damascian ineffability is based upon that in henadic individuality which resists intellectual appropriation, or what we may appropriately term 'totalization'. When Damascius says that the all is simply an all-embracing *act* of the One, he means of *any one thing*—this, he explains, is how unity and totality can be one nature, and this is the *only* way.

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