

# Dionysius' *On Divine Names* Revisited: A Structural Analysis

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It has been known since at least the end of the nineteenth century that the pseudonymous “Dionysius the Areopagite,” who exercised so much influence on medieval Greek, Latin and Arabic thought, was significantly influenced by the philosophical thinking of the fifth-century Athenian School of Neoplatonism. Major works of modern scholarship have studied the pseudo-Dionysius almost exclusively in terms of this doctrinal influence, and even the scholarship that has emphasized the not-insignificant Patristic background of Dionysian thought has acknowledged this connection. One notable teaching of Athenian Neoplatonism concerns the structural analogy—here seen as an ontological relation between image and paradigm—between a philosophical discourse and the reality represented. Evidence of this teaching is provided by the anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, which state that the dialogues of Plato can be analyzed into literary components corresponding point by point with the six constituents of the universe: either the more typically Platonic set of matter, form, nature, soul, intellect and divinity, or the partially Aristotelian set of material, formal, efficient, organic, paradigmatic, and final causes.<sup>1</sup> Detecting a similar doctrine in pseudo-Dionysius may help to solve a hitherto intractable problem: namely, concerning the structure of his treatise *On Divine Names*.

But first we should turn to Proclus, arguably the most immediate source of Dionysian Neoplatonism, who exploits the structural analogy between discourse and reality in one particularly important context. Towards the end of the second book of his *Platonic Theology*, Proclus concludes his summary of the interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* by his teacher Syrianus, which he has already explained in detail in his own commentary on that dialogue, with an important observation. This states that when Parmenides expounded the One's transcendence of the divine orders through the sequence of conclusions drawn from the first hypothesis, he took his first starting-point by describing the intelligible height of the intellectual gods, continued in descending

1. Anon., *Prolegomena*, in *Platonis Philosophiam* 5, 16. 1–8 and 5, 17. 40–48.

order with the intellectual and lower gods, but took a second starting-point, prior to the first, by describing the intelligible gods themselves.<sup>2</sup> With this latter move, Parmenides was “imitating the return of all things” (τὴν τῶν ὅλων ἐπιστροφὴν ἀπομιμούμενος).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he was not employing the variety of deductions and the syllogistic method exploited earlier, but using “only intellectual intuition itself (αὐτὴ ἡ νοερά ἐπιβολή), “showing by action” (ἔργῳ δείκνυσι), and using “a non-demonstrative reasoning drawing belief from the lower” (λόγος ἀναπόδεικτος ἐκ τῶν χειρόνων τῆν πίστιν ἐφελκόμενος).<sup>4</sup> Here, Proclus is explaining the peculiar fact that among the negative conclusions of the first hypothesis, the negation of multiplicity with respect to the One—multiplicity corresponding to the highest rank of intelligible and intellectual gods—is stated first, but the negation of being with respect to the One—being corresponding to the intelligible gods—is stated last. For my purposes, the most important features of this argument are that the possibility of real principles reverting beyond their initial point of procession is reflected in the adoption, by the verbal discourse first, of two distinct starting-points and, secondly, of a transformation of discursive into non-discursive thinking.<sup>5</sup>

This structural analogy between discourse and reality is centered on the relation between divine names and the cycle of procession and reversion, and elsewhere in the second book of the *Platonic Theology* we find two distinct but complementary accounts of this relation. The first account of the relation between divine names and the cycle of procession and reversion is based on the *Parmenides*. Proclus argues that the first hypothesis reveals the transcendence of the One with respect to the divine ranks, and the second hypothesis the procession of entire orders from the One,<sup>6</sup> in such a manner that the negative conclusions of the first hypothesis correspond in number with the affirmative conclusions of the second hypothesis,<sup>7</sup> that the order in which the negative conclusions are taken follows the order of the divine ranks in reality,<sup>8</sup> and that the negative conclusions of the first hypothesis

2. Proclus, *Theologia Platonis*. II 12, 72. 19–26. At *TP* II. 10, 62. 19–63. 7 Proclus explains that the primary aim of the first hypothesis is to show the transcendence of the One with respect to all levels of reality. However, since the multiplicity of lower principles and their distinction from the One is easier to show with respect to lower than to higher levels of reality, it is methodologically more reliable to reserve the most difficult philosophical task for last. For Proclus’ earlier statement of this theory see *Commentarius in Parmenidem* VI, 1091. 24–1092. 15 and 1110. 20–31.

3. *TP* II. 12, 72. 25.

4. *TP* II. 12, 73. 2–11.

5. The point is expanded in the concluding remarks of this chapter at *TP* II. 12, 73. 11–23.

6. *TP* II. 10, 61. 19–62. 18.

7. *TP* II. 10, 61. 19–21.

8. *TP* II. 10, 62. 19–63. 7.

are not privative with respect to substrates but productive with respect to contraries.<sup>9</sup> The second account of the relation between divine names and the cycle of procession and reversion is based on a combination of the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*. Proclus argues that whereas the *Republic* manifests the similarity between the secondary realities and the first principle by means of analogy, and also applies the name “Good” to the first principle as an image of the reversion of the secondary realities to the first principle, the *Parmenides* shows the transcendence of the first principle over the totality of beings by means of negations, and also applies the name “One” to the first principle as an image of the procession of the totality of beings from the first principle.<sup>10</sup> Considered as theories of divine names, the account based on the *Parmenides* implies that the name “One” is applied to the first principle and that names like “multiple,” “parts and whole” and “figure,” are applied negatively to the first principle and affirmatively to subsequent terms;<sup>11</sup> the account based on the *Republic* and the *Parmenides* states that the names “Good” and “One” are applied to the first principle with respect to different kinds of relation between secondary realities and the first principle.<sup>12</sup> Thus a complete mechanism for naming the first principle from one viewpoint either negatively or affirmatively and from another viewpoint either directly or indirectly is established by a combination of these two accounts.

It is perhaps because the verbal discourse’s adoption of two distinct starting-points and of a transformation of discursive into non-discursive thinking constitutes a reflection of the real principles’ reversion beyond the initial point of their procession, that Proclus can view the discourse no longer as an argument but as a hymn.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the entire final section of the second book of the *Platonic Theology* divides the account of Syrianus’ interpretation of the first hypothesis into three parts dealing with the general principles of negation, the application of negation to specific divine names, and a hymn

9. *TP* II. 10, 63. 8–17.

10. *TP* II. 5, 37. 12–38. 12—the analogy in the case of the *Republic* is, of course, the comparison between the Sun and the Good. Cf. *TP* II. 6, 40. 1–41. 17 and *TP* II. 7, 47. 17–48. 8.

11. For a complete list of the names involved see *TP* II. 12, 66. 18–72. 11.

12. Proclus concludes this chapter by adding two further complications to his theory. First, he notes that names are applied to the first principle with respect to the procession and reversion of the secondary realities but not with respect to the remaining of the latter which is un-nameable (*ibid.* II. 6, 42. 4–8). Secondly, he states that from another viewpoint both the method of analogy and the method of negation represent varieties of reversion to the first principle (*TP* II. 6, 42. 19–43.1).

13. On the definition of hymn in Proclus see Rudolphus M. van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns. Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 13–30. As we shall see, there is a difference between conventional hymns and a special kind of “intellectual” hymn. Van den Berg has a few notes on the latter (with reference to the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*) on p. 22 ff.

to the first God,<sup>14</sup> the part containing the hymn being placed strategically between the other two parts. This part consists of a series of injunctions that we must prostrate ourselves before the sun of the intelligible gods rising from the ocean, and then descend from this “calm” (γαλήνη) towards “intellect” (νοῦς),<sup>15</sup> that we must recall “from the intellect but using the reasoning of the soul” (ἀπὸ νοῦ τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς χρώμενοι λογισμοῖς) how transcendent we have determined the first god to be in the course of our journey, that we must “celebrate him as if in a hymn” (οἶον ὑμνήσωμεν αὐτόν) as having produced all the ranks of gods, as being the god of all gods, and as being concealed among the intelligible gods,<sup>16</sup> and that only then can we descend again from this “intellectual hymnody” (νοερὰ ὑμνωδία) towards “reasoning” (λογισμοί), and expound the transcendence of the first god with irrefutable dialectic.<sup>17</sup> If the reflection of the structure of reality by the structure of discourse and the transformation of discursive into non-discursive thinking are the really salient aspects of hymnody in this passage—rather than the obvious fact that hymns praise God by the enumeration of divine names<sup>18</sup>—, we can understand how Proclus the theurgist can elsewhere describe the lotus flower when extending and contracting its petals in imitation of the rising and setting sun as performing a non-rational “physical hymn” (ῥυμνος φυσικός).<sup>19</sup>

Now there can be little doubt that pseudo-Dionysius also seems to think of his treatise *On the Divine Names* as a hymn, since he applies the verb “to hymn” (ὑμνεῖν) to his descriptions of the individual names with remarkable persistence,<sup>20</sup> and also inserts quotations from his teacher Hierotheos’ *Hymns of Desire* at a particularly important point in the treatise as a whole. If we can show that Dionysius is exploiting the specifically intellectual kind of hymnody described above—i.e., making the structure of discourse reflect the structure of reality, and expressing the transformation of discursive into non-discursive thinking—, then we may be able to understand the structure of *DN* in a manner that has not been possible hitherto.

14. These constitute chapters 10 (*TP* II. 10, 61. 10–64.9), 12 (*TP* II. 12, 66. 1–73. 23), and 11 (*TP* II. 11, 64. 10–65. 26), respectively.

15. *TP* II 11, 64. 19–65. 3.

16. *TP* II 11, 65. 3–15. Proclus adds that the first god is more ineffable than any silence and more unknowable than any existence, the silence and existence being normally associated specifically with the intelligible gods.

17. *TP* II. 11, 65. 16–26.

18. Although Proclus is perhaps exploiting this more obvious meaning of hymnody when he describes the entire first hypothesis (at *CP* VII. 1191, 34–35) and the entire second hypothesis (at *TP* I. 7, 31. 25–27) of the *Parmenides* as hymns, one cannot exclude the possibility that the connotations of representation and non-discursivity are present there also.

19. See *De Arte Sacrificia* 149. 12–18. Cf. AS 148, 10–18 on heliotropes and selenotropes.

20. A list of examples would include Dionysius, *DN* 4. 5, 700 D (149. 9–10), 4. 35, 736 B (180. 1), 6. 1, 856 A (190. 3), 7. 1, 865 B (193. 5–6), 7. 4, 872 C (198. 21), 10. 1, 936 D (214. 9–10). The hymns of his teacher Hierotheos are mentioned at *DN* 4. 14, 713 A.

The question regarding the structure of Dionysius' treatise is perhaps a timely one, having been raised in a most provocative way by the recent study of Christian Schäfer: *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*.<sup>21</sup> Schäfer revives certain aspects of Albert the Great's and Thomas Aquinas' interpretation of this Dionysian text. He argues against the views of modern scholars like Paul Rorem and Andrew Louth,<sup>22</sup> who have noted the loose construction especially of its later chapters, that the work has a clearly-defined beginning, middle and end.

Schäfer also adopts ideas from Endre von Ivánka and Hans-Urs von Balthasar, the two most significant modern advocates of the structural approach to *DN*. The main feature of von Ivánka's interpretation is the identification of two primary triads of divine names: the group Being, Life and Wisdom in chapters 5–7 which is assumed to be derived from Proclus, and the group Wisdom, Power and Peace in chapters 8 and 10–11 which is said to have been drawn from Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>23</sup> According to this interpreter, names like Greatness and Smallness, and Sameness and Difference mentioned in chapter 9, which are thought to have been derived from Plato's *Parmenides*, play an ancillary role with respect to the second main triad.<sup>24</sup> The main feature of von Balthasar's interpretation is the notion of a cycle of procession, reversion and union as underlying the entire text, with all the names between Good in chapter 4 and Wisdom in chapter 7 representing the first phase, those between Wisdom in chapter 7 and Peace in chapter 11 the second phase, and those between Holy of Holies in chapter 12 and Unity in chapter 13 representing the third phase.<sup>25</sup> According to this interpreter, the names One and Good in chapters 1 and 4 form together with the names Perfection and Unity in chapter 13 the point of closure within a single cycle of creation and providence.<sup>26</sup>

Schäfer's own reading adopts the notion of the two primary triads and also the idea of a single underlying cycle, yet introduces an innovation.

21. Christian Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite. An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise On the Divine Names* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006).

22. See Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989), 92; Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford/New York: Oxford U Press, 1993), 158.

23. Endre von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus. Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1964), 234–42.

24. Von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus*, 234–35.

25. Hans-Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik*, vol. 2 (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 151, 166ff., 189ff.

26. Von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*, loc. cit. Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (43–44), rightly decides not to utilize the implausible reading of *DN* by I.P. Sheldon-Williams, "The ps.-Dionysius and the Holy Hierotheos," in *Studia Patristica* 8 (1966): 108–17, according to which the names in chapters 5–7 relate to the level of intellect, those in chapters 7–9 to that of soul, and those in chapters 12–13 to that of body.

This involves reading the names between Power in chapter 8 and Peace in chapters 11 as constituting what he terms a “halt”—a moment of stability between procession and reversion—and the names between Holy of Holies in chapter 12 and Unity in chapter 13 as constituting the reversion proper. Schäfer finds authoritative support for his notion of a halt in a statement of the Apostle Paul at *Romans* 11:36: “For of him, and through him, and to him are all things,” and in the commentaries on *DN* by the medieval thinkers Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas,<sup>27</sup> his arguments for the same notion being based on the connotation of stability which he detects in the names Salvation and Redemption in chapter 8, in the antithetical relation between names like Greatness and Smallness in chapters 9 and 10, and in the name Peace of chapter 11.<sup>28</sup> In fact, this interpretation means that Dionysius is replacing the original Proclean cycle of causality where a phase of remaining comes before the phases of procession and reversion with a supposedly more Christian causal cycle where the phase of remaining comes between the other phases. According to Schäfer, there are several passages in Dionysius’ treatise which explicitly state this novel position.<sup>29</sup>

It is our view that, although Christian Schäfer is basically correct in arguing that *DN* is systematically structured throughout, his thesis regarding the remaining between procession and reversion needs correction. A close reading of Dionysius’ treatise may indeed detect moments of stability within the dynamic flux of procession and reversion. However, these result either from the intersecting of two cycles of procession and reversion, or from the presence of smaller cycles within larger cycles, in both cases in accordance with Proclus’ approach. We hope to explain this feature through the consideration of three questions: 1) What is the rationale behind the ordering of the names in chapters 5–13? 2) Why does chapter 4 on the name Good have such a disproportionate length? 3) What is the nature of the contrast between chapters 1–3 and the remainder of the text?<sup>30</sup>

27. Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 30, 64, n. 19, 66.

28. Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 37–41, 89–111.

29. Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, quotes three passages of which only the second seems to support his position. 1) Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus* 1. 4, 592 CD (115. 6–10) on pp. 49–50. But this refers to a somewhat different notion of the human soul’s detachment from the exterior and uses the word ἀναπαυεῖν rather than μένειν; 2) Dionysius, *DN* 4. 14, 712D–713 A (160. 12–15) on p. 61. This does rather unusually speak of the Godhead as προϊὼν αἰεὶ καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος—on the interpretation see below; 3) Dionysius *DN* 5. 5, 820 BC (184. 2–14) on p. 61. This passage, however, seems definitely to place the remaining before the procession. Cf. Schäfer’s further comments on pp. 74, 89–90.

30. Consideration of all three questions will show how Dionysius makes the structure of discourse reflect the structure of reality, and consideration of question 2 how he expresses thereby the transformation of discursive into non-discursive thinking.

FIRST QUESTION: WHAT IS THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE ORDERING OF THE NAMES IN CHAPTERS 5–13?

The key to understanding this ordering lies in its background in Platonic philosophy. This involves the interpretation of *DN* as the unfolding of the causal cycle—the “cyclic activity” (ἐνέργεια κυκλική) of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, prop.# 33<sup>31</sup>—in a systematic and consistent manner throughout the text. This interpretation becomes possible if one assumes that there are what we shall term “major phases” of remaining, procession, and reversion, each of which contains “minor phases” reflecting the larger structure in the pattern REMAINING > remaining, procession, reversion, PROCESSION > remaining, procession, reversion, and REVERSION > remaining, procession, reversion. The interpretation depends on the further assumption that the relation between the major and minor phases is such that the first minor phase > remaining of the major phase REMAINING, the second minor phase > procession of the major phase PROCESSION, and the third minor phase > reversion of the major phase REVERSION represent the maximal points of remaining, procession, and reversion respectively.<sup>32</sup>

This pattern can be found everywhere in the writings of the later Athenian School of Platonism—provided that one is alert to the appearance of such synonyms as LIMIT > limit, infinity, mixture, INFINITY > limit, infinity, mixture, and MIXTURE > limit, infinity, mixture, or alternatively BEING > being, life, intellect, LIFE > being, life, intellect, and INTELLECT > being, life, intellect. As the fundamental architectonic principle for the arrangement of the divine orders in Proclus’ *Platonic Theology*, it is fully revealed for the first time in the latter’s discussion of the doctrine regarding the intelligible gods which he believes to be stated in Plato’s *Philebus*,<sup>33</sup> beginning with a distinction between a transcendent triad of limit, infinity, and mixture linking the One with the intelligible order and a coordinate triad of limit, infinity, and mixture within the intelligible order itself.<sup>34</sup> The logical principle underlying the development of the pattern is explicitly stated when Proclus concludes one phase of his discussion by saying that “everything is in each thing, but a different term has predominated in the case of each intelligible” (καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐκάστῳ πάντα καὶ ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ διαφερόντως ὑφέστηκε τῶν νοητῶν).<sup>35</sup>

31. Proclus, *Elementatio Theologica*, 36. 11–12.

32. For a full account of these structures and their metaphysical implications in Proclus and Damascius see Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 141–52. For the background of this thinking in Porphyry see Pierre Hadot, *Porphyry et Victorinus* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968), 213–46.

33. Proclus, *TP* III. 8, 30. 15–III. 14, 52. 11.

34. Proclus, *TP* III. 10, 41. 20–42. 12.

35. *TP* III. 13, 49. 1–2. For everything in everything cf. *TP* III. 13, 47. 3–19, and for predominance *TP* III. 13, 47. 20–22. Cf. Proclus, *ET*, props. 103, 92. 13–29.

Since this is not the place for an extensive discussion of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, we shall confine ourselves to listing the most relevant passages in Book III in tabular form.<sup>36</sup> In any case, it is probably the discussion of these intelligible gods that formed the inspiration behind Dionysius' discussion of the intelligible divine names.<sup>37</sup>

*Distinction of Major and Minor Phases:* πέρας, ἀπειρία, μικτόν—  
TP III. 14, 51, 15–19.

*Major Phases:* μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή—TP III. 14, 50. 4–11.<sup>38</sup>  
πέρας, ἀπειρία, μικτόν—TP III. 13, 47. 13–16; III. 13, 47. 19–20.<sup>39</sup>  
ὄν, ζωή, νοῦς—TP III. 14, 49. 12–18.<sup>40</sup>

*Minor Phases:* first major phase + πέρας, ἀπειρία, μικτόν—TP III. 12, 44. 22–45. 12<sup>41</sup>

second major phase + ὄν, ζωή, νοῦς—TP III. 12, 45. 28–46. 12<sup>42</sup>

third major phase + πέρας, ἀπειρία, μικτόν—TP III. 14, 51. 3–8.<sup>43</sup>

Turning now to Dionysius' discussion of the intelligible names in *DN*, we can see that this same pattern recurs albeit with the terminology modified in line with a Christian agenda. In fact, it can be shown that three major phases each containing three minor phases are distributed through nine chapters in the latter part of this text.

36. Our analysis will exclude Proclus' discussion of the terms symmetry, truth and beauty. Although important for the interpretation of Plato, these terms play a less important architectonic role at this point. On symmetry, truth, and beauty see TP III. 11, 43. 1–44. 20.

37. For a discussion of the close relation between Book I of the *Platonic Theology* and Dionysius see István Perczel, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the *Platonic Theology*. A Preliminary Study," in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne, Actes du colloque international de Louvain, 13–16 mai 1998, en l'honneur de H.-D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink*, ed. Alain-Philippe Segonds and Carlos Steel (Leuven: Leuven U Press 2000), 491–532. Although the similarities between the two writers on matters of theological methodology are often striking, Perczel's idea that Dionysius was simply making a cento of citations from Proclus is hardly convincing.

38. The second phase is actually remaining + procession here. But this does not significantly change the doctrine.

39. These passages summarize the theory. For more details see TP III. 13. 47, 1–5 (limit—also remaining); III. 13, 47. 5–7, III. 13, 47. 12–13; III. 13, 47. 17–18, III. 13, 47. 22–48. 2 (infinity—also life and power); III. 13, 47. 7–11 (mixture).

40. Cf. TP III. 9, 35. 8–36. 10.

41. The second phase is also power.

42. The second phase is also power. Cf. Proclus, *ET*, prop. 103, 92. 13–29 for a more abstract formulation of the triad of being, life, intellect.

43. The first phase is also being, the second also power. At TP III. 14, 51. 22–27 Proclus calls the first phase being, the second power or dyad, and the third multiplicity.



## I. THE MAJOR PHASE OF REMAINING (CHAPTERS 5–7)

In accordance with the initiating function of this section and its association with unity, we find fewer names than in phases 2 and 3. Names of a more philosophical character begin the sequence.

1.1. *The Minor Phase of Remaining (Chapter 5)*

That the discussion of the name Being represents the maximal point of remaining in the theonymic system of Dionysius is indicated by the occurrence of many features normally associated with the phase of remaining in the philosophy of the Athenian School. When the writer characterizes Being as “ineffable, unknowable, and unrevealed” (ἄρρητον... ἀγνωστόν... ἀνέκφαντον),<sup>44</sup> he echoes the language which the conclusion of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* applies to the intelligible gods. This Being is also “placed before” (προβέβληται) all other participated terms.<sup>45</sup> As “measure” (μέτρον) of everything that follows,<sup>46</sup> Being has a status analogous to that of the limit which is synonymous with remaining in Proclus’ system. This Being exists in the causal mode—opposed to the substantial mode or the participating mode of existence by the Athenian School<sup>47</sup>—since it itself is “the pre-existent” (ὁ προῶν, τὸ προεῖναι)<sup>48</sup> while all subsequent things have their “being” (εἶναι) in it.<sup>49</sup>

1.2. *The Minor Phase of Procession (Chapter 6)*

Since the architecture of the Dionysian system requires a minor phase of procession within the major phase of remaining, we would expect to find phraseology associating the second name Life with both procession and remaining. This indeed seems to occur when the writer praises Life not only in terms of giving as overflow but in terms of undiminished overflow. Thus, it is through its “overflow of goodness” (περιουσία ἀγαθοτήτος) that the name Life confers on celestial lives their “indestructibility” (ἀνώλεθρον), their “unswerving and unerring perpetuity of motion” (ἀρρεπῆς καὶ ἀπαρέγκλιτος ἀεικινήσια), and their “immortality” (ἀθανασία).<sup>50</sup> The close relation between giving as overflow and undiminished overflow is stated here according to the doctrine of two consecutive propositions in Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*.<sup>51</sup>

44. Dionysius, *DN* 5. 1, 816 B (180. 10–11).

45. *DN* 5. 5, 820A (183. 18), 5. 6, 820 C (184. 17–18).

46. *DN* 5. 4, 817C (182. 20).

47. See Proclus, *ET*, props. 65, 62. 13–23 and prop. 67, 64. 1–14.

48. Dionysius, *DN* 5. 5, 820A (183. 14), 5. 8, 821 D (186. 10), 5. 10, 825B (189. 7).

49. *DN* 5. 5, 820C (184. 12–15), 5. 8, 821 CD (186. 1–12).

50. *DN* 6. 1, 856 B–6. 2, 856 D (191. 1–192. 5).

51. Proclus, *ET*, prop. 26, 30. 10–24 and prop. 27, 30. 25–32. 9.

### 1.3. *The Minor Phase of Reversion (Chapter 7)*

The structure of Dionysius' system also requires a minor phase of reversion within the major phase of remaining. That the name Wisdom is associated with both reversion and remaining is indicated by the argument that Wisdom "by knowing itself will know all things" (ἐαυτὴν ... γινώσκουσα γνώσεται πάντα).<sup>52</sup> According to the Athenian School, knowing of the self represents—along with substantiating the self and vivifying the self—one of the primary modes of reversion.<sup>53</sup> Moreover for Proclus and his circle, knowledge of subsequent things in the order of reality involves pre-containment of their causes: a mode of remaining. Dionysius makes this last point by comparing Wisdom to light which "pre-contains in itself causally the knowledge of darkness" (κατ' αἰτίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν εἶδησιν τοῦ σκοτούς).<sup>54</sup>

## 2. THE MAJOR PHASE OF PROCESSION (CHAPTERS 8–10)

These chapters of *DN* are characterized by the multiplicity of the names involved and by the prevalence of power and associated notions. In the philosophy of the Athenian School, multiplicity and power are both associated with procession and often identified with the latter. The sequence begins and ends with more biblical names, having more philosophical names in its central phase.

### 2.1. *The Minor Phase of Remaining (Chapter 8)*

Two of the names occurring later in this chapter—Justice and Salvation—have connections with the notion of limit. Thus, Justice is praised for "defining the order and all assignments and ranks in each case" (καὶ διακόσμησιν καὶ πάσας διανομὰς καὶ τάξεις ἀφορίζων ἐκάστῳ),<sup>55</sup> and Salvation for "preserving the being and rank proper to each thing as distinct from other things" (τὴν ἰδίαν ἐκάστου καὶ καθαρὰν ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων οὐσίαν καὶ τάξιν ἀποσωζουσα).<sup>56</sup> The limit that is assigned or maintained in these passages corresponds with the remaining that Proclus' understands as the first member of any causal triad. Since we are dealing with a minor phase of remaining within a major phase of procession, we should not be surprised also to find references indicating the important role of procession in this part of his discussion. An example occurs when Dionysius explains the name Power which inaugurates this chapter by saying that God is "of infinite power, and

52. Dionysius, *DN* 7. 2, 869 A–C (196. 12–197. 16).

53. See Proclus, *ET*, prop. 42, 44. 11, prop. 43, 44. 32, prop. 189, 164. 20–32, and Damascius, *De Primis Principiis* II. 135. 20–136. 2.

54. Dionysius, *DN* 7. 2, 869 B (196. 21–197. 2).

55. *DN* 8. 7, 893 D–896 A (204. 5–8).

56. *DN* 8. 9, 896 D (205. 16–19).

in his superabundance of power produces an infinite number of other powers from existent powers an infinite number of times" (ἀπειροδύναμος ... τῷ ὑπερδύνασθαι καὶ ἀπειράκις ἀπείρους τῶν οὐσῶν δυνάμεων ἑτέρας παραγάγειν).<sup>57</sup> In referring here to both power and infinity, he introduces two terms corresponding to the procession understood by Proclus to be the second member of any causal triad.

### 2.2. *The Minor Phase of Procession (Chapter 9)*

That the discussion of the names Greatness, Smallness, Sameness, Difference, Similarity, Dissimilarity, Rest, and Motion represents the maximal point of procession in the theonymic system of Dionysius seems to be confirmed by a number of features present in this chapter. First, there is the unusually large number of the names, plurality being associated with procession in the philosophy of the Athenian School.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, the occurrence of the names in pairs is significant, duality also being associated with procession by the same thinkers.<sup>59</sup> Thirdly, the comments on two of the names—Greatness and Smallness—include reference to the possibility of their existing in infinite form.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the philosophical rather than biblical style of these particular names was perhaps thought by a Christian writer to be consistent with the distance from God marked by their procession.

### 2.3. *The Minor Phase of Reversion (Chapter 10)*

The structure of Dionysius' system also requires a minor phase of reversion within the major phase of procession. That the name Omnipotent is associated with both reversion and procession is indicated by the argument that God "produces everything from himself as though from an omnipotent root and then returns all things to himself as though to an omnipotent stem" (τὰ ὅλα καθάπερ ἐκ ρίζης παντοκρατορικῆς προάγουσα καὶ εἰς ἑαυτὴν τὰ πάντα καθάπερ εἰς πυθμένα παντοκρατορικὸν ἐπιστρέφουσα).<sup>61</sup> In accordance with the tendency towards plurality of nomenclature in this major phase, Dionysius here introduces further names suggesting the notions of eternity and time. Since Youthful and Ageless signify God's "procession from the beginning through all things until the end" (τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς διὰ πάντων

57. *DN* 8. 2, 889D–892A (201. 1–16). Cf. 8. 3, 892 B (201. 17–21).

58. See Proclus, *ET*, prop. 21, 24. 1–21. At *MT* 3, 1033 BC (147. 4–14). Dionysius himself associates increase in the number of divine names with cognitive descent (i.e., procession) and decrease in the number of names with cognitive ascent (reversion).

59. See Proclus, *TP* III. 14. 51. 22–27), III. 18, 58. 18–23.

60. Infinite greatness is mentioned at Dionysius, *DN* 9. 2, 909 C (208. 8–17) and infinite smallness at *DN* 9. 3, 912 B (209. 6–8).

61. *DN* 10. 1, 936 D–937 A (214. 13–15).

ἄχρι τέλους ... προΐεναι),<sup>62</sup> we can discern the association with procession and reversion in this case also.

### 3. THE MAJOR PHASE OF REVERSION (CHAPTERS 11–13)

In accordance with the mediating function of this section and its association with both unity and multiplicity, we find more names than in phase 1 but fewer names than in phase 2. Names of a more philosophical character end the sequence.

#### 3.1. *The Minor Phase of Remaining (Chapter 11)*

Since the architecture of the Dionysian system requires a minor phase of remaining within the major phase of reversion, we would expect to find phraseology associating the first name Peace with both remaining and reversion. This indeed seems to occur when the writer praises Peace on one occasion, in terms of its “ineffability and immobility with respect to any known procession” (ἀφθεγξία...καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γιγνωσκομένην πρόοδον ἀκίνησία).<sup>63</sup> Although the passage begins by quoting the opinion of “Holy Justus,” a terminological shift towards a typically Proclean formulation of the moment of remaining quickly becomes apparent.<sup>64</sup> In another passage, Dionysius praises Peace on grounds that it “makes the particularity of the multiple return towards the universality of unity” (τὸ μεριστόν...πλήθος ἐπιστρεφούσης εἰς τὴν ὅλην ἐνότητα).<sup>65</sup>

#### 3.2. *The Minor Phase of Procession (Chapter 12)*

The structure of Dionysius’ system also requires a minor phase of procession within the major phase of reversion. That the frequently occurring biblical names Holy of Holies, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and God of Gods, and so forth are associated with procession is shown by references to God as “infinite in names” (ἀπειρώνημος) and to the “doubling of names” (διπλασιασμός τῶν ὀνομάτων),<sup>66</sup> infinity and duality being normally associated with this moment in the philosophy of the Athenian School.<sup>67</sup> The precise interpretation of these names is explained in an interlude towards the end of the previous chapter where Dionysius explains that the abstract terms from which divine names are derived can be understood in three ways: as “participating” (μετέχον), as “participated” (μετεχόμενον), and as “un-

62. *DN* 10. 2, 937 BC (215. 14–216. 1).

63. *DN* 11. 1, 949A (218. 7–9).

64. Proclus, *ET*, prop. 26, 30. 10–24.

65. Dionysius, *DN* 11. 1, 948D (217. 7–10).

66. *DN* 12. 1, 969AB (224. 1–7).

67. See Syrianus, *Commentarius in Metaphysica* 46. 22–25; Damascius, *PP* I. 35. 17 and I. 68. 16–17.

participated" (ἀμέθεκτον).<sup>68</sup> Considered in this way, the terms "holy" or "king" signify either the celestial beings as participating terms or their properties as participated terms whereas the terms "Holy of Holies" and "King of Kings" signify the un-participated term.<sup>69</sup> This group of terms which is explained in two consecutive propositions in Proclus' *Elements of Theology* reflects the notion of reversion through its triadic form.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.3 *The Minor Phase of Reversion (Chapter 13)*

That the discussion of the names Perfect and One represents the maximal point of reversion in the theonymic system of Dionysius seems to be confirmed by certain features present in this chapter. The name Perfect is associated with the reversion according to the philosophy of the Athenian School since imperfect power or potentiality is converted into perfect power or actuality as it reverts,<sup>71</sup> and Dionysius seems to follow this usage. The connection between the name One and reversion only emerges through the identification of the One and the Good towards the end of the chapter. The writer explains that this One is not the arithmetical unity correlated with multiplicity:<sup>72</sup> rather, it is that whereby all things are identical with it in their transcendent mode<sup>73</sup> and whereby it is identical with all things in its immanent mode.<sup>74</sup> Since it is also that which transcends both limit and infinity,<sup>75</sup> both the "one being" (ἐν ὄν) and the "being one" (ὄν ἐν),<sup>76</sup> and both trinity and a unity,<sup>77</sup> we cannot express its nature in any nomenclature. Nevertheless, "in our desire to understand something and say something about that ineffable nature, we consecrate for it primarily the most hallowed of names" (πόθῳ τοῦ νοεῖν τι καὶ λέγειν τι περὶ τῆς ἀρρήτου φύσεως ἐκείνης τὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων σεπτότατον αὐτῇ πρώτως ἀφιερῶμεν).<sup>78</sup> In justifying our speaking of the first principle as Good Dionysius here echoes the words of Proclus in justifying our speaking of that principle as One.<sup>79</sup> In both cases, it is the desire associated with reversion that makes utterance possible with respect to the ineffable.

68. Dionysius, *DN* 11.6, 953 D–956 A (222. 13–223. 3).

69. *DN* 12. 4, 972 AB (225. 14–20).

70. Proclus, *ET*, prop. 63, 60. 1–64, 62. 12.

71. *ET*, props. 44, 46. 1–12 and prop. 77, 72. 20–78, 74. 17.

72. Dionysius, *DN* 13. 2, 980 A (227. 13–228. 2).

73. *DN* 13. 2, 980 B (228. 3–11).

74. *DN* 13. 2, 980 C (228. 14–16).

75. *DN* 13. 3, 980 C (228. 18–22).

76. *DN* 13. 3, 980 CD (228. 20–229. 5).

77. *DN* 13. 3, 981 A (229. 6–14).

78. *DN* 13. 3, 981A (229. 15–17).

79. Proclus, *Comm. in Parm.* VII, 58, 1–17 (Klibansky-Labowsky).

SECOND QUESTION: WHY DOES CHAPTER 4 ON THE NAME GOOD HAVE SUCH A DISPROPORTIONATE LENGTH?

If we apply the principles of interpretation already applied to chapters 5 to 13 once again—asking whether the name under discussion relates more closely to remaining, procession, or reversion—we have to conclude that in the case of chapter 4 a complete cycle of causality with its terms distinguished on one level only—in sequence rather than with respect to major and minor phases—seems to be implied. On this basis, there is a kind of metaphysical necessity for Dionysius' more extended treatment of the name Good and the other associated names.

The chapter falls almost exactly into two halves distinguished by both style and subject-matter. In the first half of this chapter (sections 1–17 of the critical edition), we are immediately informed that the divine authorities “mark off the Good by a boundary, it seems to me” (ἀφορίζουσιν αὐτήν, ὡς οἶμαι) from the other names because it indicates how God by his very being “extends goodness to all existing things” (εἰς πάντα τὰ οὐτα διατείνει τὴν ἀγαθότητα).<sup>80</sup> Dionysius then explains that all the intelligible and intellectual beings receive their substances, powers, and activities, all souls receive their being, life, and intelligence, and all the heavenly bodies receive their order and movement from the Good.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the name Light can be associated with the name Good because the former—constituting the visible image of the latter in the specific form of the sun—“returns all things to itself” (πᾶντα πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ... ἐπιστρέφει).<sup>82</sup> An even more explicit sense of circularity emerges in connection with the name Beauty. Using terminology that recalls the higher logic of the Platonists, the author notes that application of this name signifies that God is the cause of all “determinate essences” (οὐσιώδεις ὑπάρξεις), and of all sameness and otherness, and motion and rest.<sup>83</sup> This point leads to an extended explanation of the threefold motions of intellects and souls whereby they move in a circle as unified with the irradiations from the Good—i.e., their remaining—in a straight line as exercising providence over the lower—i.e., their procession—and in a spiral as both unified with the higher and providing for the lower—i.e., their reversion.<sup>84</sup> This section also includes reminiscences of the lower logic of the Aristotelians, since the name Beauty further signifies that God is the cause of all quality and quantity, and of all final, efficient and formal causality.<sup>85</sup> The first half of the chapter

80. Dionysius, *DN* 4. 1, 693 B (143. 9–144. 1).

81. *DN* 4. 1, 693 B–4. 4, 697 B (144. 1–147. 1).

82. *DN* 4. 4, 700 A–C (148. 3–149. 8).

83. *DN* 4. 7, 704 BC (152. 10–153. 3).

84. *DN* 4. 8, 704 D–4. 9, 705 B (153. 4–154. 6).

85. *DN* 4. 10, 705B–708 A (154. 7–155. 7).

continues with a discussion of the name Desire (ἔρως), and the author immediately justifies the use of this term—rather than the more usual Love (ἀγάπη)—on the basis of Scripture, adding for good measure that we should be concentrating not on the “utterance” (λέξις) itself but on the “intention” (σκοπός) of the utterance, and not on “unintelligent letters” (γράμμα ἀνόητοι) but on “nameless intuitions” (ἀνόματα ἐπιβολαί).<sup>86</sup> Dionysius then explains that it is through Desire that higher beings exercise providence towards the lower, that beings of equal status display regard for one another, and that lower beings return divinely towards the higher.<sup>87</sup> Finally, God himself is sometimes referred to as Desire and Love and sometimes as Desired and Loved, because he is himself the motion which “both flows forth from the Good towards beings and also then returns again to the Good” (καὶ ἐκ τὰγαθοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐκβλυζομένη καὶ αὐθις εἰς τὰγαθὸν ἐπιστρεφομένη).<sup>88</sup> The author concludes this part of his discussion by quoting from his teacher Hierotheos’ *Hymns of Desire* a kind of summary of what has just been said about Good, Beautiful, and Desire.<sup>89</sup>

It should be noted that the discussion of the name Good in the first half of chapter 4 not only ends but also begins with references to Hierotheos “my famous teacher” (ὁ κλεινὸς καθηγεμῶν ἡμῶν),<sup>90</sup> the actual rhetorical beginning of the discussion being placed in an interlude towards the end of chapter 3.<sup>91</sup> With this arrangement, Dionysius clearly wants us to understand that this entire discussion of the name Good is actually a report of Hierotheos’ teaching: a literary device which tends to separate the material of chapter 4 as a whole logically from that in the chapters to follow. But there is something beyond literature implied here. Dionysius goes on to explain that he is “unfolding and distinguishing, in a discourse proportionate to his powers, the condensed and unified enfoldings of that man’s most intellective power” (ἀναπτύξαι καὶ διακρίναι τῷ ἡμῖν συμμέτρῳ λόγῳ τὰς συνοπτικὰς καὶ ἐνιαίας τῆς νοερωτάτης ἀνδρὸς ἐκείνου δυνάμεως συνελίξεις).<sup>92</sup> Since the technical vocabulary shows clearly that the literary relation between Hierotheos’ and Dionysius’ discourses represents the metaphysical relation between remaining and procession, we are probably justified in understanding the first half of chapter 4 and chapters 5–13 as corresponding to further

86. *DN* 4. 11, 708B–709A (154. 1–57. 8).

87. *DN* 4. 12, 709 D–4. 13, 712 A (158. 13–159. 8).

88. *DN* 4. 14, 712C–713A (160. 1–15).

89. *DN* 4. 14, 713 A–4. 17, 713 D (160. 15–162. 5).

90. Cf. *DN* 3. 2, 681A (139. 17–18). As frequently noted, this Greek phrase recalls Proclus’ habitual method of referring to his teacher Syrianus as “our teacher” (ὁ ἡμέτερος καθηγεμῶν).

91. This arrangement is found elsewhere in *DN*. See the discussion 3.2 above.

92. *DN* 3. 2, 681 B (140. 6–10).

phases of remaining and procession respectively encompassing the major and minor phases discussed earlier.<sup>93</sup>

The second half of chapter 4 (sections 18–35 of the critical edition) is composed in a very different style. Here, Dionysius answers an objection raised in the manner of a schoolroom debate that, since the demons have fallen from the angelic inclination towards the Good, it cannot be maintained that every being returns to the Good. More specifically, three questions are posed: 1) What made the demons evil? 2) What is the nature of evil? and 3) Why did the Good permit evil to occur?<sup>94</sup> The second question is answered first by arguing that evil is neither a being, nor a non-being, but is in beings.<sup>95</sup> Dionysius then surveys the entire order of the universe in order to show that evil is not present in the Good or in beings,<sup>96</sup> in angels,<sup>97</sup> human souls,<sup>98</sup> irrational animals,<sup>99</sup> nature as a whole,<sup>100</sup> bodies,<sup>101</sup> or matter *qua* matter.<sup>102</sup> In the course of this survey, he answers the first question by saying that the demons are not evil in respect of their being but only with respect to lack of being,<sup>103</sup> and adds to the answer to the second question by noting that evil is associated with the particular rather than the universal,<sup>104</sup> and that evil is not associated with necessity.<sup>105</sup> Dionysius next prepares the answer to the third question and adds further to the answer to the second question by arguing that goodness arises from the one universal cause, whereas evil arises from the multiplicity of particular deficiencies<sup>106</sup>—evil being further associated with the accidental.<sup>107</sup> Finally, he addresses the third question by arguing that the

93. There is no real inconsistency between interpreting the first part of chapter 4 as corresponding a. to the cycle of remaining, procession, and reversion as a whole, and b. to the remaining only, since the stability of the process is implicit in both viewpoints. For another reason to interpret chapters 5–13 as a single movement of process see the analysis of chapter 1 below.

94. *DN* 4. 18, 713 D–716 B (162. 6–163. 60).

95. *DN* 4. 19, 716 B–4. 20, 721 B (163. 7–168. 11).

96. *DN* 4. 21, 721C–724 A (168. 12–169. 19).

97. *DN* 4. 22, 724 BC (169. 20–170. 11).

98. *DN* 4. 24, 725 D–728 A (172. 12–20).

99. *DN* 4. 25, 728 B (173. 1–9).

100. *DN* 4. 26, 728 C (173. 10–16).

101. *DN* 4. 27, 728 D (173. 17–174. 3).

102. *DN* 4. 28, 729 AB (174. 4–175. 4).

103. *DN* 4. 23, 724 C–725 C (170. 12–172. 11).

104. *DN* 4. 26, 728 C (173. 10–16). This comment is made in connection with the dissociation of evil from nature as a whole.

105. *DN* 4. 28, 729 AB (174. 14–175. 4). Thus comment is made in connection with the dissociation of evil from matter *qua* matter, necessity having been traditionally associated with matter

106. *DN* 4. 30, 729 C–4. 31, 732 C (175. 10–177. 2).

107. *DN* 4. 32, 732 CD (177. 3–15).



Good—as Providence—does not produce evil but makes use of evil effects in order to turn them to particular or common advantage.<sup>108</sup>

We will not discuss the intricacies of these philosophical questions in further detail—this part of *DN* chapter 4 is especially well known because its verbal and conceptual similarities with Proclus' essay *On the Existence of Evils* were seen to provide the crucial evidence for Dionysius' philosophical dependence on Athenian Platonism and indeed for his position in the history of philosophy as such.<sup>109</sup> For our purposes, the most important issue is the stylistic contrast between the dialectical form of the discussion introduced by the phrase: “But someone might say ...” (καίτοι φαίη τις...) and further characterized as “the expression of such great difficulty” (τοιόσδε ἀπορῶν λόγος) on the one hand,<sup>110</sup> and the semantic exploration of the various names under which God is praised in the remainder of chapter 4 and indeed in the entire sequence running from chapter 5 to chapter 13 on the other. We should recall that two of the defining features of Proclus' notion of hymnody were reflection of the structure of reality by the structure of discourse and transformation of discursive into non-discursive thinking. The organization of the divine names as a sequence of remaining, procession, and reversion has perhaps been sufficient to exemplify the reflection of the structure of reality by the structure of discourse. Is it possible that the transformation of discursive into non-discursive thinking is exemplified by the contrast between the dialectical form and the semantic exploration in chapter 4? That Dionysius is thinking along these lines is indicated by the chapter's concluding remarks in which he declines to debate these issues further, having already in his treatise entitled *Concerning Justice and the Judgment of God* rebuked “sophistical arguments and idle chatter (σοφιστικούς ... λαλοῦντας... λόγους) imputing injustice and falsehood to God, and being “content to raise a hymn the Good” (καθ' ἡμᾶς ἀρκοῦντως ὕμνηται τὰγαθόν) in the present work. The passage ends by summarizing all the aspects of the divinity explored at length earlier in the chapter—the remaining, proceeding, and reverting—in the form of a litany based on a sevenfold repetition of the phrase [“to praise him”] “as” (ὥς).<sup>111</sup>

108. *DN* 4. 33, 733A–C (178. 3–17).

109. For the most recent discussion of this question see Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition. Despoiling the Hellenes* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2007), 75–84.

110. *DN* 4. 18. 713D (162. 6) and 4. 19, 716 B (163. 7).

111. *DN* 4. 35, 736 AB (179. 18–180. 7). Dionysius explicitly raises the question of non-discursive thinking at the beginning of chapter 4 when he compares the Good's and the sun's extension of goodness to all things. The sun illuminates “not by reasoning or choosing but by its being as such” (οὐ λογιζόμενος ἢ προαιρούμενος, ἀλλ' αὐτῷ τῶ εἶναι). See *DN* 4. 1, 693B (144. 1–5).

THIRD QUESTION: WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE CONTRAST BETWEEN CHAPTERS 1–3 AND THE REMAINDER OF THE TEXT?

Without venturing into a complete discussion of these chapters, it is possible to apply the results of the analysis pursued thus far in order to illuminate the literary and metaphysical relation between the shorter and longer segments of the text. We shall consider three such applications.

Among his introductory remarks to the entire treatise in chapter 1 Dionysius makes two points relevant to the structural interpretation of *DN*. First, he contrasts “intelligible” (νοητά)<sup>112</sup> with “sensible” (αἰσθητά)<sup>113</sup> divine names—examples of the former are Being, Life and Wisdom and of the latter Fire, Eyes and Crown<sup>114</sup>—and announces that the intelligible names will form the subject-matter of the present treatise.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, by speaking of the “beneficent processions” (ἀγαθουργοὶ πρόοδοι)<sup>116</sup> of the former and of the “stretching upward according to analogy” (ἀναλόγως ἀνατείνεσθαι)<sup>117</sup> of the latter, Dionysius aligns the intelligible and sensible names with the movements of procession and reversion respectively. If that is the emphasis here, then a further phase of procession encompasses the phases of remaining, procession, and reversion previously under discussion in this essay.

Chapter 2 of *DN* is particularly important from the methodological viewpoint, since Dionysius here explains the relation between the terms “union” (ἔνωσις) and “distinction” (διάκρισις) as applied to divine naming.<sup>118</sup> He shows that there are certain names with the prefix ὑπερ— or having a causal sense which indicate unification among the names themselves, and others connoting activity which indicate distinction of the divine persons.<sup>119</sup> He next complicates the picture by saying that there are “specific unions and distinctions within the union and distinction aforesaid” (τῆς εἰρημένης ἐνώσεως ... καὶ αὐθις τῆς διακρίσεως εἶναί τινας ἰδικὰς καὶ ἐνώσεις καὶ διακρίσεις).<sup>120</sup> This discussion reveals three things about the structure of

112. *DN* 1. 8, 597 B (121. 4–13).

113. See *DN* 1. 8, 597 B (121. 6) for the former and *DN* 1. 4, 592 B–593 A (114. 1–115. 18) and *DN* 1. 8, 597 AB (120. 12–121. 3) for the latter. The sensible names are discussed more fully in Dionysius, *CH* 15. 1, 328A–15. 9, 340 B (50. 13–59. 13).

114. See *DN* 1. 6, 596 AB (118. 2–119. 5) for the former and *DN* 1. 8, 597 AB (120. 11–121. 3) for the latter.

115. *DN* 1. 8, 597 B (121. 4–8).

116. *DN* 1. 4, 589 D (112. 8–9).

117. *DN* 1. 4, 592 C (115. 8).

118. *DN* 2. 3, 640 B–2. 8, 645 D (125. 13–133. 4).

119. See *DN* 2. 3, 640 BC (125. 13–126. 2).

120. *DN* 2. 4, 640 D–641 A (126. 11–13). In all, Dionysius mentions four kinds of name in this passage: 1) Names with the prefix ὑπερ—which indicate unification among the names themselves (*DN* 2. 3, 640 B [125. 14–16] cf. 2. 5, 641 D–644A [128. 8 and 128. 16]); 2) Names connoting activity which indicate distinction of the divine persons (*DN* 2. 3, 640 C

*DN*. First, it shows that there is a clear distinction between the intelligible names discussed in chapters 5–13 and the Trinitarian names discussed almost exclusively in chapter 3.<sup>121</sup> Second, it establishes the principle of distinguishing between what we have termed major phases and minor phases of procession (and therefore, presumably of remaining and reversion). Third, it introduces the name One at a point in the text where it can complete the circle left incomplete by the sequence of divine names between Being in chapter 5 and One in chapter 13.

Dionysius makes two further points relevant to the structural interpretation of *DN* among his remarks preliminary to the discussion of the name Good in chapter 3. First, he explains to his fellow presbyter Timothy that we must begin by invoking the Trinity which is the source of Good and superior to the Good and then puts this precept into the syntactic form of an injunction: “Let us stretch ourselves upward by prayers” (ἡμᾶς οὖν αὐτοὺς ταῖς εὐχαῖς ἀνατείνωμεν).<sup>122</sup> Secondly, he alludes to the famous Homeric image of being on earth and pulling a shining chain hanging down from heaven where we “are in reality not drawing it down but we ourselves are being drawn up” (τῶ ὄντι δὲ οὐ κατήγομεν ἐκείην... ἀλλ’ αὐτοὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνηγόμεθα) in order to explain how we pray to God from our position in the

[125. 19–126. 2] cf. 2. 5, 641 D [128. 8–13]); 3) Names connoting processions which indicate distinction among the names themselves (*DN* 2. 4, 640 D–641 A [126. 10–11] cf. 2. 5, 641 D–644 A [128. 15–17]), 4. Names in the contradictory form ὕπερ-*x* + *x* which indicate unity of the godhead (*DN* 2. 4, 641 A [126. 15–16] cf. 2. 4, 641 C [128. 3]). The argument is problematic because Dionysius really seems to be talking about four modalities of God and the creature rather than four types of name. Here, we have 1) Properties of the creature considered in transcendent form; 2) Activities of the divine persons considered in immanent form; 3) Creatures considered in themselves; and 4) God considered in himself. Since there should really be no names of 4 at all, Dionysius is confusing the issue by inserting a more paradoxical version of name or a fusion of names 1 and 3 at this point in his scheme. Fortunately, the only aspect of this doctrine relevant to the present discussion is that of the different levels of union and distinction. Translated into our terminology, type 4 represents the major union + minor union, type 2 the major union + minor distinction, type 3 the major distinction and minor distinction, and type 1 the major distinction and minor union. These four types constitute the logical-semantic structure known as the semiotic square as follows:

type 4 UNION (union)	type 2 UNION (distinction)
type 1 DISTINCTION (union)	type 3 DISTINCTION (distinction)

Metaphysically speaking, type 1 indicates the remaining of the names, type 2 the procession of the godhead, type 3 the procession of the names, and type 4 the remaining of the godhead.

121. With the exception of some comments in *DN* 13. 3, 980 D–981A (229. 6–14), Trinitarian names are largely ignored throughout chapters 5–13. I disagree with the thesis argued in Klitenic Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 33–48, that Dionysius is interpreting the triad Being, Life, and Wisdom in a Trinitarian manner.

122. *DN* 3. 1, 680 C (138. 13).

hierarchy.<sup>123</sup> Clearly, the overlapping between the major and minor phases of remaining, procession, and reversion which we have been discussing in this essay is founded on the ultimate inseparability of the downward and upward processes as such.

We can conclude from these arguments that chapters 1–3 and the remainder of the treatise are distinguished primarily by the Trinitarian character of the former and the non-Trinitarian character of the latter.<sup>124</sup> The shorter segment is also demarcated from the longer by its emphasis upon the principles of divine naming, and by the prominence accorded to the theory and practice of prayer.

*Postscript*

At times this analysis has seemed to be over-complicated. In retrospect, it perhaps has been rather simple. But if the latter is the case, why did previous readers of the text not explain it as we have done?

There are at least two answers to this question. First, there is the issue of translations of Dionysius' work. It is clear that the conceptual subtleties of Dionysius' writing are generally obscured by the translations used by most modern readers. However, a very close reading of the Greek text coupled with sensitivity to the meaning of technical terminology has made new conclusions possible. Secondly, there is the issue of Dionysius' own style of writing. Since this is as elaborate in its use of rhetorical effects as it is allusive with respect to philosophical concepts, it is often easy for the reader to overlook the most crucial turns in the argument. This aspect of Dionysius' style may have resulted from a strategy of concealing the debts to philosophy or from the evolution of the text itself through an increasingly convoluted series of revisions.

123. *DN* 3. 2, 680C (139. 4). He also uses the image of being in a boat and pulling on a hawser attached to a rock.

124. There is a reference to the Trinity in chapter 13 (at *DN* 13. 3, 980 D–981 A [229. 6–14]), and to Logos in chapter 7 (at *DN* 7. 4, 872 C [198. 21–199. 7]). However, the Trinity is not introduced as a major issue in either case.