

Much Ado about Nothing: A Note on Trouillard's Use of Proclus¹

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In their analyses of various late antique philosophical systems, recent scholars have helped to reveal the meaning of the First Principle's *nothingness*. The writings of Émile Bréhier and Jean-Luc Marion, for instance, have been crucial to these developments (though they remain largely critical of pagan Neoplatonism's later stages²), and Jean Trouillard has explicated the One's radical unnameability, or *Nothingness by excess*. Trouillard's texts present a close study of the pagan Neoplatonists, especially Proclean negative henology. Beginning within the framework established by an article that appeared previously in *Dionysius*,³ the aim of this paper is to show the wider philosophical context and contemporary relevance of Trouillard's Proclean exegesis, particularly his explication of the self-constituted soul and its union with the One.



To establish this context, we shall examine Eli Diamond's comments on the 'Doctrine of Being' section in Hegel's *Logic*.⁴ In the *Logic*, Hegel treats

1. I thank Wayne Hankey and Susan Harris for the time they most generously devoted to helping me revise this text.

2. Cf. Émile Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *The Hellenistic and Roman Age*, trans. Wade Baskin (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1965), 202ff. Bréhier sides with Plotinus, in whom he finds an intellectualism opposed by the later Neoplatonic tradition. Marion sides rather with Dionysius, whom he contrasts with a theoretical abstractionism which he finds in the Greek Neoplatonists in general. Cf. Wayne J. Hankey, "Jean-Luc Marion's Dionysian Neoplatonism," for "Neoplatonism and Contemporary Philosophy: Proceedings of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies Meeting in Québec 2006," in press. For more reactions to Marion's use of Dionysius, see Stephen Gersh, *Neoplatonism after Derrida: Parallelograms* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), xi–xii and 180–81.

3. Eli Diamond, "Hegel on Being and Nothing: Some Contemporary Neoplatonic and Sceptical Responses," *Dionysius* XVIII (2000): 183–216. Evidently, the present paper owes much to this article.

4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Logic: Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), Part One*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

the Eleatic doctrine of pure Being as the beginning moment of philosophy. This is the Hegelian logic's opening stage, and, as such, this section has been the subject of much post-modern, anti-Hegelian criticism.⁵ Diamond shows how this discussion is more relevant to the spirit of Neoplatonism than Hegel's explicit treatment of Plotinus in his *History of Philosophy*. Consequently, beginning at this point will help us to see what is at stake for Trouillard and his post-modern, Neoplatonic followers.

Hegel describes this first Eleatic moment in the 'Doctrine of Being' as one of pure, immediate, undetermined self-identity. Hegel writes:

Pure Being makes the beginning: because it is on the one hand pure thought, and on the other immediacy itself, simple and indeterminate; and the first beginning cannot be mediated by anything, or be further determined." (§86)

The Eleatic God, or pure Being, transcends the determinate reality of beings and is their wholly indeterminate ground—it is the *superlatively real*. Hegel describes this Eleatic God in a way that is reminiscent of Proclus, especially as Trouillard interprets him. Hegel argues:

the indeterminate, as we here have it, is the blank we begin with, not a featurelessness reached by abstraction, not the elimination of all character, but the original featurelessness which precedes all definite character and is the very first of all. (§86)

For Hegel, this is the starting point of thought. He writes, "Being, as Being, is nothing fixed or ultimate: it yields to dialectic and sinks into its opposite, which, also taken immediately, is Nothing." (§86) In Hegel's view, this opposition must be overcome dialectically by a movement through becoming to a determinate being, to a God who contains division in himself. Pure Being and Nothing must be thought in their concrete unity since, at this first stage, they are identical—pure Being and Nothing cannot be intelligibly distinguished. If pure Being is the indeterminate, 'original featurelessness' beyond all predication, then Being's "distinction from nothing is a mere intention or *meaning*." (§87)

Proclus would not agree with this identification, but he would not find it repellent. For him, this moment does not call for a dialectical supercession insofar as intelligible distinction first occurs only in the realm of *Nous*. In his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Proclus states that the faculty required for our final union with the One is not Intellect, but it is:

5. See Diamond, 188 n.7.

an ‘inspired impulse’ in our consciousness of that which transcends all beings, required in order that we may not slip unawares from our negations into Non-Being and its invisibility by reason of our indefinite imaginations.⁶

The distinction between the One (characterized by Trouillard as *nothingness by excess*) and the nothingness of indeterminate matter (*nothingness by default*) is not an intellectual distinction. No logical necessity separates them, but, as we shall see, Proclus places an urgent importance upon their extra-logical distinction.⁷



The French historian of philosophy Émile Bréhier⁸ employs these same categories in an important but largely unnoticed article, written in 1919. His analysis is rather significantly titled, “L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec,” and Trouillard would later call this study “une belle étude.”⁹ Bréhier states well the problem before us:

The origin [of being] cannot, as such, possess any of the characteristics which belong to the beings to be explained or deduced; for it would thus be one thing among other things, one being among other beings. But, possessing no characteristic of beings, it appears, to the thought which tries to grasp it, as a pure non-being, a nothingness of being.¹⁰

There are two kinds of *nothingness*; they must not be confounded, while neither can be thinkable. Bréhier explains that for Plotinus it is philosophically essential that:

because the One is the origin, the One is nothing; on the other hand, and for the same reason, because it is the origin, it must be that this One is not less than being, but on the contrary more than being.¹¹

6. Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, trans. G. Morrow and J. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1987), 1072, 6.

7. Hence Diamond’s observation that there is no logical necessity separating the corresponding ‘pious’ and ‘nihilist’ positions. See Diamond, 216. Stanislas Breton, for instance, opposes the ‘logical necessity’ inherent in Hegel’s dialectical overcoming of this opposition. See, e.g., “Being, God and the Poetics of Relation: An Interview with Stanislas Breton,” in Stanislas Breton, *The Word and the Cross* (New York: Fordham U Press, 2002), 129–44.

8. See W.J. Hankey’s discussion of Bréhier in his *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*, Studies in Philosophical Theology (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 120–30.

9. Jean Trouillard, “Préface,” in Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, traduction, introduction, et notes par Jean Trouillard, Bibliothèque philosophique (Paris: Aubier, 1965), 10.

10. É. Bréhier, “L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec,” *Revue de métaphysique et morale* 26 (1919): 443.

11. *Ibid.*, 452.

In its superabundant productivity, the radical origin cannot be reduced to an intelligible object, and a non-intellectual ‘attitude’ of the soul is necessary in order to distinguish it from pure matter’s deficient nothingness. To return to this origin, one must be “drunk with nectar and inspired.”¹² This ‘attitude’ is what Hegel would criticize, or a post-modern thinker like Breton would praise, as not a form of knowing but ‘a mere intention or *meaning*.’

Bréhier examines this idea’s development in Proclus and Damascius. He determines that Proclean negation does not indicate the One’s *deprivation* of certain characteristics, but rather shows its *liberty from* any essential predication whatever. Further, Bréhier explains, “this liberation from essence is at the same time a *power over* essence.”¹³ Crucially, negations are not only superior to affirmations but they are even productive of them.¹⁴ Positive predicates are denied of the One, but, in Proclus’ words, “as the One is cause of all things, so these negations are the causes of the corresponding affirmations.”¹⁵ The One grounds the existence of all multiplicity while it is not itself pluralized, and it becomes none of the things which proceed from it:

If then, says Proclus, it is nothing of those things which it produces, and it produces everything, it is no one of those things. If, then, we know all things through assertions, we reveal the nature of that ‘entity’ by negation from each other thing in the universe, and thus this form of negation is productive of the multiplicity of assertions.¹⁶

The One is the radical origin of the totality of Being. It must not be included within that totality, and everything negated of the One also proceeds from it by that very negation. The One’s negativity is not only free from essence, but it is also the *cause* of all essential predication.

In Bréhier’s final view, the One’s unspeakable nothingness is a real ‘problem’ without a solution in the Neoplatonic tradition itself. It expresses philosophy’s historical need to overcome “the intimate link of Greek intellectualism with the linguistic expression of thought.”¹⁷ Bréhier’s later work tries instead to isolate the intellectualist in Plotinus—a virtue lost to Iamblichus and Proclus as this ‘problem’ draws them into a non-intellectual, ritualistic pragmatism.¹⁸ By 1928, concerned with preserving the purity of Western philosophical reason, Bréhier is fully persuaded by Hegel’s reading of Plotinus.

12. *Ibid.*, 461. Cf. Hankey, “Jean-Luc Marion’s Dionysian Neoplatonism,” in press.

13. Bréhier, 459 (*italics mine*).

14. This, for Proclus, explains why the wholly negative hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides* comes first.

15. Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, 1075, 19.

16. *Ibid.*, 1075, 31.

17. Bréhier, “L’idée du néant,” 475.

18. See É. Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 204.

He writes: “the idea of the Plotinian philosophy is an intellectualism or an elevated idealism,”¹⁹ wherein “Plotinus had the idea that the essence of God is thought itself and that the essence is present in thought,”²⁰ and wherein the moment of mystical union does not transcend the moment of absolute intelligence. With Hegel, Bréhier attributes the non-intellectualist strand in Plotinus to external, Oriental influences.²¹ His earlier study, though, reveals that “Bréhier understood the basis in Neoplatonism for the religion, mystical theology, and negative henology found there later, especially by priests like ... Jean Trouillard.”²²



Martin Heidegger’s early work, published throughout the 1920s, appears to have influenced Bréhier’s departure from the approach he took in 1919. Heidegger establishes few explicit connections between his own philosophy and Greek Neoplatonism, and it has been argued that he had little understanding of that tradition.²³ Because of the study he published in 1919, however, Bréhier could not have missed the connections. Significantly, when Trouillard and his followers developed a theological response to Heidegger’s criticisms of onto-theology, their efforts culminated in a subtle analysis of Proclean negative henology.

Diamond observes that Heidegger, in his lecture ‘What Is Metaphysics?’²⁴ (1929):

is self-consciously attempting to undermine the necessity of the first determination in Hegel’s ‘Doctrine of Being,’ the absolute identity of indeterminate Being and Nothing. In opposition to this first determination, Heidegger attempts to show how these two nearly indistinguishable terms belong together.²⁵

Heidegger explains how, in its quest to know the being of beings, scientific logic must always have a prior relation to the *nothing* which it excludes. This *nothing* is not a being, nor is it simply the negation of all that is. It is the prior condition of negation and of thought. He states:

19. Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin* (Paris: Boivin & Cie., 1928), 181.

20. *Ibid.*, 180.

21. Specifically, he attributes this to the Indian Upanishads. See Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin*, 116–18.

22. Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 129.

23. See Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)*, *L’âne d’or* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001); also see Diamond, 198ff. Cf. S. Gersh’s discussions of Heidegger and Neoplatonism in *Neoplatonism after Derrida*, esp. 28ff.

24. Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993).

25. Diamond, 199.

the nothing is more original than the 'not' and negation. If this thesis is right, then the possibility of negation as an act of intellect, and thereby the intellect itself, are somehow dependent upon the nothing. Then how can the intellect hope to decide about the nothing? (100)

Heidegger describes our original immediate union with the *nothing*, from which our engagement with determinate beings is produced. His language is influential for Trouillard's account of the Proclean soul's transcendence:

Only on the ground of the original revelation of the nothing can human existence approach and penetrate beings.... It emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already revealed. Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing. Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. This being beyond beings we call 'transcendence.' (105)

Like the *One-in-us* or the *seed of Non-Being*, which Trouillard examines in the Proclean soul, Heidegger's *Dasein* is rooted in that which is beyond and prior to beings. From this rootedness arises the intellect's power to negate, and so "the idea of 'logic' itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning." (107) For Heidegger, and also for Proclus: "we cannot even bring ourselves originally before the nothing through our own decision and will." (108) The relation between the Heideggerian *nothing* and *Dasein* is analogous to that between the Proclean One and the soul, as Trouillard interprets them.



When Trouillard ²⁶ departed from what he later called the 'Augustinian onto-theology' of his teacher Maurice Blondel, he became attracted to Plotinian studies.²⁷ He found in Plotinus "a pagan philosopher who posited at the root of mind an implicit union with an ineffable source."²⁸ Trouillard went on to explore this pre-noetic contact with Being's pre-essential origin, and he later turned to Proclus, who, he says:

made me encounter the 'self-constituting' character of all authentic being and made it clear that in a monadological perspective the entire procession is intrinsic to each psycho-noetic subject.²⁹

26. See Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 152–62 and 193–200.

27. See J. Trouillard, "Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel," *Archives de philosophie* (janvier-mars 1961): 21–28.

28. Joseph Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui: La vie et le pensée de Jean Trouillard (1907–1984)," in *Études néoplatoniciennes* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1989), 355.

29. J. Trouillard, *L'un et l'âme selon Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972), 4.

Therefore, Trouillard realized, “Proclus must be interpreted in what we now call the register of immanence and that of transcendence, at the same time,”³⁰ and this means an interpretation that focuses on the doctrines of the One and the soul. For Trouillard, “once Proclus is properly understood, the Neoplatonic doctrines of transcendence and of the soul must be reconceived,”³¹ and he does precisely this in his *L’Un et l’Âme selon Proclus* (1972). He begins by firmly opposing Neoplatonic transcendence and procession to Judeo-Christian accounts of Creation—something which Heidegger failed to do in his lecture when he claimed that, throughout the entire ancient tradition, “the questions of Being and of the nothing as such are not posed.” (110) Trouillard insists:

Being and the One are not interchangeable. Creation is not to be confused with procession. The creature is something other than a derived entity and the Principle does not act like a sublimated artisan.³²

It is therefore necessary to distinguish *ontology* from *henology* in the history of metaphysics, since:

to judge the second according to the laws of the first is to condemn oneself to understanding neither one nor the other... [Further,] Neoplatonic transcendence is not an absence, but an excess of presence, since it is for each mind its interior home of liberation. It is less an end than a point of departure, less a superior term than a prior state, never participated, always communicated. It is only exterior to us inasmuch as we are exterior to ourselves.³³

There are similarities between this, Heidegger’s *nothing*, and Marion’s *saturated phenomenon*. In his later *La Mystagogie de Proclus* (1982), Trouillard is concerned with defending his form of ‘negative theology’ against the same critics as Marion. Like Marion in his debates with Derrida, “Trouillard was well aware of ‘the risk which in a permanent way Neoplatonism runs just as much as does all negative theology.’”³⁴ Unlike Marion, Trouillard determines

30. Ibid.

31. Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 195.

32. Trouillard, *L’un et l’âme selon Proclus*, 5.

33. Ibid.

34. S. Breton, “Négation et négativité proclusiennes dans l’œuvre de Jean Trouillard,” in *Proclus et son influence, actes du Colloque de Neuchâtel*, Juin 1985 (Zürich: Éditions du Grand Midi, 1987), 88. Breton is quoting Trouillard’s *La Mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 94. Cf. Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 209. For the exchanges between Marion and Derrida on negative theology, see especially Jean-Luc Marion, “In the Name. How to Avoid Speaking of ‘Negative Theology,’” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, in *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1999), 20–53.

that this is “a risk evaded by Plotinus and Proclus ‘at least in their fundamental orientation’, but which threatens, *a fortiori*, their interpreters and followers.”³⁵ What is ‘risked’ here is a superficial negation that is only a type of predication; this would render nothingness a mysterious substance of which Not-Being was an attribute. The One, however, is more radical than any simple negation, because “if the ineffable were only the denial of positive significations, it would establish itself again among those significations.”³⁶

For Trouillard, the Proclean soul enjoys an original union with the One, which is radically unnameable precisely because of its inconceivable fullness, and “the centre of the soul, because of her mystical communion with the ineffable, is shut up neither in language nor in the intelligible.”³⁷ Trouillard strongly emphasizes the soul’s prior union with the ineffable, in order to counter the post-modern criticisms of negative theology. For him, “negative theology is radical because the mystical is first and not only final. The deeper the negation runs, the more it reveals that it is the divinity that negates in us.”³⁸

In Trouillard’s view, Proclus agrees with Heidegger that due to the transcendent One’s pre-noetic, pre-essential character, it cannot be reduced to an object of knowledge. The first precept of Platonic philosophy, however, is the Delphic invitation to *Know thyself*, as Proclus’ *Commentary on Alcibiades I* illustrates. “Philosophy will be therefore a complete reflexion of the soul upon itself,”³⁹ that is, “the knowledge of the soul with all the functions which compose it and the presences it implies.”⁴⁰ Negation is a return to the self and to its origin. The soul’s knowledge of itself, however, is more than just the knowledge of one specific term in the procession, but “the soul thinks all things in thinking itself.”⁴¹ This is because the soul “unfolds the entire circuit of the procession-conversion in its very substance.”⁴² The soul enjoys an ineffable union with the One in the center of itself, which is the *seed of non-being* or the *One-in-us*, and it is by the soul’s mediation that the One becomes a principle of things in the world. The soul is both rooted in the One and involved in temporal activity in the world, and it is, in effect, the very immanence of the One. This is why:

35. Ibid.

36. J. Trouillard, *La Mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 94.

37. Ibid. This passage is quoted in both Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 209, and Breton, “Négation et négativité proclusiennes,” 89.

38. Trouillard, *L’un et l’âme selon Proclus*, 75.

39. Ibid., 11.

40. Ibid., 3.

41. Ibid., 28.

42. Ibid., 84.

to enjoy the mystical union is to recognize that the center of the soul coincides with the universal center. In this way the mystical, for Proclus as for Plotinus, is not only the conquest, but the origin of all life and intellect and of the philosophical effort itself. It is less superior than anterior, less 'super-essential' than 'pre-essential'.⁴³

Heidegger wrote something similar when he noted that "scientific existence is possible only if in advance it holds itself out into the nothing."⁴⁴(111)

Given that the One is beyond any determination of Being, what proceeds from the One cannot do so by way of ontological derivation. The One's fullness communicates to the soul only the infinite power freely to determine itself and its world entirely, and this is for Trouillard the unique characteristic of Neoplatonic procession. In its radical freedom, the soul is *self-constituted*, and in this Proclean account, "self-constitution is the Neoplatonic definition of substance Being is not a totally objective intelligibility, but a self-affirmation."⁴⁴

This self-constitution of the soul does not equal complete self-causation; it does not preclude derivation from a superior principle. In fact,

it presupposes it, since all that proceeds and converts, even in itself, has a double nature and so must find its center in the rigorous simplicity of the Good, which is anterior to all self-sufficiency and to all internal procession and conversion.⁴⁵

Corresponding to the third hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, the soul is the One that concentrates and refuses all affirmations and negations, and it is also necessarily divided, "since, giving itself its subsistence, it is on the one hand the cause and on the other hand the effect of itself."⁴⁶ The self-constituted thinking subject is thus forced into contradiction with itself. As an alternative to positing a supernatural reality where all tensions are reconciled, Trouillard emphasizes that "by this very conflict, the soul will construct itself in unfolding its negations."⁴⁷ By doing so, the soul is the link that provides cohesion to the universe. The soul is:

the spontaneous recapitulation of the entire procession, from the One to matter ... and the soul is the perfect mediation [between the finite and the infinite] because it is the plenitude of negations. It is in this that it is self-moving.⁴⁸

43. *Ibid.*, 85.

44. *Ibid.*, 83. On this logic, see also Henry Duméry, *The Problem of God in Philosophy of Religion: A critical examination of the category of The Absolute and the scheme of transcendence*, translated and introduced by Charles Courtney (Evanston: Northwestern U Press, 1964).

45. Trouillard, "Introduction" in Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, 51.

46. Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, 140.

47. *Ibid.*, 141.

48. *Ibid.*, 8.

Trouillard devotes much attention to how the center of the Proclean soul's substance remains rooted in the One, even as the soul separates itself from the One in its procession. This logically prior *manence* is what allows for the conversion. This *manence* is:

the presence of the origin that cannot be lost, from which the derived makes itself simultaneously other and identical. It is the nourishing root of the processive expansion and the fundamental communication which permits that which has separated to be converted by assimilation.⁴⁹

Later, he writes, "far from the negative theology being the cause of the mystical union, it is on the contrary the effect and the mediation If there is to be conversion, there must first be *manence*."⁵⁰ From this rootedness, whenever the soul negates some essential characteristic from the One, it works to define and to constitute its own being and its world, since it gives to itself what it negates. In this activity, it also finds a radical freedom, since the soul gives to itself what is at a distance from its origin:

It is the same thing for the soul to constitute the intelligible world and to constitute itself, since it gives itself its field of operation. And it is again the same thing for the soul to disengage its source from all meaning and to disengage itself, since at this point of origin the soul cannot be divided from the One.⁵¹

In Trouillard's interpretation, the Proclean soul is, like Heidegger's *Dasein*, always rooted in that which is beyond being. Its intellectual powers in relation to the world of thinkable beings are dependent upon that prior *manence*, which is the *seed of non-being*. As we shall see, however, for Trouillard the soul's return to the One demands more than a nostalgic return to a 'more original questioning'.



As Trouillard contends, "a study of the Neoplatonic soul in its relation to the divinity cannot omit theurgy."⁵² In this context, it is crucial to recall that the *mystical* corresponds with the *One-in-us*; that is, the *mystical* denotes the always prior *manence* of the soul in the One, which is its original conversion and is the source-spring of the procession. Concerning Trouillard's mysticism, Breton writes:

49. *Ibid.*, 98.

50. *Ibid.*, 138.

51. *Ibid.*, 139.

52. *Ibid.*, 173.

in the strict reciprocity of these fundamental operations, 'the mystical' designates less a historically circumstantial practice, than the henophanic *a priori* of all realization, the *a priori* that comprehends, down to the extreme point of its unfolding [that is, matter], the self-constitution of a liberty.⁵³

Since, from its prior union with the One, the soul unfolds the entire procession down to matter, material cannot be excluded in its return; hence the significance of theurgy. Matter and form are both "factors of [the soul's] self-constitution," and as the soul contains within itself all the levels of being involved in the procession, "by each she communicates directly with the One."⁵⁴ The sensible symbols of theurgy are therefore effective means of mystical union. In fact, theurgy "is summoned by negative theology and places itself between contemplation and mystical union, so that it awakens this union,"⁵⁵ finding in these sensible symbols the divinity that engendered them. The Platonic dialectic is moved by love, and "the limit of formal reason is not the limit of thought or act. Love expresses itself through *myth* more greatly than by systematic knowledge."⁵⁶ Theurgic ritual is understood as *active myth*, offering sensible symbols to awaken one's *eros*, and ritual practice must complete the task of negative theology.

The nature of the Proclean soul and its procession means that the Lycian "is less of a pessimist than the Alexandrine concerning all that relates to matter."⁵⁷ In Trouillard's analysis, the Proclean universe is not a fixed hierarchy of 'horizontal levels', but a series of "rays diverging from the same universal center."⁵⁸ The soul, and all authentic being, is rooted in that center, and final union becomes possible through sensible ritual because:

the divine is, in effect, absent from nothing, but it is present equally to all. That is why, even in beings of the lowest rank, one will discover the divine presence. For the One is everywhere in the sense that each being owes its subsistence to the gods and that, in proceeding from the gods none leave them entirely, but everything is rooted in the divine.⁵⁹



If the moment of mystical union is beyond the division of thought and being, various consequences could arise. One possible reading would be to take the procession of all the levels of intelligibility as merely a vanishing moment.

53. S. Breton, "Négation et négativité proclusiennes," 95.

54. Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, 77.

55. *Ibid.*, 177.

56. *Ibid.*, 171.

57. *Ibid.*, 74.

58. Trouillard, "Introduction" in Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, 24.

59. *Ibid.*, 25.

In this view, since the One contains absolutely no division, the return to that simplicity would annul the divided moment of procession. Consequently, a Hegelian movement toward a self-dividing principle would then be required, upon which to ground a substantial metaphysical system. Alternatively, and for the same reasons, one could move toward a Heideggerian *openness to Being* in anxiety, which would avoid metaphysical mastery over the world and seek a grounding in the One without the mediation of *Nous*. Trouillard's intention is to provide an anti-idealist interpretation of Neoplatonism in the wake of Heidegger's criticisms of onto-theology; however, along with recent commentators like Gregory MacIsaac, I judge that the truest reading of Proclus brings us somewhere between these two positions.⁶⁰

For Proclus, thought is an unfolding motion that is made up of the three moments of remaining, procession and return—that is, thought involves a principle to be divided, and the double activity of its division. MacIsaac explains how “the moment of procession shows that the unfolding activity *is not itself* the principle, and the moment of return shows that this activity, which is itself that which has unfolded, *has* a principle.”⁶¹ Even though the divisions of our knowing activity are not contained within their principle, they are, nevertheless, *about* that prior unity insofar as that unity is the true ground of the unfolding activity. Despite the fact that it is not contained within its principle from the beginning, the intellectual multiplicity need not vanish in the moment of return. Likewise, the details of theurgic ritual are not historically contingent, but they remain necessary for our return. Our knowledge leads to love, to a union with the Principle that runs deeper than knowledge. As MacIsaac states, “the [intellectual] divisions stand in the return, but at the end of the activity the thinker puts aside the cognitive divisions, not because they are untrue, but because he puts aside thinking itself.”⁶²

Intellectual divisions are not contained within the Principle's *nothingness*. They are not, however, historically contingent since they are a true unfolding of their principle according to a different mode. Proclean mysticism, then, transcends the distinction between affirmative and negative theology, or rather it is both. Like a circle moving upon its centre, our dianoetic thinking activity does not penetrate the One, but it is still a true and necessary unfolding of the *One-in-us*. To choose exclusively either the *apophatic*, on the one hand, or the *kataphatic*, on the other, is either to disconnect or to

60. See D.G. MacIsaac, “Neoplatonism and the Hegelianism of James Doull,” *Animus* (2005). MacIsaac has plausibly identified these alternatives as ‘Hegelian’ and ‘Heideggerian,’ respectively. I have borrowed these identifications from him.

61. *Ibid.*, 9.

62. *Ibid.*, 10.

collapse the moments of remaining, procession and return, and to hold in opposition the original and final moments of the same activity.⁶³



Concerning Eriugena, Trouillard writes:

because it is in the image of God our mind is nothingness, and this is why it expresses the totality of the universe. Becoming the meanings which it emits, it creates itself in them, and nevertheless however refuses to define itself by its own creations.⁶⁴

The soul freely constitutes itself as it circles around the noetic realm of Being, while it remains always at a critical distance from that world because it is rooted in that which is more than Being and *Nous*. Trouillard uses effectively the logic employed by Bréhier in 1919 to counter post-modern criticisms, against which Marion also defends himself. Unlike either of them, he remains within a fully positive relation to the Greek Neoplatonic tradition and to the language of Proclean henology. Trouillard explains the nothingness of the One and all its consequences for a mystical theology, clarifying what it means for Proclus that “both the man of wisdom and the doubly ignorant inquire after *nothing*.”⁶⁵ His exegesis of Proclus’ texts carries crucial significance for some of contemporary philosophy’s most salient questions.⁶⁶

63. *Ibid.*, 11.

64. J. Trouillard, “Érigène et la naissance du sens,” *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie*, herausgegeben von Horst-Dieter Blume und Friedhelm Mann, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Ergänzungsband 10 (Munster: Aschendorffsche, 1983), 268 and 272. See also Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 196.

65. *toinun kai ho epistēmōn kai ho diplē amathaiōn oudenos eisi zētētai*. Proclus, *Commentary on Alcibiades I*, trans. with commentary by Wm. O’Neill (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1965), 190.1.

66. Important factors in his interpretation have been challenged in recent years: see, e.g., E.P. Butler, “Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold,” *Dionysius* 23 (2005): 83–104.

