

Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold

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In his 1918 book *The Neo-Platonists*,¹ Thomas Whittaker rejected the notion that the doctrine of the henads was merely “an attempt to find a more definite place for polytheism than was marked out in the system of Plotinus,” and approved of the effort “to find in it a more philosophical meaning” (173), remarking that already in his day “much has been written upon the question, what the henads of Proclus really mean,” (ibid). And yet, despite the explosion of interest in recent decades in Neoplatonism and in later antiquity generally, interest in the henadology, particularly interest in its “meaning,” has been lacking, as measured both by the relative paucity of literature on the henads, as well as by the tone of much that has been written. I will discuss at the end of this essay what I regard as the constructive trends in the previous literature on the henads, after I have presented my own reading of some of what I regard as the most important primary texts. In the first place, however, I wish to isolate the tendencies which I believe to have obstructed progress in understanding the doctrine.

The first is the tendency to overlook unique logical and structural characteristics of the henadic manifold which set it apart from any *ontic* manifold. If a logic really distinct from that applying to beings applies to supra-essential entities, the henads shall no longer seem, as they otherwise might, a mere structural complement within the system. One would see, in short, the *work* the henads do. The whole concept of the supra-essential or “existential,” that which lies beyond Being, would thus acquire true content, whereas otherwise it might seem mere hyperbole or obscurantism.

The contemporary understanding of the henadology has also been hindered by the inability of commentators to integrate the doctrine’s theological and philosophical dimensions. The henads are also the Gods; and this has caused inexplicable problems for commentators who would not, to put it bluntly, find it so difficult to accept the interplay and interdependence of philosophy and theology in a monotheistic philosopher, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim. In such a case, one would recognize the constructive

1. *The Neo-Platonists: A Study in the History of Hellenism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1918).

contribution that the problem of rationally articulating a religious position could make to a philosopher's thought; one would not see the philosopher in question as merely engaged in special pleading. An implicit assumption for many commentators with respect to the henadology seems to be the following: if the identity of the henads and the Gods is to be taken seriously, then the philosophical significance of the henads must be minimal, while if their philosophical significance is to be affirmed, then their identity with the Gods must be a mere concession to vulgar opinion, even if the vulgar opinion is Proclus' own. Upon either alternative, the *integration* of the philosophical and theological dimensions of the henadology is ruled out from the start. This dichotomy is already present in Whittaker, who explicitly opposes the theological and philosophical readings of the doctrine, and remains the dominant theme in the literature.²

Nor have modern commentators interested in the "mystical" elements of Neoplatonism, as has been the case particularly among Francophone scholars such as Jean Trouillard, in general advanced the understanding of the henadology.³ The intrinsic value Proclus accords to the specific identities, names and natures of the traditional Gods of his own and other nations is awkward for the mystic, who would find common ground with the rationalist in their disdain for the belief in Gods and Goddesses as divine individuals who are not the masks, aspects or potencies of anything—not, in short, *whats* but *whos*. Between the mystic's beatific dissolution of all otherness and the rationalist's reduction of individuals to accidents of the *infima species*, there is no room for an appreciation of the polytheist's experience of wonder at the existence of unique divine individuals.

What is the source of the presupposition that the function of the henadology cannot be both apologetic *and* systematic? One could attribute it simply to the difficulty modern commentators have often had taking the classical paganism of the West seriously (and, in fact, non-Western religions to the degree that they resemble classical paganism). A habit of long standing sees the development of philosophy in the West as inextricably tied to a

2. A.C. Lloyd, for example, in his "Procession and Division in Proclus," in *Soul and the Structure of Being in Late Neoplatonism: Syrianus, Proclus and Simplicius*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and A.C. Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool U Press, 1982) attributes to "critics of the henads" the position that "their identification with traditional gods is built into the theory" (36f), reflexively assuming that the theological dimension of the theory must operate at the expense of its philosophical integrity.

3. For the history of the French retrieval of Neoplatonism in the last century I am indebted to Wayne J. Hankey's exhaustive survey in *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History* (Peeters, forthcoming), a revised translation and extension of his *Cent Ans De Néoplatonisme En France: Une Brève Histoire Philosophique*, Collection Zêtêsis (Paris/Québec: J. Vrin/Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004), and to Prof. Hankey for pointing out the necessity of taking separate account of the Francophone scholarship.

progressive estrangement from paganism. This view features in a particular metanarrative regarding the spiritual history of the West and of the world. To trace the history of this metanarrative and criticize the notions upon which it rests is not the task of this essay. Let it suffice to say that within this metanarrative polytheism is something any connection to which could only taint Proclus, and that this metanarrative makes itself felt nearly as much in the proponents of a “mystical” reading of Neoplatonism as those who prefer a “rationalist” reading.

It is not merely a delicacy with respect to exposing the prejudices of previous generations of scholars which urges forbearance in pursuing the matter from this viewpoint, however, for this metanarrative does not suffice by itself to explain the complex of assumptions which have prevented an integrated understanding of the henadology. It is a more likely as well as a more charitable supposition that the roots of the incapacity to integrate its philosophical and theological dimensions lie rather in the first problem I outlined, namely the failure to recognize a special logic of supra-essential existence in Proclus. For it is not merely a question of a reflexive cultural bias privileging monotheism, but beyond this, of a logic of unity and multiplicity for which intelligibility can only come at the cost of reducing multiplicity to unity and the diverse to the same. A fresh investigation of the potential function of the henadology within a polytheistic economy has therefore something to offer above and beyond the progressive emancipation from archaic prejudices. Polytheism is a theological position uniquely suited to stimulate novel solutions to philosophical problems concerning the logic of unity and multiplicity, for if the polytheist wishes to take full advantage of a conceptual apparatus, such as Neoplatonic logic, that inherently privileges unity over multiplicity, without at the same time compromising his/her theological position, s/he must fashion out of the concepts of unity and multiplicity instruments subtle enough to be applied within a polytheistic framework without doing it violence. In this article, I wish to show how approaching the henadology in this way can, in fact, shed light on the doctrine’s most recondite aspects, in particular by stressing the value of the henads’ *individuality*.

In his *Platonic Theology*, Proclus states that “all that have ever touched upon theology have called things first according to nature, Gods; and have said that the theological science concerns these.”⁴ He goes on to explain that since, for some, what ranks first is the corporeal, the Gods are for such as these a certain kind of body. Proclus intends the Stoics here. Others, he continues, regard soul as primary. For these, the best of souls are Gods. These

4. *Théologie Platonicienne*, 6 vols., ed. and trans. H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–97) [henceforth *PT*; translations mine, incorporating elements of Thomas Taylor 1816] I 3. 12. 11.

are apparently Anaxagoreans. Others again place intellect before all else, and these, he explains, consider theology and the discussion of intellectual essence as one and the same. These are Peripatetics. Now Plato, according to Proclus, laid the groundwork for a different sort of theology altogether because of the principle that he places first, namely unity. Unity is the most generic of concepts; not everything participates of soul, nor even of intellect or being, for these are only enjoyed, Proclus explains, by such things as subsist *according to form*. Unity, however, is, at least in some respect, prior to form. In a theological discourse based upon the concept of unity, the Gods will be first *by virtue of their mode of unity*. What, then, is the mode of unity of the Gods? We know that it is a unity prior to form, but what does this mean? Moreover, how are we to distinguish the special characteristics of a theology based upon the concept of unity, rather than any of the other concepts named? In what lies its superiority to the other theologies? We know that it is based on a concept that is, in itself, more generic and hence superior. But a Platonist must believe that it will also, for that very reason, be a science more adequate to its object.

Let us turn to a text of Proclus where he deals with the very issue of the mode of unity of the henads, or Gods, as contrasted to that of forms. In a passage from his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Proclus explains that

all the henads are in each other and are united with each other, and their unity is far greater than the community and sameness among beings. In these too there is compounding of forms, and likeness and friendship and participation in one another; but the unity of these former entities, inasmuch as it is a unity of henads, is far more uniform and ineffable and unsurpassable; for they are all in all of them, which is not the case with the forms. These are participated in by each other, but they are not all in all. And yet, in spite of this degree of unity in that realm, how marvelous and unmixed is their purity, and the individuality of each of them is a much more perfect thing than the difference of the forms, preserving as it does unmixed all the divine entities and their proper powers distinct⁵

In this passage there is nothing whatsoever about the One Itself; rather, it is a question of a straightforward contrast between *henads* and *forms* or, more simply, *beings*. The text lays out a series of contrasting characteristics. The henads are *all in all* or *all in each*, in which lies their "unity" (*henôsis*). Note that this unity is not a matter of their union *with or in the One*, but the presence of all the henads *in each other*. The "unity" of the henads thus

5. *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. J.M. Dillon and G.R. Morrow (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1987) [henceforth *IP*; translations occasionally modified] 1048. 11–26. References are to the pagination in *In Platonis Parmenidem*, ed. V. Cousin. (Paris: Durand, 1864; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1961) except for those followed by 'K,' which refer to the Latin portion, as in Dillon & Morrow.

conceived far exceeds that which beings possess by virtue of the corresponding phenomena among them, namely community, sameness, compounding of forms, likeness, friendship, and participation in one another. Participation in one another, in particular, is mentioned twice, and thus makes the clearest contrast to the all-in-all of the henads. So far, it would seem as if what is at stake here is a difference in the degree to which entities are united *with each other*, with the various relationships mentioned as existing among beings serving to unite beings with each other to a lesser degree than the degree to which the henads are united with each other. “Unity” then would be a matter of the reduction of difference to sameness. But then Proclus proceeds to contrast the purity and individuality—*idiotês*—of the henads to the difference—*heterotês*—of the forms. It cannot be a matter, then, of entities simply becoming more united with each other, and hence less differentiated from each other, as we ascend to the One Itself. A henad is both more united to the other henads than a being is to other beings, *but also more distinct from the other henads than a being is from other beings*. There are only two options: Proclus is either simply positing an irrational coincidence of opposites, or propounding a philosophical doctrine of more subtlety than has hitherto been appreciated. That he intends what he says here to bear philosophical weight is indicated by his remarks a page later:

So much, then, may be said concerning the situation of the primal henads and their communion with and distinction from one another, of which we are wont to call the one individuality [*idiotêta*], the other unity [*henôsîn*], distinguishing them thus also by name from the sameness and difference manifested at the level of Real Being.⁶

The attempt to establish technical terminology respecting the difference in question hardly seems consistent with an appeal to a coincidence of opposites beyond our rational powers. Let us try then to better understand what Proclus means by the contrast he draws here.⁷

6. *IP* 1049.

7. A.C. Lloyd’s “Procession and Division in Proclus” (1982) offers a contrasting interpretation of *IP* 1048. Lloyd sees no more in the passage than that the henads are described “in effect, as having all the positive and formal properties of forms but to a greater degree” (36). But in fact Proclus lays out in this passage a series of specific characteristics with respect to which henadic existence differs fundamentally from the mode of existence of the forms. The henadic characteristics are juxtaposed with the corresponding formal characteristics to *contrast* them, not to posit a difference of degree, as is shown by the fact that Proclus seeks to develop a distinct and parallel terminology to refer to the henadic characteristics. That there is a correspondence, a parallelism, is a result of the fact that formal being is ultimately a *product*, an *effect* of henadic existence. But since Lloyd presupposes that there is no real difference between the supra-essential and the ontic registers, he sees nothing in the contrast beyond hyperbole. This imputes to Proclus in too many places what amounts to an empty verbosity and renders the henadology a doctrine without substance.

Among the characteristics attributed to beings in the passage cited above, the ones that stand out especially are sameness (*tautotês*), difference (*heterotês*), and participation in one another (*methexis*). These are the most frequently repeated characteristics, and also those with the clearest systematic functions in Proclus' thought. Proclus' remarks here, where he contrasts the all-in-all of the henads to the participation in each other of the forms, should be seen in the light of his rejection elsewhere of henads participating altogether, that is, not just in each other, but in *anything*. Proclus states in the *Elements of Theology*, for instance, that the Gods "have no attribute by participation, but all according to existence [*huparxis*] or implicit in their causality [*kat'aitian*]" (prop. 118)⁸ and in his *Timaeus* commentary that "every God is essentialized [*ousiôtai*] in being a God, or rather is supra-essentialized [*huperousiôtai*], but there is nothing which is participated by him; because the Gods are the most ancient and venerable of all things."⁹ This passage is especially significant, for it explicitly states that the fact that the Gods possess a common characteristic *does not mean that they participate in something*, making a clear break with a basic axiom of Platonic ontology, namely that common characteristics belonging to coordinate entities are to be explained by reference to their common participation in some single principle of a higher order of being than they.

In Proclus, participation as such tends to be superseded by a more general relationship, that between a manifold (*plêthos*) or class (*taxis*) and its principle or monad, with its complementary concepts of procession from (*proödos*) and reversion upon (*epistrophê*) the principle. The basic concepts are laid out in prop. 21 of the *Elements*, which states that "every class originates from a monad and proceeds to a coordinate [*sustoichon*] manifold, and the manifold of any class is carried back to one monad." In the body of the proposition, we read that

8. *The Elements of Theology*, ed. and trans. E.R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) [henceforth cited by prop. #; translations occasionally modified]. Dodds' attempts to blunt the impact of the statement in prop. 118 that the Gods "have no attribute by participation" by making this an instance of "characters derived transversely from the monad by its co-ordinate *metechomena*," and traces this doctrine to prop. 19 (263). But the latter proposition merely refers to two different kinds of participation, one "primitive" and one "transient," and never implies that the former might be regarded as no participation at all. Dodds wishes to preserve an account of the relation between the One and the henads which would be "exactly parallel to that which subsists between intelligences and the Intelligence or between souls and the Soul" (270), but does not justify why the cases should be parallel, or why the parallel should be "exact" rather than holding in some respects and not in others. The One, after all, is of a nature fundamentally different from the ontic hypostases.

9. *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*, 3 vols., ed. E. Diehl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–06; reprint, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965) [henceforth *IT*; translations mine] I, 364.

since ... in every class there is some common element, a continuity and identity in virtue of which some things are said to be coordinate [*homotagê*] and others not [*heterotagê*], it is apparent that the identical element is derived by the whole class from a single principle. Thus in each class or causal chain there exists a single monad prior to the manifold, which determines for the members of the class their unique relation [*hena logon*] to one another and to the whole.

Notice that the relationship of members of such an order to one another and to the whole is *mediated* by the monad, the monad being equivalent to a common *logos* uniting the members of the order. This principle of mediation, where beings relate to each other indirectly through a superior principle, can be generalized to the whole of Being. In the *Parmenides* commentary we read that just as “there must exist ... prior to all beings the Monad of Being, through which all beings *qua* beings are ordered with respect to one another,” so “we seek to know of them, in so far as they are beings, what sort of monad they have which embraces and unifies them.”¹⁰ And again, “all beings are actually from a single monad which is and is called primarily Being, by which they are and are named beings according to their respective classes [*taxin*]; and from this monad all beings are sympathetic with one another and are in a sense identical, as being from the One Being”; indeed, “all things, insofar as they participate in the One Being, are in a sense the same as one another and one.” Ontology, therefore, is *monadology*. The application of the concept of the monad extends from the highest hypostases to the individuals under *infima species*.¹¹ Common to these various usages of ‘monad’ is the idea of some common *logos* in a manifold, with the degree to which we are entitled to hypostatize that *logos* being variable, for the monad itself carries only a minimum of ontological commitment. The monad expresses *formal unity*. Formal unity determines a being as some kind of being, while at the same time affirming the unity of beings with the whole of Being, their identity in and with Being through the very nature of form. As such, the formal unity possessed by beings undercuts their unity in the sense of individuality or uniqueness on account of the holistic system into which they are folded by the very structures from which they derive determinacy. We read in prop. 66 that “every being is related to every other either as a whole or as a part or by sameness or by difference.” We can see this as an axiom of the universality of mediation with respect to beings: the part mediated by the whole; identical

10. *IP* 703f.

11. The most specific Ideas are those “that are participated by individuals, such as Man, Dog, and others of the sort. Their ‘makings’ have as their immediate result the generation of individual unities [*tas en tois atomois monadas*]—Man of individual men, Dog of particular dogs, and Horse and each of the rest in like manner” (*IP* 735). Similarly at *IP* 752 “monad” is used to refer to “the many separate individuals” under some Idea, e.g., “the infinity of existing men” under the Idea of Man.

things mediated by that quality with respect to which the two are identical, or with respect to which one thing is self-identical; different things mediated, likewise, by that quality in respect to which they differ; and finally, the whole itself mediated by the parts.¹²

The Gods, however, are explicitly non-relational. The *Elements* states that the henads transcend relation on account of their “purity” (*amigês*),¹³ which derives from the “simplicity” and “self-sufficiency” of the Gods.¹⁴ Deities are “perfectly unitary,” *heniaios*, and as such are “wholly self-sufficient . . . perfect simplicity is the character of deity. Being a pure excellence, deity needs nothing extraneous; being unitary, it is not dependent upon its own elements.” The quality of being unitary, then, is a matter of the integrity and autonomy of an individual. *Heniaios* is the technical term in Proclus for the type of unity possessed by supra-essentials, contrasting with the term *hênômenos*, or ‘unified,’ which applies strictly to beings. Prior to Proclus the term *heniaios* usually simply characterizes a unifying agent.¹⁵ Notably, however, the term *heniaios* is used in the plural by Iamblichus¹⁶ to explain that any multiplicity brought together according to summation (*sôreia*) or herding together (*sunagelamos*) can be discriminated (*diakrinai*) into *heniaia*. *Heniaia* are thus integral individuals whose assemblage into a common body is adventitious in relation to their own individuality. Entities determined by their relations, on the other hand, lose their autonomy to the degree that those relations come to be objective.

For instance, “every God,” Proclus explains in the *Elements*, “is above Being, above Life, and above Intellect,” the three major ontic hypostases, inasmuch as “these three, though mutually distinct, are each implicit in the other two.”¹⁷ Here again, we see the ubiquity of holism and mediation among beings, and that this is in some way the very thing which makes Gods profoundly different from beings. This comes up again in a discussion contrasting the status of relations in the ontic and supra-essential realms in

12. Even the “whole-before-the-parts” (prop. 67), that is, “the whole in its cause” or “the form of each thing . . . pre-existing in the cause,” is still “a whole of parts” albeit prior to them (prop. 73).

13. Prop. 126.

14. Prop. 127.

15. “Unitary *Logos*” is for Aristides Quintilianus (*De Musica* I 3. 9) an epithet of the demiurge, where “unitary” is glossed as “making the many and diverse beings to rest by indissoluble bonds in one comprehension”; similarly Iamblichus, *De Myst.* VIII 3. 265. 6, which reports an ostensibly Egyptian doctrine respecting a “supreme unitary cause of all things” which “masters” the “indeterminate nature” (*tês aoristou phuseôs*) as or in conjunction with “a certain determinate measure” (*tinos hôrismenou metrou*).

16. *In Nic. Arithm.* 81. 15.

17. Prop. 115.

the *Parmenides* commentary.¹⁸ This discussion turns on the use of the terms “for itself” and “for another.” The intelligible, he explains, is “for itself” and the Intellect is “for itself,” but “through this very relation the Intellect is united with the intelligible and the intelligible with the Intellect, and the Intellect and the intelligible are one thing.” The very “for itself,” then, of ontic hypostases like Intellect and Being, serves ultimately to *unite* them, since in their very nature they co-posit each other. They are, we might say, *diacritically determined*. Proclus goes on, however, to speak of a higher degree of existence “for itself,” which is present among the Gods. He uses, as an example, the relationship of *being a father*: among beings a father, since he possesses the essentially relational attribute of father, is therefore purely “for another”; but among the Gods, by contrast, a “paternal cause” is first “for itself,” as, indeed, is “any offspring.” Proclus states that when conceiving the Gods we must place prior, “even to ... self-identity the existence [*huparxin*] of each in itself; for each exists primarily ‘for itself,’ and in itself is united to the rest Such an entity ... then, is non-relational, though productive of a relation.” Proclus repeats the same doctrine later,¹⁹ explaining that “the paternal and maternal faculties,” are present among the Gods not as “mere relationships” but rather as “generative powers.” The Gods have relationships among each other, but unlike beings, a God is “for itself” [*sic*] prior to these relationships, which are present incipiently as that deity’s “powers.” Proclus contrasts the powers of the Gods and their *huparxeis*, or “existences.”²⁰ *Huparxis*, which we have already encountered, e.g., in the discussion of *ET* prop. 118, is a technical term establishing the henads as prior to Being Itself and to the opposition of Being and Non-Being.²¹ Prior to the general opposition of *huparxis* to Being, however, is the opposition between considering the Gods with respect to their *huparxeis* and with respect to their *dunameis*. At *IP* 1128, for instance, intellectual shapes “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.” The “powers” of the Gods are also mentioned in the following passage from the *Platonic Theology*: “We must never think therefore that all power is the progeny of essence. For the powers of the Gods are supra-essential, and are consubstantial with the henads themselves of the Gods. And through this power the Gods are generative of beings.”²² The “powers” of the Gods are, like the Gods

18. *IP* 936.

19. *IP* 942.

20. E.g., at *IP* 1128.

21. For the history of the term *huparxis* in Neoplatonism, see *Hyparxis e Hypostasis nel Neoplatonismo*, ed. F. Romano and D.P. Taormina (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1994).

22. *PT* III 24. 164–65.

themselves, supra-essential, but it is through their powers that the Gods are “generative of beings.” The opposition between *huparxis* and *dunamis* is thus the locus for the opposition between the supra-essential and ontic domains. For not only are the Gods generative of beings through their powers, but it is by virtue of their powers that they themselves can be grasped like beings and treated ontologically—grouped into functional classes, for instance.

The notion of relations as somehow emergent from the non-relational state of the henads comes up in the *Parmenides* commentary when Proclus considers the applicability of the notion of difference to the relationship between the One and the Many (*polla*), the context being the affirmation at *Parm.* 139e that “the One cannot be other than, or the same as, either itself or another,” that is, the negation of identity and difference with respect to the One.²³ Proclus explains that despite their transcendence of difference (*heterotês*) as such, there is still differentiation among the Gods:

The Many *qua* different are necessarily also in all ways ‘other’ [*alla*], but are not *different than* the One. For as he himself has declared, what is ‘different’ [*heteron*] is different *than another*; and so, even if they should be called ‘others’ [*alla*] and different than the One, one would not say it in the sense that they have made a procession from it by means of Difference ... let us grant that there is a declination [*buphesis*] from the One to these; but not every declination is the product of Difference, but only that declination which is in the realm of the forms.²⁴

Proclus goes on to explain that “the others than the One” will be called “different than the One insofar as by becoming *other than each other*, they are separated from the One, which absolutely rejects the title of reciprocal otherness [*ên allêlôn prosêgorian*].” And so “in the supra-essential realm,” that is, the realm of the henads, “instead of the difference of superior forms from inferior, we must postulate transcendence [*huperochên*], instead of that of inferior from superior, declination [*buphesin*], and in place of the distinction [*diakriseôs*] of coordinates [*homostoichôn*] from each other, individual peculiarity [*idiotêta*].” The “Many” of the present passage are thus evidently the henads, whose individuality—note the use of *idiotês*, which was introduced as a technical term in *IP* 1049—is contrasted with the “reciprocal otherness” of the forms, “the distinction of coordinates from each other,” that is, the other *than*-ness or determinate difference of beings that are coordinate, i.e., can be assigned to a common order or reduced to common “elements” (*stoicheia*).

The Many (that is, the henads) are “other” (*allos*) in relation to the One, but not different (*heteros*) than the One. This would seem to be nonsense if it were not for the explanation that what comes to be other *than* or different

23. This negation corresponds positively to the third order of the intellectual Gods.

24. *IP* 1190.

from the One, does so through coming to be other than its coordinates. That is, when determinate relation amongst coordinate entities arises, so too does a determinate relationship arise between them and their principle, ultimately the One. The different position relative to the One of the henads and the forms is therefore a matter of the emergence, with the forms, of mediating relationships, namely the ontic relations of whole and part, identity and difference. Simultaneously to these, a relationship emerges between the forms and the One, where no relationship seems to exist between the One and the henads. The term *allos* refers to this looser, generic “differentiation.”

Note that whereas, for the relationship among the forms of reciprocal otherness or the distinction of coordinates, Proclus simply substitutes the *idiotês*, the individual peculiarity, of the henads, he substitutes for the *single* vertical relationship between the superior and the inferior among the forms the *two* complementary notions of transcendence and declination in the supra-essentials. These notions are not important in themselves. What matters, rather, is the strategy of breaking up the single relation into two, because of the way it forecloses mediation. Rather than a single substantial relation mediating two henads—and hence uniting them in some third—the relationship exists as a potential in each of the members. This potential is actualized and *becomes* a substantial relationship, a third, when the hypostasis of intellect is fully constituted and the necessary structures of identity and difference have been constituted by divine activity. The special importance of the hierarchical relationship, the reason why it is singled out here, is because were the relations of subordination between more “universal” and more “specific” henads to be granted the status such relations possess among forms, then the more “universal” henads would be *more* henadic than the more “specific” ones. But there are not degrees among the Gods. Proclus is quite clear that even an infra-intellectual God is still altogether a henad and supra-essential.²⁵

Here we see the formal structure distinguishing ontic multiplicities from the manifold of the henads. Coordinate terms, terms subsumed under a single class, are *other than* one another, that is, they are reciprocally or *diacritically* distinguished, which implies mediation. The Gods transcend relation and mediation. But how can this be if they are subject to the rules governing the relationships between monads and their manifolds in prop. 21? The question is, in what sense do the henads proceed from the One at all?

25. The assimilative Gods (constitutive of the form of Likeness, that is, of assimilating participants to the forms they participate) are “according to their *hyperxeis*, beyond essence and multiplicity; but according to the participations of them which receive the illumination of a procession of this kind, they are called assimilative” (*PT* VI 16. 79. 7–10).

According to the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, the One neither is, nor is one; and Proclus further specifies that the One is neither a cause nor a producer; the various modes of causality—the “about which,” the “on account of which” and the “from which”—are all said by him to subsist in and through the intelligible order of Gods.²⁶ In accord with this, Francesco Romano has noted a propensity throughout Proclus’ work to use the term *aitia* in reference to the One, as opposed to *aition*, seemingly in order to avoid the hypostatizing connotations of *to aition*.²⁷ This usage is already evident in the *Elements*, and so we should not accord more weight than is merited to the extension there of the structure of monad and manifold to the One and the henads. Indeed, according to prop. 21, a monad is simply that which “has the relative status of a principle [*archês echousa logon*].” In turn, an unparticipated principle “has the relative status of a monad [*monados echon logon*]” (prop. 23). The key, then, is to understand which aspects of “monadicity” are appropriate to the relationship between the One and the henads and which are not.

Furthermore, there is no “decline” from the One to the henads. In the *Platonic Theology*, Proclus says that “if the Good is multiplied through weakness, the whole of things will proceed through a diminution [*huphesin*], rather than through a superabundance of goodness.”²⁸ In the passage cited above from the *Parmenides* commentary (*IP* 1190), Proclus contrasted the mode of procession of the henads from the One to the “procession by difference” of the forms. At another point (*IP* 745) Proclus speaks of different modes of procession, contrasting that “by way of unity [*henôsin*]” and that “by way of identity [*tautotêta*].” Procession by way of unity belongs to the henads, “for there is no identity among them, nor specific likeness, but unity only,” while procession by way of identity belongs to “the indivisible substances, where that which proceeds is somehow the same as what it came from, for being all safeguarded and held together by eternity, they manifest in a sense the identity of part to whole.” The “procession by identity” of this passage is evidently the same as the “procession by difference” of 1190, since identity and difference share the same formal structure. Beings proceed by identity, because to *be* is on some level to be identical, as a part of Being, with the whole of Being. All that *is*, is the same as Being because every being is, and is one—a monad of some sort and an *hênômenon*, a unified entity, just like Being Itself. Being is one and many, identical and different, like all the beings themselves, for Being accepts all the determinations the One rejects in the

26. *PT* II 9. 57. 21–24; 59. 14–16, 24; 60. 26–28.

27. “L’Idée de Causalité dans la *Théologie Platonicienne* de Proclus,” in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne: Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13–16 Mai 1998) en l’honneur de H.D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink*, eds. A. Ph. Segonds & C.M. Steel.

28. *PT* II 7. 50. 20–22.

First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*.

The henads are the sole exemplars of procession “by way of unity,” which is discussed at *PT* III 3. 11f. After having laid out a line of reasoning essentially the same as that of prop. 28 of the *Elements*, namely that “every producing cause brings into existence things like to itself before the unlike,” he concludes that if every other cause constitutes a progeny similar to itself prior to that which is dissimilar, much more must the One reveal after this manner things posterior to itself, since it is beyond likeness, so the One Itself must produce according to *unity* (*kat’ henôsin*) things which primarily proceed from it.

The One is thus said to produce the “unitary manifold” (*plêthos heniaion*) of the henads “unitarily” (*heniaiôs*). This manifold consists of “self-perfect [*autoteleis*] henads most cognate to their producer [*tô paragoni suggenesteras*]” and is “connascent [*sumphuomenos*] with the One, uniform [*henoeidês*], ineffable, supra-essential, and perfectly similar to its cause.” This perfect similarity is such that no “intrusion of difference separate[s] from the generator the things begotten, and transfer[s] them into a different class.” The “cause of all things,” we read, “has established about itself a divine set, and has united it to its own simplicity.”

To think the henads as caused at all, then, we must imagine the difference between producer and product as approaching zero, with no difference to separate them from their principle, lest they lack the very unity—that is, individuality, integrity, and simplicity *each in itself*—that is the very characteristic imparted them by the One. They would fall short in their unity were the One to be set over and above them. This is what makes the set, or *arithmos*, of the henads “ineffable”: the character of ineffability refers to the impossibility of drawing the inferences in respect to this series which would apply to any other manifold. From a discussion in the second book of the *Platonic Theology* we may gain insight into how the causal economy is sublated in the relationship between the One and the henads:

it is necessary that every thing which is produced with reference to, and on account of it [viz. “the cause of all beings”], should have a certain relation [*schesisin*] with it, and through this also, a likeness to it. For every relation of one thing towards another, is predicated in a twofold respect, either from both participating one thing, which affords to the participants a communion with each other; or from one of them participating the other Hence it is necessary ... either that there should be a certain third thing the cause of the relation, or that the principle should impart to the natures posterior to itself a tendency to itself, and that desire through which everything is preserved and exists. (*PT* II 3. 23f)

The reference to a “third thing” puts us in mind of the problematic of the “Third Man.” To avoid an infinite regress of relations and causes of relations,

the first series must relate to its cause through a desire which does not cause us to posit any likeness or relation to anything different, but rather a desire for *self*. This is evident simply from the nature of the characteristic imparted by the One. The One or the Good is *sôstikon hekastou*, that which “conserves and holds together the being of each several thing” (*ET* prop. 13). Desire of the One, therefore, is desire as self-production, inasmuch as in desiring the One/Good, entities desire their individual integrity. In the *Parmenides* commentary (*IP* 54K), Proclus speaks of “a natural striving after the One” in everything: “What else is the One in ourselves except the operation and energy of this striving? It is therefore this interior understanding of unity, which is a projection and as it were an expression of the One in ourselves, that we call ‘the One.’” Again, “we should rather say that it is not the One that we call ‘one’ when we use this name, but the understanding of unity which is in ourselves” (*ibid*). This striving is aptly referred to elsewhere by him (*PT* II 8. 56. 25–26) as a “desire for the unknowable nature and the source of the Good.” Desire of the One is desire as self-production. In desiring the One or Good, entities desire their individual integrity. If for beings the guarantor of this integrity is their form, then it is through the mediation of the form that the being desires itself, and constitutes itself through reversion upon its form. This means that for beings, the desire-for-self leads to the sublation of the self as narrowly conceived. For any being *qua* being, reversion upon its form will disclose that the given being is mediated by the whole of Being.²⁹

For the henad, however, there is, existentially, only itself. For we read in the “Ten Doubts” essay that

[t]he One and the Good exists in three ways: according to cause, and this is the first principle; for if this is the good and is it through itself, it is inasmuch as it is cause of all goods and all henads; or according to existence, and this is each God, since each of them is one and good existentially; or according to participation, and this is what there is of unity and goodness in substances.³⁰

29. The caveat is that beings participate, not only in ontic classes, but also in divine series; and beings participate in the latter apparently *as individuals* rather than as instantiating forms. Two modes of reversion are thus possible for individual beings: one by way of form, which is mediated by the whole of Being, the other by way of theurgy and reversion upon the (individual) tutelary deity (on which see Andrew Smith, *Porphyrus's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague, 1974)). Cf. *ITL*, 212, which explains that “it is necessary to observe a stable order in the performance of divine works,” so that, preserving “segregation from every other pursuit,” and thus “becoming *alone*, we may associate with *solitary deity*, and not endeavor to conjoin ourselves with multitude to the One. For he who attempts this effects the very opposite, and separates himself from the Gods.” This passage illustrates nicely the way that the language of unity and multiplicity so important in Platonism is deployed by Proclus in a manner never conflicting with his polytheism; for here the integrity of the individual worshiper approximates them to the supra-essential individuality of the chosen deity.

30. *Decem Dubitationes* X. 63. *Existentiam*, *Existens* render *hyparxis* in this passage according to Carlos Steel, “*Hyparxis* chez Proclus” in *Hyparxis e Hypostasis nel Neoplatonismo* ed. F. Romano

This corresponds to prop. 65 of the *Elements*, which states that “all that subsists in any fashion is either according to cause [*kat’aitian*] in the mode of a principle, or according to existence [*huparxis*] or according to participation in the mode of an image.” But the interesting thing about the way in which the axiom is applied in the passage from “Ten Doubts” is that usually when Proclus speaks of something subsisting *kat’aitian* it is a matter of seeing “the product as pre-existent in the producer” (prop. 65), as when we would speak of Intellect subsisting in Being *kat’aitian*. But here, the subsistence of the One Itself *kat’aitian* actually posits it in things which ostensibly are *from* it, namely “all goods and all henads.” And yet *this* is the One and the Good as “first principle.” Where it is a matter of the subsistence of the One and the Good *kath’huparxin*, which is generally where “we contemplate each thing in its own station [*kata tēn heautou taxin*], neither in its cause nor in its resultant” (prop. 65), the One and the Good exists *as each God*.

The One then, when contemplated *in its own station*, is not an hypostatized One Itself, but *each God*. Proclus explains that the One as it exists in the Gods is self-sufficient, not like something existing in a substratum, that the One “*truly is*,” as it is among them, whereas in beings it exists “as a character in something.”³¹ The point of such passages cannot be that the One exists among the Gods as something separate from them. But neither can the point be to fold the Gods into the One. In the *Platonic Theology*, for instance,³² Proclus explains that by establishing the henads, neither each as one *only*, in the same manner as the One Itself, nor each as one *and many*, like Being, we not only preserve the transcendency of the first, but also ensure that “the henads proceeding from it are unconfused either with respect to themselves, or to the one principle of them.” But if the manifold of the henads was a whole, rather than a unitary set in which all are in each, the henads would precisely *not* be unconfused with respect to each other, nor to the One Itself, for the henads would be contained in the One as effects in their cause, at once spoiling the transcendency of the First Principle and subverting the autonomy of the Gods. The transcendency and efficacy of the First Principle lies precisely in the fact that it does not subordinate the manifold of the Gods. Proclus refers to the henadic manifold as “the totality of the divine set [*pas te theios arithmos*], in virtue of which is the being, or rather pre-being [*proeinai*], of the Gods.”³³ The “pre-being” of the Gods is here secured, not as one might expect, by reference to the One, but to the totality (not wholeness, but totality) of the *arithmos*, or “set,” itself; it is as

& D.P. Taormina (Leo S. Olschki Editore: Firenze, 1994) 94. The correspondence is, at any rate, evident from the parallel structure of *ET* prop. 65.

31. *IP* 641f.

32. *PT* III 4. 123–24.

33. *IP* 1212.

much as to say that the Gods possess their Godhood from themselves. Hence he calls it, when being strict, an *arithmos* rather than a *plêthos*, for *plêthos* is a notion arising at a distinct moment in the procession of Being, namely in the intelligible-and-intellectual order, where the negations of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* begin. Here multiplicity (*plêthos*) emerges in opposition to and conjunction with unity. In this way Proclus can say that “a multiplicity of henads is discernible first in the first rank of the intelligible-and-intellectual,”³⁴ that is, a multiplicity *that is unified*.

The results of this investigation of the primary texts could be synthesized as follows. In the “production” of the henads from the One the economy of causal procession breaks down because the One ultimately represents each God’s uniqueness and absolute individuality. The One would sacrifice its own perfection were it to subsist as something over and above the Gods, lest each God be less one; hence the ultimate consequence of pursuing the concept of unity to its radical conclusion is that a One over this manifold or subsuming it would impart to them a lesser degree of unity. Procession “by way of unity” is, in a real sense, not procession at all, if there is no One beyond the henads. Procession by unity is not a matter of the manifold of the henads vanishing into the One, as if the henads were but “aspects,” “adumbrations” or “perspectives” of the One. The One is not one, and its purpose is not the subordination of multiplicity. The characteristic the henads possess in common is none other than irreducible uniqueness and individuality. This uniqueness and individuality is not negative, a function of each henad’s *difference* or *discernibility* from every other, but *positive*. This positive individuality, manifest especially in the proper name borne by each God, which denies the One as something that could subordinate the multiplicity of Gods to it, is in fact how the One “truly is.” The presence of all the henads in each grounds the henadic manifold as a set of absolute individuals, inasmuch as that which has no other outside it, which has its other in itself, is more *individual* than that which confronts an other through difference. In accord, then, with the conclusion of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* that the One neither *is*, nor is *one*, we should say that the One *is* as each henad, each God, rather than as the hypostatized entity that, for our own convenience, to be able to refer to divine activity in generic fashion, we refer to as “the One Itself.” There is *no such thing* as the One Itself, if we mean something *different* than the henads; Godhood is nothing but the Gods themselves. In this way the One is clearly and unequivocally distinguished from the One-that-is, the Monad of Being, which subsists itself as something unified.³⁵

34. *IP* 1091.

35. Being is referred to at *PT* III 9. 40 as “not only standing in the One, but receiving a multiplicity [*plêthos*] of henads and powers which are mingled into one essence [*ousian*]” (4–8).

The above account, while it may seem provocative, is grounded ultimately in motives which should be regarded as modest. First, Proclus should be approached as a systematic thinker, until the impracticability of such an approach presents itself; thus it should be legitimate to use the texts of Proclus to illuminate one another. Second, the principle of hermeneutic charity should guide us in our reading of Proclus, requiring us not to attribute open contradictions, empty rhetoric, or willful paradox to texts where a more fruitful meaning can be found. I would argue that this principle in itself, even absent other considerations, legitimates juxtaposing the *negativity* of the One with the *positive* pluralism of the henadology in order to save the former from obscurity and the latter from triviality. Thirdly, to see in the resulting system an expression of Proclus' polytheism is simply to entertain a reading of his system in which the religious interest he constantly expresses and regards as essential to his philosophical enterprise is seen not as adventitious but as organic and, indeed, as having been a stimulus toward a novel set of approaches to classic philosophical problems. It is past time for a more balanced approach in the literature, and not only in the case of Proclus. Moreover, the literature does not lack for overtly monotheizing readings of Proclus, despite the violence this does both to Proclus' own attested piety for the traditional Gods of his own and other nations, as well as to the systematic negativity of the One. Pantheistic readings are no less violent, although they are at least more cognizant of the risk of hypostatizing the One even in the context of a "negative theology."³⁶ The intrinsic value the polytheist accords to the distinct identities and autonomy of the individual Gods acts, by contrast, as a bulwark against illicit hypostatization of the One.

In closing, I would like to review certain antecedents of this reading in the literature. Whittaker remarks on "an element of explicit pluralism in his [Proclus'] doctrine," (302) and that "Proclus seeks the cause of plurality in things at a higher stage than the intelligible world Before being and mind are produced, the One acts as it were through many points of origin," (173). Whittaker recognizes the problem, however, with asserting that the One "acts" *per se*, asking

what is the meaning of 'creation' by the One? It means, for both philosophers [Plotinus and Proclus], essentially this: that without unity in and over the system of things there

Notice how the unity of the henads only comes about through a "mingling" posterior to their *huparxis*. It is this mingling that produces the decline in Being; not the existence of many Gods, but their coalescence in and through the Intellect. For the Gods are only finally "mingled" into one essence, and Being itself fully constituted, in the hypostasis of Intellect, that is, in a single formal regime.

36. See, e.g., Trouillard's comments in *La mystagogie de Proclus* on the danger "à faire du silence une contre-expression, de la nuit un secret et du néant une substance mystérieuse" (94).

would be no particular existence as an actually realized thing. It does not mean that abstract unity, without the latent existence of a many as it were in its own right, calls it from nothing into being. (235f)

The notion of latency, of course, is equally impracticable in regard to the One:

For a real understanding of their [the Neoplatonists'] position, however, we must equally avoid attributing to them the ideas of volitional creation and of 'pantheistic absorption.' The many are never finally absorbed into the One; and therefore, on Neoplatonic principles, there was never a time when they did not in some sense exist as a many. On this, Proclus is more explicit than Plotinus. (236)

Whittaker takes notable care with respect to the doctrine of the henads. In an area which is prone to misunderstanding, for instance, he recognizes (175f) that henads participated in by lower ontic hypostases are no less *henads* than those participated by higher ones; and with respect to the distinction between henads and monads, he sees the monad as "the unity of a group," and does not conflate monads and henads (251). As far as he went, Whittaker thus laid out a promising path for research.

Among more recent commentators on the henads, however, the most promising contributions have been made, not by those focusing squarely on the metaphysics of the henads, but those whose interest lies in the consequences of the henadology for individuals at the *bottom* of the Neoplatonic hierarchy. Here, it seems, it has been perceived that there is a stake in recognizing really distinct properties of the supra-essential domain. Andrew Smith, in his study of theurgy in *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism*,³⁷ discusses the henads with respect to their connection to theurgy and the concept of the *sunthêmata*, calling attention to a series of passages from Olympiodorus which he correlates with passages in Proclus and which distinguish theurgic virtues as *heniaiai* or "unitary" by contrast with the ontic virtues which are "substantial" or "substantifying," *ousiôdeis*, and as possessing *huparxis* in contrast to the *ousia* of the ontic virtues. The distinction between the regimes of *sunthêmata* and of Forms manifests itself in the different structure lamblichus accords to the *epitêdeiotês*, or "suitability," for participation in forms as compared to the suitability to participate in *sunthêmata*. As Smith points out, "the continuity of Neoplatonic ontological procession seems to break down here" (127), inasmuch as the normal order of reversion up the hierarchy of ontic hypostases "has been, as it were, bypassed and a more direct mode of contact with the divine created" (126). Smith explains that

37. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1974.

Iamblichus' *epitêdeiotês* for divine mantic is over and above normal *epitêdeiotês* for form. Proclus distinguishes *sunthêma* and Form. This seems to imply that the divine channel which aids in ascent is different from the ontological procession of Form. On a broader basis Proclus distinguishes henads and *ta noêta*. The henads in their manifestation at different levels are independent of the *noêta* or Forms. Thus theurgy which works through the henads leads to a divorce of the spiritual ascent from the contemplation of Forms. (127 n. 7)

Smith recognizes, further, that the activity of the supra-essential realm with respect to beings is to impart a unity which is to be understood as *idiotês*, that is, individual peculiarity. This is already implicit from the very notion of the *sunthêma*, which is not just a particular type of being but a particular "divinized" individual, for even if the *sunthêma* is selected because of the type of being it is—say, a particular species of herb or stone—it is necessarily divinized as, e.g., *this* piece of carnelian. Furthermore, its significance to the theurgic ritual lies not in its position in the ontic hierarchy, but in its relation to the myths and attributes of particular deities. Putting together the pieces in a manner that Smith does not, inasmuch as the metaphysics of the henads is not his chief concern, one could conclude that the unity corresponding to the One and conferred by it is also a generically distinct mode of unity, that is, individuality.

"La théorie des hénades et la mystique de Proclus," by Christian Guérard (*Dionysius* 6, 1982) begins from the aspiration to recover the unity of the theological and systematic functions of the doctrine of the henads, and the things Guérard says about the relationship between the One and the henads, albeit brief, are much in harmony with the present essay. Guérard's reading follows in the footsteps of Trouillard, who recognized in the negativity of the One Itself an opportunity for a positive pluralism; but Trouillard, for his own part and in accord with the general motivations of the "mystical" school, evinces no interest in the henadology, conflating henads and monads, in no way distinguishing the supra-essential and ontic modes of unity, and effacing any polytheistic aspect of the doctrine or identification of the henads with the pagan Gods.³⁸ Trouillard speaks of "polycentric procession" in Proclus, a term which would be admirably applicable to the henads,³⁹ but means nothing more by it than the venerable axiom (already of hoary antiquity for Iamblichus), "all things are in all things, but each according to its proper nature," (e.g., *ET* prop. 103).⁴⁰ Guérard, although identifying with Trouillard's

38. See *La mystagogie de Proclus*, especially chap. 6.

39. Compare Diana Eck's characterization of Hinduism as "radically polytheistic" inasmuch as it is "polycentric" (*Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 3rd ed. [New York: Columbia U Press, 1998] 22ff).

40. *La mystagogie de Proclus* 111.

tradition, seeks to restore the henads to the system. The first proposition of the *Elements of Theology*, he stresses, is not to be interpreted as saying that the henads participate the One; instead, in accord with the choices already made by translators Trouillard and Dodds alike, as he puts it, “il ne faut en effet pas mettre de majuscule à cet un général [i.e., the *to hen* of the first three propositions] qui n’est pas l’Un,” (n. 21 p. 76). The importance of this point for Guérard is that

après l’Un sera nécessairement le nombre hénadique, qui, contrairement à la doctrine jambliquienne, n’est que la somme ‘uniée’ des Uns et non pas une hypostase individuelle. De la sorte, les êtres ne participeront pas à ce qui serait un unifié, mais bel et bien à des Uns. Dans une telle optique, il ne saurait être question d’un Un participé, ni de participation à un unifié. Il faut, au contraire, que la participation à l’un soit la participation à des Uns. (76)

Since Guérard’s interest is primarily in the consequences of the henadology for beings, rather than in explicating the status of the henads themselves, he does little to draw out the implications of this doctrine of “Ones.” And yet he suggests he is not unaware of the possibility of just such an interpretation as the present essay offers by his provocative remark that “[i]l convient de rappeler que, ‘stricto sensu’ chez Proclus, il n’y a pas d’hénologie, mais une hénadologie” (n. 26 p. 76). The first proposition of the *ET*, when it “énonce que tout participe obligatoirement à l’un ... signifie évidemment que tout participe à l’Un par les Hénades, et non que l’Un soit participé ou qu’il soit un” (77). In accord with the argument of the present essay, then, there really is no “One,” there are only Ones, that is, the henads. Guérard says that the henads “ne sont donc pas des ‘participants’ à l’Un, mais de pures ‘participations’,” and that there are, besides them, only the “irradiated states of unity” of *ET* prop. 64, and that “Entre elles [the henads] et l’Un, il ne faut pas établir un rapport de methexis, mais de simple *proödos*” (78). The henads are thus preserved from losing their autonomy to an hypostatized One, but so too is the principle of irreducible individuality itself preserved from the exigencies of ontic logic, theological and philosophical exigencies coinciding. Guérard calls the fact that “les Hénades sont autonomes et ne constituent pas un hypostase unifiée” their “horizontal” characteristic; he proceeds to analyze the significance of the “vertical” dimension of the henadology. I have commented (see n. 25 above) on the significance of the doctrine that the hierarchical manifestation of the henads as intelligible, intelligible-and-intellectual, intellectual and even infra-intellectual Gods does not make the members of these divine orders any less henads in their *huparxeis*. Guérard discerns the contrast between the henads’ polycentric existence and their hierarchical manifestation, which in turn grants to Be-

ing its hierarchical nature, because of his interest in the anti-hierarchical implications of this contrast for beings. That there are orders of the Gods proceeding to the last orders of Being means that, as Guérard puts it, “la participation à l’un est participation aux Uns et non à l’unité de l’être qui précède” (79). That is, beings are divinized directly at each level, so that their opportunity for reversion does not arise exclusively from reversion upon all the hypostases lying between them and the First Principle on the ontic ladder. Guérard concludes by endorsing the comments of Trouillard, who opposed Bréhier’s characterization of the Proclean system as one in which “chaque réalité reste à sa place, dans une hiérarchie figée,” by arguing for a tendency in Proclus which “porte à considérer tous les ordres, même les derniers, comme des rayons immédiatement issus du centre universal. Tous deviennent des modes, non pas égaux, mais directs de l’Un” (81).⁴¹ Indeed, as Guérard points out, “la primauté de l’un sur l’être prend ici tout son sens,” namely, from the polycentricity of the henads. In asserting that “l’idée de hiérarchie, fondamentale dans tout le platonisme, ne vaut plus ... par rapport aux dieux,” the henadology truly does represent something “révolutionnaire dans la pensée grecque classique.”

This “revolutionary” potential will, however, be easily squandered without a proper appreciation of the value of polytheism for the system. To speak as Guérard does of “modes of the One,” which would be harmless enough in itself were the understanding of the system on firmer ground, will otherwise tend inexorably to encourage less perspicuous commentators in hypostatizing the One and effacing the individuality and autonomy of the henads. An impulse to render the henads evanescent is already hinted at by Guérard’s ambiguous characterization of the henads as “pure participations,” as if the henads are, at last, merely the event of their participants.⁴² Beyond perpetuating the historical erasure of a subtle and profound polytheistic theology, the principles sustaining the coherence and viability of Proclus’ system would thus be obscured, a system the grasp of which must be regarded as inherently endangered in a polemical environment failing to acknowledge the intrinsic value for Proclus of the Gods themselves.

41. This exchange between Bréhier and Trouillard should be read in the context of the conflict between “Hegelian” and “Bergsonian” strains in the French retrieval of Neoplatonism, as discussed by Wayne J. Hankey in *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*. Perhaps as commentators learn to better appreciate the richness and complexity of Neoplatonic thought, rather than seeking relentlessly to streamline it, “Bergsonian” and “Hegelian” moments—and others too—will be found to be equally accommodated in the most systematic expressions, such as that of Proclus.

42. Cf. Trouillard, *Mystagogie*: “Dieu n’existe pas comme Dieu sans théophanie” 110.