The Drunken *Epibole* of Plotinus and its Reappearance in the Work of Dionysius the Areopagite

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Dionysius the Areopagite, the mysterious fifth- or sixth-century author who wrote under the name of Paul's Athenian convert, seems to have had a special attachment to a passage from Plotinus: *Ennead* VI.7.35. In this famous passage, Plotinus describes the intellect's interaction with the One as an *epibole,* a provocative term whose use in theories of cognition originates with the Hellenistic philosophers, especially the Stoics and Epicureans. Plotinus, however, does not follow either of these previous schools of philosophy or his fellow Neoplatonists when he puts *epibole* to the use we find in *Ennead* VI.7.35, as none of these other schools and thinkers use the term to refer to the intellect's interaction with the One. Even Plotinus, outside this passage, only questions whether the intellect's interaction with the One may be an *epibole.* The next two centuries of Hellenic Neoplatonists do not adopt the unusual use of the term in *Ennead* VI.7.35, but this usage does appear in the work of the Christian Dionysius. I will argue, based on Dionysius' specialized use of *epibole* and his clear familiarity with this chapter from Plotinus, that *Ennead* VI.7.35 is the one and only source of the use to which Dionysius puts the term.

Dionysius does not, however, adopt the Plotinian context of the *epibole* without modification. Plotinus characterizes the intellect in its *epibole* of the One as "drunk with nectar," a reference to Socrates' story about the birth of the god Eros in Plato's *Symposium*. Dionysius, on the other hand, never characterizes the intellect as drunk in its interaction with the One. He uses the term "drunk" to describe only the activity of the One itself. This sobering up of the intellect's interaction with the One is not merely the abandonment of a traditional metaphor, but a subtle alteration of the interaction itself. The reaching out to God on the part of the Dionysian soul and intellect lacks the generative properties that result from the drunken *epibole* of Plotinus.[1]

1. In what follows I will look primarily at instances of the noun form *epibole*. The verb form *epiballo* has a significantly broader range of meanings, and is often not a technical term.

Dionysius, Vol. XXIII, Dec. 2005, 117–138.

I

Plotinus explains the meaning of "drunk with nectar" in *Ennead* III.5, his only exegetical treatise. The subject of his exegesis is Socrates' story about the birth of Eros in Plato's *Symposium.* As Socrates tells it, the god Plenty wanders into the garden of Zeus while "drunk with nectar," and is seduced by the goddess Poverty. Their union produces Eros. Plotinus, like Plutarch before him, interprets the myth as an allegory describing the structure of the unseen world.[2] He follows Plato most closely in his starting point, the identification of Eros as the proper activity of the soul.[3] The parents of Eros, Plenty and Poverty, constitute the contributions of a formal component and a material component respectively to the life of the soul. Because Plenty and Poverty cannot couple until they have an occasion to meet, the one who provides their meeting place must represent a principle higher than the soul. That is, the host of the party—Zeus—precedes the coming together of his guests. Here as elsewhere, Plotinus interprets the name "Zeus" as referring to the divine intellect in its production and governance of everything lower than itself.[4] The garden of Zeus, where Poverty and Plenty meet, is the garden of the intellect, where a formal principle and a material principle conceive the soul. What is this garden? He reasons that we plant gardens in order to have a source of delight: an *aglaisma* or *agalma*.[5] Plotinus seems to expect his use of *agalma* here to remind us of the statues commonly referred to as *agalmata*. The statues portray the gods, and can be made to manifest their activity.[6] The garden of Zeus, like his statue, can manifest his activity, which is in reality the activity of intellect. To understand the garden, then, we must first pinpoint the kind of reality that manifests the intellect. Plotinus reminds us that the manifestations of the intellect are the defining principles of the visible world: the *logoi*. These principles are to be distinguished from the forms of things in intellect; unlike the intellectual forms, the *logoi* are on

A study of the related term *prosbole* is essential to a complete picture of *epibole* in Plotinus, but as it plays no role in the work of Dionysius, I have not treated it here.

2. For Plutarch's interpretation, see *De Iside et Osiride* 374D–E.

3. III.5.4. See VI.9.9.24, where Plotinus claims that love is connatural (*sumphutos*) with the soul.

4. III.5.8.14. See IV.4.10.1–5; P. Hadot, "Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus in Plotinus' Treatise against the Gnostics," in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of A.H. Armstrong* (London: Variorum Publications, 1981) 124–37.

5. III.5.9.13–4.

6. See IV.3.11.1–3; *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A.D. Nock and A.J. Festugière (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1960) II, 347; Eunapius, *Lives* 475. On the other hand, Plotinus may simply be referring to Plato's use of *agalma* to refer to the bodies of the celestial beings at *Tim.* 39e. See F. Cornford's discussion of the term in *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato* (London: Routledge, 1937) 99–102.

their way into bodies. The garden of Zeus is simply the totality of the *logoi* that inform the visible world.

Plotinus identifies these *logoi* not only with the garden of Zeus, but with the god Plenty himself. He says: "what else is the garden of Zeus but his statues and ornaments? And what else are his ornaments and decorations but the *logoi* which flow from him? The *logoi*, taken together, are Plenty."[7] The *logoi* which constitute Plenty are *logoi* which have already flowed out from Zeus, and which now manifest him in the soul. Plenty, or the garden of Zeus, is in reality the formal principle of the soul, which receives the *logoi* from the intellect in order to exist. Plenty is called "drunk" because he receives his own *logoi* from something higher than himself in order to exist as the soul rather than the intellect. That is, he fills himself up with more than he can handle. Drunkenness, then, simply indicates that the formal principle of a new hypostasis (in this case, the soul) thinks the objects of a higher hypostasis (intellect) as received from outside itself. If it thought the objects of the higher hypostasis *as* itself, it would be intellect and not the soul, and the soul would never exist. The formal principle must think its content (the intellectual forms) from the perspective of the new hypostasis it is about to be. The intellect does not become drunk on these same intellectual forms because it does not receive them from anything higher than itself. As Plotinus says: "the intellect possesses itself in satiety, and its possession does not make it drunk. For it possesses nothing from outside itself."[8] The intellect does not have to receive the forms prior to its own existence; it possesses them as its own existence and from itself.

Though Plotinus denies that the intellect becomes drunk when it possesses its own forms, he does claim in the famous passage from *Ennead* VI.7.35 that the intellect becomes drunk when it turns to the One. In this passage, Plotinus claims that the intellect has two powers. The first power is the one we have seen Plotinus describe in his commentary on Socrates' story of the birth of Eros, when the intellect "possesses itself in satiety and its possession does not make it drunk." In *Ennead* VI.7.35, he describes this power as that by which the intellect "looks at what is inside it."[9] It is the proper power of the intellect and the "contemplation of the intellect in its right mind," when it remains, Plotinus says, "quite serious." When the intellect uses its second power, it does not look at what is inside it, but at "what is beyond it." It then "becomes erotic" and "mindless." Plotinus says that the intellect in this state is "drunk with nectar"—a reference to the drunkenness of the god Plenty in the *Symposium*. As we have seen, Plenty represents the formal

7. III.5.9.12–15. Except where noted, all translations are my own.
8. III.5.9.19–20.
9. VI.7.35.21–22.

principle of the soul, and is called drunk because it receives the *logoi* from outside itself in order to exist. In the present passage, the intellect plays the same role, looking to something outside itself in order to exist: it "first simply saw, and, seeing, it then possessed intellect." This seeing that precedes the existence of the seer is accomplished through what Plotinus calls "a kind of *epibole* and *paradoche*."

This pairing of *epibole* and *paradoche* here should shock us, as it must certainly have shocked ancient readers. A *paradoche* is typically a passive reception of something. *Epibole,* on the other hand, has by the time of Plotinus a long history in Hellenistic theories of vision and imagination as an active reaching out for something. Both *epibole* and *paradoche* result in possession, but *epibole* is the chasing down of a ball in the outfield by comparison with *paradoche*'s passive reception of whatever falls into one's mitt. According to what we can reconstruct of the Stoic theory of vision, an *epibole* constitutes the attack made by the spirit of an animal through the eye on the surrounding air.[10] The spirit, by attacking the air, shapes the air into a tool which can report the presence of distant objects to it. Chrysippus compares this activity to a blind man's use of a cane to sense objects at a distance. The *epibole* which enables us to see, then, is an active shaping of the outside air rather than a passive reception of sensations transmitted through that air. Once the spirit has sensed the objects in the world around it, however, it does impress those objects on the soul, an act in which the soul plays the role of passive receiver.[11] In other words, the *epibole* of the spirit is followed by a *paradoche* of the soul.

Plotinus' account of sense-perception develops at least partially as a response to this latter element in the Stoic account, according to which the soul sees objects by receiving impressions of them as wax receives the impression of a stamp. As far as Plotinus is concerned, such passivity on the part of the soul is incompatible with its immateriality. The immaterial cannot be affected by bodies outside it, and so the soul's immateriality necessitates that it not be like wax affected by a seal. In the opening lines of *Ennead* III.6, Plotinus announces a theory of sense-perception which does not require the soul to be passive: "we say that sense-perceptions are not affections but activities and judgments concerned with affections."[12] When the soul sees an object,

10. D.E. Hahm, "Early Hellenistic Theories of Vision and the Perception of Color," in *Studies in Perception: Interrelations in the History of Philosophy and Science*, ed. P.K. Machamer and R.G. Turnbull (Columbus: Ohio State U Press, 1978) 66. The same activity, without the term *epibole,* is described in Plato: *Tim.* 45b–d.

11. See *Stoicorum Veterorum Fragmenta,* I.141 (Zeno), 484 (Cleanthes); II.55 (Chrysippus).

12. III.6.1.1. See IV.3.26.8.

the object does not impress its image on the soul. Instead, what appears to be impressed on the soul in sensation is actually constructed by the soul. Plotinus maintains this as much for violent emotions as for sensations: "when we say that the soul moves itself in lusts or reasonings or opinions, we are not saying that it does this because it is being shaken about by them, but that the movements originate from itself."[13] Plotinus does not shy away from using the term *epibole* to characterize these emotions and sensations, but the meaning he gives to the term in this context does not derive from the Stoic theory of vision. Instead, it seems to derive from a second Hellenistic theory: the Epicurean theory of the imagination.

The Epicureans, like the Stoics, regard the soul's passive reception of its object as essential to sense-perception. They add, however, a new use of *epibole* in their description of the process. Epicurus notes that we may visualize an object in our mind even when the object is not impressing itself on the mind through the senses. In some cases, such as when we see an object in a dream, our sight of the object cannot easily be explained as the continuing presence in the mind of an impression already made through sensation. In such a case, an image bypasses sensation to impress itself on the mind directly. Epicurus calls such an act of mental sight an *epibole dianoias,* apparently by analogy with the *epibole* of sensation.[14] Unlike the *epibole* of sensation, this one does not describe an assault on the object by the mind, but simply the active thinking of the received image.[15]

Plotinus adopts this use of *epibole* to characterize the soul's construction of its object. His departure from the Hellenistic theories, both Epicurean and Stoic, should already be clear from the fact that the Plotinian mind constructs rather than receives its object. But he borrows elements of both the earlier theories: the shaping power of the Stoic spirit becomes the constructive power of the soul and, more directly, the active thinking of the Epicurean *epibole dianoias* becomes the object constructed. Plotinus often treats the *epibole* in this sense as a tool constructed by the soul to help it know an object that is not as clearly present to it as a sense object. Take the circle, for example. It is not itself a visible object, but at first we can derive an *epibole* from visible circular bodies to help us gain knowledge of the circle. Once we have knowledge of the circle in itself—through geometrical demonstration, for example—such *epibolai* are no longer useful. If the visible bodies that share in bodiless objects like the circle should present themselves to our sense-perception, "it is not necessary that we construct an *epibole* from the sensible particular and

13. III.6.3.22.

14. In Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* X.31, 50, 51, 62, 147.

15. See Laertius, *Lives* X.147, where Epicurus describes the *epibole dianoias* as one of three ways of being present to a knower.

give up on our knowledge of them."[16] That is, if I see a beach ball, I need not imagine its circularity in order to extend my knowledge of the circle. My knowledge has already surpassed the contribution of sense-perception, and so an *epibole* derived from the visible object is useless. In some cases, such an *epibole* may in fact be harmful. Plotinus tells us that the Stoics and Epicureans imagine the soul as a wax tablet which receives impressions from outside it, and this image helps them to understand how the soul's sense-perception works. They then go astray, since such "*epibolai*, derived from sensible objects, are close at hand, and deceive us with their likenesses." The Stoics and Epicureans derive an *epibole* for the soul from their sensation of bodies, and the distance of bodies from the soul makes the *epibole* ill-suited to the object it seeks to represent. In another passage, Plotinus criticizes the Stoics and Epicureans for thinking "about sensations and memory as though they were letters written on boards or tablets."[17] Again, the *epibole* derived from a sensible body is not suited to give us knowledge of something as lofty as the soul or its activities.

It is not only the Stoics and the Epicureans who fail in their construction of *epibolai.* Plotinus repeatedly cautions his reader about the *epibolai* that we construct for non-visible objects, such as the soul, the good, time, and eternity.[18] The problem, as he identifies it, is that we construct our *epibolai* before we have thoroughly understood the object they represent. In the case of eternity and time, Plotinus says, "it is as though we think that by our more general *epibolai* of these concepts we have a clear impression of them in our souls, since we are always speaking of them and naming them all the time."[19] Of course, the mere fact that we can speak of eternity does not mean that we have thoroughly understood it, and so "when we attempt to proceed nearer to it," as Plotinus says, we find ourselves confused and unable to articulate it clearly.

The deceptive character of *epibole* in all these cases owes to its nature as a construction of the mind separated from the object to which it refers. Not surprisingly, then, when Plotinus makes an assumption about the relation between number and being in his treatise on number, he immediately asks: "is this, then, in our consideration and *epibole* of it, or also in its reality?"[20] We, who know objects discursively, cannot avoid this separation of our *epibole* from the reality of the object.

16. IV.4.8.6.
17. IV.6.3.74.
18. VI.2.4.23 (the soul); VI.8.11.13 (the good); III.7.1.4 (time and eternity).
19. III.7.1.4–6.
20. VI.6.9.14.

The intellect, on the other hand, experiences no such separation. The object which the intellect thinks is both object of thought and the thinking of it. The thinking of intellect, then, Plotinus says, is not thought in the sense that it is "a definition of the thing or an *epibole* of it."[21] Definitions and *epibolai,* as we understand them in the soul, are by their very nature separate from the object they allow us to know, and so do not adequately characterize the thought which belongs to the intellect. This thought, Plotinus says, "is true knowledge, which is not an image of the thing, but the thing itself." Plotinus does not always reject *epibole* as a way of characterizing the thought of intellect. For instance, when criticizing Aristotle for attributing the category of quality to the visible world, Plotinus suggests that both sensation and the intellect can distinguish objects without needing these objects to be given definition by the Aristotelian category of quality. Sensation can distinguish objects without such definition because it never uses a definition. It simply sees. The intellect, too, Plotinus says, "does not use definitions in its simple *epibolai*."[22] That is, the intellect can distinguish its objects without the need of *logoi* present in the objects. It simply sees each in a specific act of intellectual vision. Plotinus calls such an act an *epibole,* by analogy with the *epibole* of the soul, but the two kinds of *epibolai* are radically different. If the soul's *epibole* of its object were the object itself, and if it were not a construction of the soul but the soul's own existence, then it would be identical with the *epibole* of the intellect.

The intellect, then, perceives itself through a group of simple *epibolai*, which are not constructions separate from their objects, but are the objects themselves.[23] In *Ennead* III.8, Plotinus asks whether the intellect also perceives what is beyond it by an *epibole*, but he does not give an answer, and he does not explain what kind of *epibole* this would be.[24] His statement at *Ennead* VI.7.35, then, that the intellect sees what is beyond it by an "*epibole* and *paradoche*," is unique in the Plotinian corpus. It is the only passage where

21. VI.6.6.24.

22. VI.3.18.12.

23. It may be that the intellect knows itself through a comprehensive or *athroos epibole* that constitutes the collection of all the simple *epibolai* by which the intellect knows its objects. The passages in which Plotinus applies the term *athroos* to the *epibole* of the intellect are few, and of these many are aporetic in character, so no firm conclusion can be drawn. See IV.4.1.20, III.8.9.21.

24. III.8.9.21. J. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1967) 50 does not treat this passage as aporetic, but as a solid affirmation. He adds to this passage others which seem to me to speak of *epibole* aporetically and not affirmatively, and concludes that *epibole* is "Plotinus' favorite word for the 'knowledge' of the One." If the present passage and the others are, in fact, aporetic, and not affirmative, then Plotinus may simply be asking whether the One can be thought of in the same terms as an intelligible object, and eventually answering in the negative.

Plotinus positively states that the intellect interacts with the One by means of an *epibole*. We can now see how striking is the juxtaposition of *epibole* and *paradoche* in this passage. The term *epibole* suggests that the intellect sees the One as itself, in the way that it sees its own objects as itself, while the term *paradoche* suggests that it receives the One from outside itself. This juxtaposition of terms has received some scholarly attention in recent years,[25] but little has been given to the generative aspect of the act described by the term *epibole.* Plotinus says that the intellect sees what is beyond it in an act "by which it first simply saw, and, seeing, it then possessed intellect."[26] That is, the intellect does not properly become intellect until it undertakes this first act. Plotinus' reference to the intellect as "drunk with nectar" here is then far more than mere decoration. It refers to Plotinus' own interpretation of the *Symposium* myth, in which drunkenness is tied directly to the production of a lower principle by a higher principle.[27] The drunkenness of Plenty is the intellect's knowing of itself as something higher, so as to receive its own content from outside itself. Intellect (Zeus) becomes the soul's formal principle (Plenty) by allying itself with otherness (Poverty, in the story), and the soul is born in this alliance. To use the language of *Ennead* VI.7.35, Plenty must make an *epibole* to see his object as higher than himself, but he must then receive that object from outside in a *paradoche*. Only by such a means can he be a likeness of the higher principle without being identical with that higher principle. In *Ennead* VI.7.35, it is the intellect which is born by seeing the One in an *epibole*, and by receiving the One from outside itself in a *paradoche*.

The intellect-in-otherness, to which Plotinus in his interpretation of the *Symposium* story gives the name of Plenty, is not a distinct hypostasis between the intellect and the soul. It is simply the formal, rather than the material, component of the soul. Likewise, the One-in-otherness which allows the birth of the intellect is neither the One, nor a hypostasis between the One and the intellect, but the formal, rather than the material, component of the intellect.[28] The use of the term *epibole* to characterize the act of this

25. J. Phillips, "Plotinus and the 'Eye' of Intellect," *Dionysius* XIV (1990): 102; J. Bussanich, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988) 94–95, 175.

26. VI.7.35.23.

27. See Bussanich, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, 175. Bussanich claims the drunkenness of the intellect here is different from the drunkenness of Plenty in the *Symposium*. One, he says, is "the super-consciousness of Intellect's source," the other, "the soul's forgetfulness of Intellect, its source." The latter description finds no support in Plotinus' text, while the former omits the generative connotation of "drunk with nectar." The omission is deliberate—Bussanich denies that the present passage describes the generation of the intellect.

28. Plotinus speaks explicitly of a formal and material component of the intellect at III.8.11.3–4.

component is unique to *Ennead* VI.7.35. The phrase "drunk with nectar" serves to underline the non-intellective character of the act, and to point out its generative capacity. Despite its singular character, this *epibole* does not differ entirely from the other *epibolai* we have examined in that it is still an act, still the act of one of the knowing hypostases, and it still results in the possession of something. It is the intellect attempting to know the One in order, later, to know as the intellect.

II

We know too little of the work of Plotinus' student Porphyry to say what he thought of *Ennead* VI.7.35, but we can say at least that his extant works and fragments do not use *epibole* in its ecstatic sense. The same may be said for Porphyry's rough contemporary Iamblichus. The comparative wealth of works by the fifth-century Neoplatonist Proclus puts us in a better position to judge his use of *epibole.* His influence on Dionysius the Areopagite has been well-documented, to the extent that Dionysius is often, and perhaps rightly, considered to be a Proclan rather than a Plotinian Neoplatonist.[29] Since Proclus uses the term *epibole* frequently throughout his works, we might assume that Proclus is the source for whatever meanings Dionysius gives to it, but such an assumption finds no support in Proclus' own writings. Though Proclus uses *epibole* frequently, he confines its application to the soul in its ordinary construction of its object. This construction may be simple or composite depending on how the soul undertakes to know its object. Often the soul knows its object through syllogisms, whose *epibole* will be highly composite, since syllogisms are composed of many parts.[30] There may be many such *epibolai* of a single object,[31] since the same thing may be demonstrated in different ways. Once the soul has thoroughly understood the syllogism and can simply contemplate its conclusion, it may have a simple *epibole* of the conclusion, since the truth that has been demonstrated does not have parts.[32] Since the mind's *epibolai*, whether simple or composite, are

29. The dependence of Dionysius on Proclus was first demonstrated by J. Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253–73, 721–48 and H. Koch, "Proklus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen," *Philologus* 54 (1895): 438–54. More connections between the two have been drawn by H.D. Saffrey, "Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus," *Studia Patristica* 9.3 (1966): 98–105; "New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought,* ed. D.J. O'Meara (Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982) 65–74.

30. See *In Plat. Theol.* 3.68.6 for a use of *epibole* to mean the mind's understanding of an argument.

31. *In Plat. Theol.* 4.76.11.

32. See *In Parm.* 1125.

always the understanding of an object as different from itself as knower, they cannot be identical with the intellect's acts of understanding, since intellect knows all things as itself. For this reason, Proclus denies that there can be *epibolai* of intelligible objects, or of the One—both of them are encountered outside the strict separation of knower and known.

Proclus addresses the knowing of intelligible objects in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*. Plato's Parmenides has said that "none of the forms is known by us, since we do not participate knowledge itself."[33] Proclus qualifies Parmenides' statement so that it refers only to what Proclus calls the "separate forms," the intelligible objects removed from their visible likenesses. He comments: "the separate forms cannot be known by our knowledge, for only the divine intellect sees them." Only the divine intellect can see them because they are "higher than our intellection and the partial *epibole* of our soul."[34] He earlier explains the reason why our *epibole* cannot know these separate forms: "the intellective *epibole* of knowledge and science is more composite, while the intellect is what properly sees the forms."[35] The soul may be intellective, and so it can think forms of a sort, but its intellection is too composite to be able to know the separate forms. These latter forms require a unity of intellection which can only be achieved by the divine intellect. Unlike Plotinus, Proclus does not extend the meaning of *epibole* to include the thought of the divine intellect as though there were a close analogy between the two modes of thinking. He confines his use of *epibole* solely to the soul's mode of knowing.

Just as there can be no *epibole* of a separate form, so there can be no *epibole* of what is beyond all form. In the *Platonic Theology*, Proclus declares that the One is beyond all "knowledge, reasoning, and *epibole*;"[36] that *epibole* is not a means of union, since "union with the first occurs outside of knowledge;"[37] and that union with the incomprehensible "comes after scientific activities and intellective *epibolai*."[38] What prevents the soul's *epibole* from knowing the One is not its composite nature, but the fact that it is a mode of knowing at all. The soul requires a mode of union, not a mode of knowledge, in order to interact with the One. In the work of Proclus, the higher power of the intellect described by Plotinus in *Ennead* VI.7.35 now constitutes such a mode of union. Proclus retains the attribute "drunk" for this higher power. He says: "the intellect is endowed with two kinds of activities, as Plotinus says.

33. *Parm.* 134b.
34. *In Parm.* 949.30–31. See 950.8.
35. *In Parm.* 924.32–34.
36. *In Plat. Theol.* II.31.13.
37. *In Plat. Theol.* II.42.12.
38. *In Plat. Theol.* II.73.15.

There are those by which it is the intellect, and there are those by which it is 'drunk with nectar.'"[39] The latter activities of intellect, those which make it drunk, are not quite the same as those of Plotinus. Proclus takes steps toward hypostasizing the One-in-otherness which is the intellect attempting to think the One. Proclus calls this One-in-otherness the "henad beyond substance" and "the flower of the intellect."[40] In other words, when the divine intellect attempts to think the One, it is no longer, or not yet, an intellect. It is rather a henad, a divine unity. Aside from this modification, the act of the henad remains similar to the act of the "drunken" intellect in Plotinus. It retains, for instance, its generative function. When the intellect, Proclus says, is "'drunk on nectar,' … it generates the whole of cognition."[41] The union of intellect and henad allows all form to come into existence, beginning with the intellect itself, but extending by the providence of the henad into lower forms, down to and including the visible.

III

Dionysius does not directly appropriate the term "drunk" either from Socrates' story of the birth of Eros or Plotinus' commentary on it, since he has explicitly committed himself to deriving names for God only from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. If, like Plotinus and Proclus, he were interested only in describing lower principles as "drunk," this would pose no problem for him. Dionysius, however, intends to use the name "drunk" of his first principle—the God of the scriptures—and to exclude it from the cognitive activities of souls and angelic intellects. He finds scriptural authority to use "drunk" as a name of God in the Book of Psalms, where the Lord awakes "like a sleeper, like someone powerful but reeling with wine."[42] The scriptural passage uses the term *kraipale,* and Dionysius includes it when listing "drunk" as one of the many divine names.[43] When he wishes to explain what drunkenness means, on the other hand, he switches to the term used by Plotinus and Proclus—*methe*—and his discussion likewise follows their lead.

39. *In Plat. Theol.* I.14.

40. *In Parm.* 1047. On the flower of the intellect, see Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism," *Hermes* 92 (1964): 213–25; J. Trouillard, *La Mystagogie de Proclos* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1982) 103–04.

41. *In Parm.* 1047, trans. G. Morrow and J. Dillon in *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's* Parmenides (New Jersey: Princeton U Press, 1987).

42. 77: 65, according to the Septuagint.

43. See, for example, the list at *De Mystica Theologia* (*MT*) 147, 1 (1033B). Page and line numbers for the Dionysian corpus refer to the edition of B.R. Suchla, *De Divinis Nominibus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990) and G. Heil and A.M. Ritter, *De Coelestia Hierarchia; De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia; Mystica Theologia; Epistulae* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991).

Dionysius does not accept the Neoplatonic tradition uncritically. His elevation of drunkenness into the first principle is already a departure from his predecessors, for whom it describes no more than the state of an incipient lower principle undertaking to think a higher principle. But the Neoplatonic structure persists in his description of divine drunkenness: "the cause of all goods, God, is said to get drunk because his good cheer is over-filled and over intellect, or, to put it more properly, because of the complete and ineffable measurelessness of God's good health."[44] Terms like "fullness" and "intellection" typically characterize the mind's thinking of its proper objects. Plotinus, as we have seen, says that "the intellect possesses itself in satiety." It is full, and not over-full. As the source of intellect and its fullness, God must be beyond them both, and so possess the over-fullness that is the characteristic of Plotinian drunkenness.

In the *Symposium* story, the drunkenness of Plenty results in the birth of Eros, since Plenty impregnates Poverty only because he is drunk. Plotinus takes this to mean that drunkenness and eros are linked concepts: drunkenness belongs to the formal principle of the soul, and eros is the soul's very life. Dionysius does not explicitly link drunkenness and eros, but he does famously describe God as erotic, after noting a scriptural passage that does the same thing.[45] He says: "the author of all things himself, by his providence for all things, comes to be outside of himself through the transcendence of his erotic love, by a beautiful and good eros for all things."[46] It is not clear that God's coming to be outside himself here is the act through which all things exist; the language of the passage suggests that God is descending into things he has already created so as to illuminate them, and the context of the passage is the providence exercised within the already existing hierarchy of beings. Dionysius does, however, use the Plotinian structure of erotic production here—though in reverse. Just as the soul's formal principle must think its own content as received from outside before soul itself can exist, so Dionysius' God must desire to be in all things, outside himself, before those things either exist or are illuminated. Their existence or illumination is God's thinking himself as other than himself. A danger is present here that does not trouble the Plotinian account of the birth of Eros. Because Plotinus' drunken act is undertaken by the lower principle (Plenty), there is no danger that the higher principle (Zeus) will descend into the lower principle. Dionysius' God, on the other hand, is himself descending, and so risks becoming a part of his creation. Dionysius seems to recognize this danger, and so adds that God descends by a power "that cannot be stretched

44. *Ep.* IX, 204, 8–11 (1112B–C).
45. Wisdom of Solomon 8:2.
46. *De Divinis Nominibus* (*DN*) 159, 9–11 (712A–B).

beyond him." The power by which God descends remains his own and is not given to his creation.

Perhaps because only God has the measurelessness characterized by drunkenness, Dionysius never describes human drunkenness as a good thing. It is only "an inharmonious (*asymmetros*) consummation and an ecstasy of intellect and mind."[47] Dionysius may simply be referring to the drinking of too much wine, but the term "inharmonious" suggests that the state he criticizes here is one he has often criticized elsewhere in his work—an attempt to break the hierarchic chain of illumination to acquire knowledge higher than befits one's own capacity to receive it.[48] To succeed in such an endeavor would require the measureless power possessed only by God. For a human being to try it would be madness: an "ecstasy of intellect and mind." After one such critique of those who try to seize what is beyond their capacity, Dionysius praises those who "take wing with a harmonious (*symmetro*) eros for the illuminations permitted them."[49] Human drunkenness is always inharmonious, but human eros can be harmonious, and so can have a positive role to play. It is not a generative role—it allows the human soul to take wing in its return to God, rather than bringing about the human soul in the first place. It is also cognitive—the eros of the soul is for an illumination, and so it does not resemble the Plotinian intellect's drunken encounter with the One, which is beyond all understanding. It is in this sense that we should understand the eros attributed by Dionysius to the apostle Paul, "who became erotic in his possession by the divine and, transported with its self-effacing power, said with his divine tongue: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.'" Paul, Dionysius says, spoke "as a true lover and, as he himself says, effaced by God, living not his own life, but the life of his beloved."[50] Paul is not generated in his eros for God; he is illuminated by God. If anything is produced in Paul's encounter with God, it is the sacred text that he hands down in the form of his letters.[51] This text now serves as a source of illumination for others within the ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

When Dionysius deflects the course of human eros toward cognitive illumination, he does not mean to rule out an encounter with God that transcends all cognitive activity. Dionysius describes the capacity of the soul

47 *Ep.* IX, 204, 11–2 (1112C).

48. See *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* (*EH*) 74, 22–75, 1 (400A) and *DN* 110, 15–8 (589A): those who contemplate rightly do not "reach out impossibly toward something beyond the theophany given harmoniously to them."

49. *DN* 110, 19–111, 2 (589A).

50. *DN* 159, 4–7 (712A).

51. For a discussion of this erotic encounter with God as productive of sacred texts and the performance of the liturgy, see L.M. Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism* (New York: Palgrave, 2004) 100–01.

to interact with God repeatedly in the treatise *On the Divine Names*, but nowhere so schematically as in the triad of human interactions with God described in Book One. The last of the three interactions concerns us most directly, but it is most easily understood by contrast with the first two, so I will present them all here. Dionysius describes the triad twice.[52] First, he describes it in the form it will have when, as he says, "we are incorruptible and immortal and attain a state which is most blessed and formed after Christ."[53] In this state, we will engage in the single experience of three objects. First, we will "be filled with the exceedingly apparent sparkles of the Lord's visible theophany." The object we experience here is the sparkles, and we perceive them in our "all-holy contemplation"—apparently an activity of sense-perception, such as the disciples undertook at the transfiguration of Christ. Second, we will "participate the Lord's intelligible gift of light." Here the object is the intelligible light of God, perceived in our "passionless and immaterial intellect."[54] As with our perception of the sparkles, we use a faculty suited to its object. Our sight perceived visible light; here our intellect perceives intelligible light. The final object in this triad, if it can be called an object at all, functions somewhat differently. Dionysius says that we participate "a union above intellect." Here he describes no object, but only an activity—the activity of union. This occurs "in the incomprehensible and blessed *epibolai* of the rays beyond appearance." Dionysius does not describe a faculty that could cause the union; instead, he describes only another activity: the *epibolai*. What does *epibole* mean here and whose is it? The *epibole* is clearly above sense and intellect, and so cannot refer to a mental construction or vision. Does it then have the uniquely Plotinian meaning of an attempt to think a higher principle? Or does the *epibole* not belong to the human knower at all, but to the rays? After all, Dionysius' *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* once uses *epibole* to refer to the "pouring out" of holy oil into the baptismal water.[55] In this case, the human knower would simply receive the pouring out or *epibole* of the rays into its intellect, at which point they would cease to be rays of union and become intelligible objects.

The answers to these questions become clear when Dionysius revisits the triad just a few lines later. Here he is describing our state "now," when we are mortal and corruptible. In our present life, the single experience of

52. *DN* 114, 7–115, 5 (592B–C); *DN* 115, 6–18 (592C–593A). The triad appears a third time in a different context at *DN* 156, 15–19 (708D). Dionysius' description of the third term there reads: "intellectual powers are useless when the soul, formed after God through an ineffable union, casts itself (*epiballei*) on the rays of unapproachable light by means of blind *epibolai*."

53. *DN* 114, 7–8 (592B–C).

54. For Dionysius' most thorough description of God as intelligible light, see *DN* 149, 9–150, 14 (700D–701B).

55. *EH* 72, 15 (396C).

the age to come is broken up into distinct moments. In the first of these, "we use appropriate symbols for divine things."[56] By "appropriate," here, Dionysius seems to mean, as he often does, symbols that are adapted to our needs as knowers. Our knowledge begins with the sensible, and we must use symbols that are appropriate to that form of knowing. That is, the symbols must be sensible. Once we have acquired such symbols, "we are extended up again, in a manner proportioned to ourselves, from them to the simple and united truth of the intelligible sights." This second moment does not leave the sensible behind, but extends it into something further: its intelligible truth. For instance, if I read the Book of Psalms, and find there that "the Lord awoke," I have a symbol which requires interpretation. The act of interpreting extends the symbol into its intelligible truth: that "the divine sleep is God's removal from and lack of communication with the objects of his providence."[57]

The third moment is more clearly distinguished from the first two. Dionysius says: "after all our intellection of the divine forms, we cease our intellective activities, and cast ourselves (*epiballomen*), so far as we may, into the ray beyond substance." Here, the *epibolai* are clearly our own and do not belong to the ray. They are also clearly above the proper activities of sensation and intellection. Prior to this passage, we have seen such a use of *epibole* only in *Ennead* VI.7.35. There is a strong circumstantial case, then, for the dependence of the Dionysian *epibole* on the Plotinian *epibole* of *Ennead* VI.7.35. A few lines later, the case becomes more than circumstantial. Dionysius uses the term *epibole* again, this time as a description of the highest experience of the angelic intellects, which he here calls "holy powers," and refers to *Ennead* VI.7.35 directly. He says: "the unions of the holy powers—should we call them *epibolai* or *paradochai*?—are ineffable and incomprehensible."[58] Dionysius introduces his reference to Plotinus with the indirect mode of expression he occasionally adopts when paraphrasing or borrowing language from the Hellenic Neoplatonists.[59] In these cases, Dionysius does not simply state his claim, but interjects: "should I speak in this manner?" or "should it be called this?" This expression by itself suggests that Dionysius is referring to a Hellenic Neoplatonist here, even without the telltale pairing of *epibole* and *paradoche*.

56. *DN* 115, 6 (592C).

57. *Ep.* IX, 206, 9–10 (1113B).

58. *DN* 116, 10–12 (593B).

59. P. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. C. Luibheid (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) 61, n. 4 has noted four of these "disclaimers," as he calls them: at 641A, 645B, 648B, and 697B.

Dionysius' brief reference to *epibolai* and *paradochai* in Book One of *On the Divine Names* is not our only evidence that he had read *Ennead* VI.7.35. In Book Seven of the same work he paraphrases the immediately preceding claim of Plotinus, that the intellect has a two-fold function: its own proper function, when it sees objects of intellect, and an ecstatic function when it attempts to provide for itself a higher object. Plotinus says: "intellect, then, has a power for intellecting, by which it sees what is inside it, and a power by which it sees what is beyond it."[60] Dionysius paraphrases: "let it be known that our intellect has a power for intellecting, through which it sees the intelligibles, and a union beyond the nature of intellect, through which it touches what is beyond it."[61] Dionysius has made a few changes to the Plotinian passage. The intelligibles which intellect sees are no longer explicitly inside it, and the higher experience of intellect is no longer characterized with the same terms—"power" and "sight"—as its lower experience. Intellect, then, may not have a natural capacity for this higher experience, and in this higher experience intellect may not function in a mode analogous to its lower experience.[62]

The noun form of *epibole* occurs only three times in *On the Divine Names*. In all three cases, it describes the ecstatic mode of a human or angelic intellect. The only author to use *epibole* in this sense prior to Dionysius is Plotinus in *Ennead* VI.7.35. Because Dionysius is clearly familiar with this extraordinary passage, it is reasonable to conclude that he derives his use of *epibole* from no other source. This point is worth underlining, if only because so many recent translations of the term either attribute *epibole* to the divine rays rather than the soul or give it the merely cognitive significance it possesses in the work of Proclus.[63]

60. VI.7.35.20–22.

61. *DN* 194, 10–12 (865C–D).

62. The question of whether the Dionysian soul or intellect has a natural capacity for union with God is discussed by J. Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu* (Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959) 206. Vanneste (209) believes there is such a natural capacity in the Dionysian soul and intellect. J. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism," *Hermes* 92 (1964): 213–25, at 219; and A. Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei* (Thessalonica: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikon Meleton; George Dedousis, 1994) 109–12 have criticized his conclusion. See also L.M. Harrington, *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook of Mystical Theology at the University of Paris* (Paris, Leuven/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004) 15.

63. Translations of *On the Divine Names* tend to identify the *epibole* with the rays rather than the knower. J. Jones, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1980) translates the term as "radiations," "objects," and "emissions." C. Luibheid's translation, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) is imprecise, but appears to translate the term as "struck" and "comings." C.E. Rolt, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1920) translates it as "embraces" and "impulsions," with the note that "God sends the impulse, the angels receive

Having identified Plotinus as the sole source of Dionysius' use of the term *epibole*, can we then say that the act characterized by the term is the same in both Dionysius and Plotinus? In at least one important respect, the answer must be "no." Dionysius removes all trace of the act's generative nature, retaining only its characteristic of being something done by the soul. Dionysius invariably characterizes the object of this experience as a "ray" or "rays."[64] By itself, this characterization of the object does not differ from that of Plotinus, who himself describes the One as a ray seen by the intellect at *Ennead* VI.7.36. For Plotinus, however, the intellect sees the ray as the precondition for its own activity. As a result, the intellect possesses a dual activity: its *epibole* of the ray and its comprehension of intelligible objects. Plotinus is careful to maintain that, although one of these activities is logically prior to the other, they occur simultaneously.[65] Dionysius, on the other hand, suggests quite strongly that the *epibole* of the ray is posterior to the proper operation of both the human soul and the angelic intellects. In the soul's present state, the posteriority is temporal. As we have seen, the soul first perceives the sensible, then extends itself upward again to the intelligible. After this, it casts itself on the ray.[66] More striking is Dionysius' subsequent claim that the angelic intellects do not uniformly undertake the *epibole*, but that the *epibole* is given "only to those angels who are made worthy of it in a manner beyond angelic knowing."[67] Unlike the intellect of Plotinus, Dionysius' angelic intellect does not undertake an *epibole* in order to exist, since not all angelic intellects undertake this act at all. For both the human soul and the angelic intellect, the *epibole* is not a constitutive act, but follows after the proper rational or intellective activity of the being.

Terms like "drunk" and "erotic" are then wholly inappropriate for the Dionysian *epibole*, since, in the Neoplatonic tradition, they indicate a generative process. Dionysius seems to have recognized this, and, as a result, omitted all language of drunkenness and erotic love in his treatment of the *epibole*. We see this omission not only in passages where he uses the term *epibole* explicitly, but also in passages where he does not speak of an *epibole* but does describe the ecstatic experience of the soul, as in the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*. The final lines of this chapter, with their allegorical

it." Y. de Andia borrows a translation of Proclus' *epibole* to use with Dionysius: *Henosis: l'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) 109.

64. *DN* 115, 2 (592C); 115, 10 (592D); 156, 18 (708D).

65. VI.7.35.28–29. See III.8.11.23: the intellect "is always desiring and always finding what it desires."

66. *DN* 115, 6–10 (592C–D). The soul's circular motion described at *DN* 153, 10–6 (705A) contains a similar series of steps.

67. *DN* 116, 12–3 (593B). For more on this difference between Dionysius and Plotinus, see Harrington, *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook* 12–15.

interpretation of Moses' ascent into the darkness above Mount Sinai, are a crux for any interpretation of *epibole* in the Dionysian corpus, despite the fact that Dionysius does not use the term here. In these lines, he twice uses a synonym, *eisduo,* whose meaning is less susceptible to misinterpretation. Where *epiballo,* as we have seen, can mean many different and sometimes opposed things, *eisduo* generally means "enter into." Moses, Dionysius says, "is freed from both what is seen and what sees, and enters into the truly mystical darkness of unknowing."[68] Dionysius says little else about this "entrance," save that it is a union, it is not an intellective act (Moses "is united by an entirely unknowable inactivity of all knowledge"), and it transcends the division into subject and object (Moses is "neither of himself nor of another"). Dionysius describes here the highest union participated by the soul, as he does in the passages where he refers to *Ennead* VI.7.35, but never in the entire chapter does he use any language of drunkenness or eros. The Dionysian *epibole* is a sober union with the Good, which does not result in the generation of a new hypostasis.[69]

IV

Dionysius' sober but non-cognitive union with God does not endure among his interpreters. The first commentary on the Dionysian corpus, composed in the form of scholia on various passages, reduces the Dionysian union to a cognitive act and, in doing so, paves the way for an entire interpretive tradition. By understanding union with God in Dionysius as cognitive, this "intellectual" tradition diminishes its transcendent character. However extraordinary the cognition required, it is at least analogically related to our present cognitive activity. The union remains sober, as in Dionysius, but there is now no reason to call it drunk or erotic in the first place, since it no longer involves a radical transcendence of the soul's own nature and faculties. I will conclude with a brief look at the intellectual interpretation of *epibole* in Dionysius' earliest interpreters: the sixth-century scholiast in the East, and his ninth-century Latin translator Eriugena in the West.

The Dionysian scholiast, often identified with John of Scythopolis, comments on both of Dionysius' uses of *Ennead* VI.7.35: the references

68. *MT* 144, 9–11 (1001A).

69. Dionysius' likely contemporary Damascius, in his *De Principiis,* ed. L.G. Westerink (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2002) I, 65, ll. 1–7 uses *epibole* in a strikingly similar sense: "if there is a unitary knowledge, such as the knowledge of the gods, established by the one and beyond the unified, it will touch the one by an *epibole*…. If even we ever make such a casting of ourselves (*epibaloumen*), it will be when, as Plato says, we raise the ray of our soul, thrusting out the very flower of our one-like knowledge." Dionysius refers to the higher of the two powers of intellect as a "touching"; Damascius calls the *epibole* a "touching," and describes it outside of any generative context.

to *epibole*, and the description of the two powers of intellect. The scholiast passes over Dionysius' descriptions of the soul's *epibole* in silence, and comments only when Dionysius says of the angels that "the unions of the holy powers—should we call them *epibolai* or *paradochai*?—are ineffable and incomprehensible." The scholiast is not sure whether "unions" here means the angels themselves or their act of uniting with God, and so he comments on both possibilities. He first treats the "unions" as the angels themselves: "if what concerns the angels is unknown to us, then what must we think about God? Dionysius says, then, that the angelic creations are like certain *epibolai* of God's goodness."[70] The *epibolai* are here described as originating in God rather than the angels, who are his messengers. In this case, the angels reveal to us the unknowability of God in their very being. The scholiast goes on to give two definitions of *epibole,* one consistent with what he has just said of it, and the other a more or less accurate presentation of the Plotinian *epibole*.[71] He says first: "*epibole* must be understood as an undividedly divided motion resulting in the production of unities, that is, resulting in the production of each intelligible thing." Then he goes on to say that *epibole* "can also be understood as their mode of union with God—in as much as it is fitting for angels to be united with God—according to which they cast themselves (*epiballousi*) on the goodness of God according to their worth, or they receive (*paradechontai*) a revelation of his goodness from him." Having presented this Plotinian definition of *epibole,* the scholiast immediately returns to the former definition, the one he prefers, and concludes the scholium with more comments on the angels as manifestations of divine unknowability.

The scholiast's interpretation of angelic *epibolai* gives us no clear understanding of how he conceives the human soul's union with God. He makes a clearer statement on this latter question when he comments on the two-fold power of the intellect described by Dionysius as "a power for intellecting, through which it sees the intelligibles, and a union beyond the nature of intellect, through which it touches what is beyond it." The scholiast radically alters the activity of the first power, which for Dionysius and Plotinus is an intellectual vision. For the scholiast, it is a discursive process. He explains the first power as acting when "the intellect, wishing to think, lowers itself, descending into its thoughts. For thoughts are lower than the thinker, being thought and comprehended, and are naturally a scattering and partitioning of the unity of the intellect itself."[72] The scholiast elsewhere explains that

70. *Patrologia Graeca* (*PG*) 4: 201.7 (3–5).

71. The scholiast may have been familiar with *Ennead* VI.7.35 directly, since he paraphrases Plotinus at several points in his commentary. For a list of Plotinian passages used by the scholiast, see R. Frank, "The Use of the *Enneads* by John of Scythopolis," *Le Muséon* 100 (1987): 101–08.

72. *PG* 4: 344.1 (2–6).

this scattering and partitioning is the formation of discursive arguments.[73] He also claims that the soul itself is incapable of division, it is simple and one, and so it must descend into the quasi-corporeal spirit when it wants to think discursively.[74] The scholiast's interpretation of the second power of the intellect seems at first to be faithful to both Dionysius and Plotinus: "he calls 'union of the intellect' that through which it is extended to what is beyond it. That is, it is that through which it applies itself to contemplation concerning God. It stands apart from all sensible and intelligible things, and even from its own motion, so as to receive the ray of divine knowledge." The scholiast describes this power as contemplative, which may suggest that it is a cognitive act, but he also says that the intellect must cease its own motion. Elsewhere, however, the scholiast makes clear that the intellect does not receive the divine rays in anything like the Dionysian *epibole.* Instead, "when the intellect becomes whole and turns to what is inside it, becoming oneness and simplicity, it will be able to take in the divine rays through a praiseworthy unknowing."[75] Union with God does not occur when the mind goes beyond itself, but when it turns to what is inside itself. Its oneness is not the supra-intellectual oneness of God, but the oneness of intellect, opposed only to the "scattering and partitioning" of discursive thought. In other words, the scholiast has turned Dionysian unknowing into what for Plotinus was the first power of the intellect: its looking at its own content. Not surprisingly, eros and drunkenness do not play a role in the scholiast's treatment of divine union. His union with God is like the Plotinian intellect's contemplation of itself, when it "possesses itself in satiety."

Eriugena does not seem to have had a copy of the Greek scholia to aid him in his interpretation of the Dionysian corpus when he translated it into Latin in the middle of the ninth century.[76] But like the scholiast, Eriugena transforms the Dionysian *epibole* into a cognitive act. His very translation of the term prevents it from being taken as anything else: he renders it once as "viewpoint" (*speculatio*) and once as "contemplation" (*theoria*).[77] When he comes to translate Dionysius' description of the two powers of the intellect, he makes two changes to the higher power that reduce it to a self-directed cognitive activity. Where Dionysius has "a union beyond the nature of intellect, through which it touches what is beyond it," Eriugena translates "a super-exalted unity and a nature through which it is connected to its summit."

73. *PG* 4: 257.4 (7–10).

74. *PG* 4: 193.5 (7–13).

75. *PG* 4: 264.1.

76. But see V. Petroff, "*Theoriae* of the Return in John Scottus' Eschatology," in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and his Time* (Leuven: Leuven U Press, 2002) 577–79.

77. *Patrologia Latina* (*PL*) 122: 1116C; 1135A.

The intellect no longer has to go beyond its own nature to achieve this union; it has a nature capable of union. The object of this union has also changed. It is no longer something beyond the intellect, but the summit of the intellect. The higher power of intellect is now its natural ability to think itself.

Eriugena's consistent rendering of the Greek *epekeina* as *summitas* also affects his translation of Moses' ascent up Mount Sinai in the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology.*[78] Where Dionysius says that the soul "enters the darkness where … the one beyond all things truly is," Eriugena says that the soul "enters the darkness where … the summit of all things truly is."[79] His treatment of God as the summit of all things rather than beyond all things is particularly perilous here, where Dionysius is using a mountain as subject for his allegory. For Dionysius, the summit of the mountain consists of the "intelligible peaks" and the "underlying structures of things subordinate to the one who transcends all." By identifying God with the summit of the mountain, rather than the darkness above it, Eriugena includes God among these objects of intellectual activity. This reinterpretation of God as summit is only one of several changes made by Eriugena that, intentionally or not, tame the radical unknowing described by Dionysius in the closing lines of the chapter.[80] Eriugena's translation remained in circulation even after it was supplemented by other Latin translations; it laid a foundation in the very text of Dionysius for the intellectualizing interpretations of great thirteenth-century Dominican thinkers like Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

A second, "experiential" tradition of Dionysian interpretation began in the Latin West with the work of Thomas Gallus, the thirteenth-century abbot of Vercelli who wrote paraphrases and commentaries on the Dionysian corpus. Gallus brought to his study of Dionysius an emphasis on love derived from the Augustinian theology of Richard and Hugh of St. Victor, as well as Bernard of Clairveaux.[81] In the Greek East, the experiential tradition has an important precursor in Maximus the Confessor, who occasionally speaks of the soul's "ecstatic and drunken participation in the good,"[82] but it flowers in the Hesychast tradition of the fourteenth century and its foremost figure, Gregory Palamas. In both its Latin and Greek forms, this tradition uses the language of eros and drunkenness freely, not in their original association

78. On Eriugena's translation of *epekeina*, see R. Roques, *Libres sentiers vers l'érigénisme* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1975) 117–19. For a more thorough account of Eriugena's translation of the *Mystical Theology,* see Harrington, *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook* 22–26.

79. *MT* 143, 16–17 (1000C).

80. On the other changes made by Eriugena, see Harrington, *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook* 24–25.

81. See *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on* De Mystica Theologia, ed. J. McEvoy (Paris, Leuven/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003) 8.

82. *Questiones et Dubia* 180.15.

with generative activity, but to indicate the affective nature of union with God. Just as the intellectual tradition draws an analogy between our present cognitive activity and the kind of cognition that is union with God, so the experiential tradition draws an analogy between our present experience of affects like love and the affect that is union with God.[83] The complications that ensue from the reintroduction of affective language to the interpretation of *epibole* cannot be addressed here, but we may note in conclusion one of the most remarkable compositions to result from it: the sixth and seventh of Bonaventure's *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*. In his responses to these questions, Bonaventure describes the mode of human knowing called *excessus* as "when we will be totally intoxicated" by the divine measurelessness; this *excessus* has as its goal "a desire of the mind."[84] To explain the difference between this drunken, desiring *excessus* and the mind's ordinary activity, Bonaventure quotes what he thinks is Dionysius, but is actually Dionysius' paraphrase of Plotinus on the two powers of the intellect. In a strange twist of history, Bonaventure restores the complete imagery of *Ennead* VI.7.35 to this passage, including language of drunkenness and erotic love, apparently without ever having had access to the texts of Plotinus.

83. B. McGinn calls the two traditions the "speculative" and the "affective" in *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 76.

84. Trans. Z. Hayes, in *Saint Bonaventure's Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ* (New York: The Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure U, 1992) 171, 188.