

# Henadology in the Two Theologies of Proclus

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to discuss the relationship between the *Elements of Theology* and *Platonic Theology* from the perspective of the theory of henads. I refer to these works as the two Theologies of Proclus and begin with some remarks for comparative purposes. The focus is the relation of Proclus' protology, the doctrine of the primordial principles, πέρας and ἄπειρον, Limit and Unlimited, with his doctrine of henads.

I claim that Proclus resolves, at least formally, the ambiguity of this relationship prevailing in the *Elements of Theology* when he gives protological items the status of henads in *Platonic Theology*. Then I briefly survey the views of the scholars who have earlier discussed the possible merits of this Proclean solution. Next I will argue that even after the crucial passage a certain tension persists in *Platonic Theology* between a reappearing ambiguity and the reaffirmation of the solution offered, and that the problem could not be resolved without constant recourse beyond the two Theologies, to the evidence of Proclus' *Commentary on Parmenides*.

## GENERAL COMPARISON OF THE *ELEMENTS* AND *PLATONIC THEOLOGY*

On the one hand we have the *Elements*, a concise, systematic work, obviously inspired by the Euclidean model but dealing with theology, and as such unique in Greek philosophical literature. On the other, we have *Platonic Theology*, a giant work, immediately recognizable as the magnum opus of its author and the culmination of his life's work. It is also a novel achievement in philosophy for its design, aiming to expose the truth concerning the classes of the gods on the basis of a Neoplatonic interpretation of Parmenides and taking comprehensive account of all Plato's writings in order also to demonstrate the total agreement of Plato with the whole body of Hellenic traditional theology and the revelation of the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

As we consider these works we could get the idea that the relationship between them may be that of a more or less complete draft with a main opus that was never properly finished (approximately the same relation, as, for example, Karl Marx's *Grundrisse* has with *Das Kapital*). The theoretical scope of

Proclus' Theologies is more or less the same, that of the *Elements* being slightly larger. They begin with the transcendent One, but the *Elements* arrives at the hypostasis of the Soul, *Platonic Theology* at the supercosmic-encosmic gods.

On closer inspection, this difference in terms of scope indicates issues more complicated than degrees of completeness. Their approach to the subject matter—explicitly declared to be the same by the titles of the works—and mode of argumentation are different. The *Elements* seems to be interested mainly in causality explaining how different metaphysical levels proceed in an ordered fashion from the primal source, *Platonic Theology*, on the other hand, is interested in the specific procession of the gods. This is a procession in the sense of declension<sup>1</sup> inside the same hypostasis, albeit taking into account the fact that for Proclus the opposition between the procession in the strict sense and procession as declension is valid only on the ontic levels and could be applied to the orders of gods only by analogy.

The difference in terms of approach also concerns the mode of argumentation and the definition of references in which support for the arguments is to be searched for. In his commentary on Parmenides Proclus gives three sources where truth, or, to put it better, the persuasion that something is true, can be sought. These are—and the order is significant—the human mind with its discursive and intuitive faculties, wise men's consensus of opinion, and, lastly, divine revelation received through oracles.<sup>2</sup> *Platonic Theology* draws abundantly on all of these sources. The *Elements*, on the other hand, remains only at the first level. Its propositions represent innate truths of the human mind, the content of our intuitive reason, which is a plenitude of copies and images of the intelligible forms. The demonstrations exemplify the dialectic effort of the human mind, showing how dianoetic reason convinces itself.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the theology of the *Elements* reveals itself to be of a kind at which rationally thinking human intelligence necessarily arrives. This is why the *Elements* does not need any reference to some specific pantheon or even any specific philosophy, not even apparently to that of Plato. Its systematic theology is Platonic only inasmuch as this theology is adequately expressed in the philosophy of Plato. That it was Plato who thought through the true theology is, of course, no coincidence for Proclus, but results from the fact

1. Proclus offers his most clear-cut distinction between "procession" and "procession by declension" in *In Parm.* II, 745.40–746.20.

2. *In Parm.* III 801.20–26. The specific question dealt in this passage is why we should be convinced of the truth of Plato's theory of ideas, but we can assume that the view on the sources of persuasion given here applies generally for Proclus.

3. See also Dominic J. O'Meara, "La science métaphysique (ou théologie) de Proclus comme exercice spirituel," in *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel (Leuven, 2000), 190–227.

that Plato's philosophy was divinely inspired,<sup>4</sup> and this is just the case which *Platonic Theology* tries to demonstrate.

While the *Elements* is a presentation of Platonic theology in its very own terms, a philosophical discourse revealing the epistemic structure composed of rational and intellectual concepts, *Platonic Theology* represents a system where Proclus takes account of all the modes of Plato's theology—besides scientific, also symbolic, iconic, and enthusiastic modes—which were all, according to Proclus, used by Plato.<sup>5</sup>

#### DISCREPANCIES WITHIN THE BASIC COMPATIBILITY OF THE HENADOLOGY IN THE TWO THEOLOGIES

There are two fundamental ideas in Proclus' henadology in relation to which other issues are secondary. The first is the notion of the henads as a sphere of the participated One.<sup>6</sup> A persistent misunderstanding inherited from the time when the theory of the henads was explained in scholarship by the belief in Proclus' urge to pile up excessive metaphysical layers or his urge to defend polytheistic piety, regarded as something external to philosophy, is the notion of the henads as a special metaphysical hypostasis between the One and the Being. Christian Guérard dedicated an article to the refutation of this view in 1982, which is one of the best pieces of modern scholarship concerning henadology.<sup>7</sup> There is a henadic hypostasis in the sense that the One, self-perfect henads and irradiations of them form a Neoplatonic serialized multiplicity, but the henads themselves and alone could not form a hypostasis just because they are the participated One. Calling the henads a hypostasis would be comparable to dividing the imparticipable Intellect and participated intellects into different hypostases. The idea, that henads-gods as self-perfect unities are sphere of participation in the One, and that their nature as a series on the superessential level is analogous to the ontic series of Being, Life, and Intellect, is the basic common claim for the *Elements* and *Platonic Theology*.<sup>8</sup>

4. The prefaces of *Platonic Theology* and the *Commentary on Parmenides* leave no doubt that Proclus was convinced of the divine inspiration of Plato's wisdom.

5. For different modes and styles of theology see *Theol. Plat.* 1.2 9.20–10.10; 1.4, 17.9–23.11, *In Parm.* 646.1–647.24.

6. *Theol. Plat.* III Chapters 3 and 4, 11.17–17.12.

7. Christian Guérard, "La théorie des hénades et la mystique de Proclus," *Dionysius* 6 (1982): 73–82, especially 76. What comes to the relation between the One and the henads it could not be according to Guérard a relation of participation, but only procession, 78. The first proposition of *ET* seems though establish a this kind of relations, which very special nature is revealed in the *Commentary of Parmenides*. See also P.A. Meijer, "Participation in Henads and Monads in Proclus' *Theologia Platonica* III, chs, 1–6," in *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. E.P. Bos and P.A. Meijer (Leiden, 1992), esp. 70; Meijer, 70; and E.P. Butler, "Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold," *Dionysius* 23 (2005): 83–104, especially 102.

8. Proclus introduces his views on self-perfect (or independent or completed) henads in

The second basic tenet of henadology is the notion that the henad exceeds any ontological form both in unity and individuality. Henads are, all in all and each in all in a way that is much more unitary than the self-identity of forms and community, based on the mutual relations of the participations between them. But henads also have absolute individuality in a way to which the difference which separates ontic forms on the ground of their distinctive characters cannot compare. This notion is, of course, also present in the *Elements* and is repeatedly referred in *Platonic Theology*; however, it is not expressed in these works as clearly as in the *Parmenides Commentary* which has concentrated passages comparing the natures of henads with ontological forms.<sup>9</sup>

Among the other henadological tenets shared between the *Elements* and *Platonic Theology* are the equation of oneness, goodness and “godness,” causative principles according to which the procession is accomplished by the likenesses of the causes and effects, that every monad produces a series appropriate to it, that an entity nearer to the primordial causes produces more effects and goes further in the chain of effects than causes which come into play later in the procession etc.

*ET* propositions 2, 6, 64 and the third books of *Platonic Theology*. He clarifies the distinction between two types of henads in the fundamental passage of *In Parm.* 1061.31–1063.5 where he ascribed the theory of the henads to his teacher Syrianus. According to I.P. Sheldon-Williams, “Henads and Angels: Proclus and the ps.-Dionysius,” *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 65–71, Proclus posits here three levels of henads, unparticipated autonomous (self-subsistent) henads, series of henads which are at once independent and participated (χωριστῶς μετεχόμενα, a compound of words which Proclus actually does not use in this *In Parm* passage, but uses in *ET* 81), and henads which are “principles of unity in those things which are units on account of them.” If this reading is correct, then the passage of *Parmenides Commentary* in consideration would flatly contradict Proclus’ claim both in *ET* and *PT* according to which all henads are always participated. However, there is a way out of this. Actually Proclus says that every cause produces two multiplicities, one separated and similar to the cause, second which is ἀχωρίστον τῶν μετεχόμενων (unseparated from its participants). Analogously to the Intellect and primal Soul, which establish some intellect separated from soul and some souls separated from bodies and some which are inseparable, the One also establishes a multiplicity of self-perfected henads which transcend their participants, and others which act as unification of other entities. Thus, there are only two different sorts of henads, self-perfect and henads as irradiations of oneness in the entities. Both *ET* and *PT* are in agreement with this distinction. That henad is a self-perfect does not mean that it is independent of participation, but that it is not immediately participated by the all members of each ontic series. In effect, only root members of the ontic series, their imparticipable monads, participate directly in henad which pre-contains the distinct characteristic of that ontic series. Thus, self-perfect henads are henads participated by imparticipable Intellect, Soul and so on, other henads are derived ones, radiations or illuminations of oneness through the participated monad of the respective series.

9. *In Parm.* VI 1047.24–1049.37.

However, it seems to me that the theory of the classes of the gods in *Platonic Theology* is not only an extended version of the henadology of the *Elements of Theology*, but brings forth some theoretical modifications. Some of these are important, such as the problem of double or “inverse” participation,<sup>10</sup> the introduction of the concept of super-unity,<sup>11</sup> the more detailed treatment of the problem of the henadic mode of knowledge,<sup>12</sup> the clarification of the theory of providence, the richer treatment of the relation of the self-perfect henads to the henadic illumination, the more precise account of the supressentiality of the henads and the relativity of this concept<sup>13</sup> etc. But, in addition to all these important matters, we find issues that are so substantial that one must describe them as major rectifications of theory.

In *Platonic Theology* Proclus expounds two innovations that are significant for the theory of henads. The first is the introduction of the intelligible-intellective gods. The second is the exact solution of the problem of the relation of the primordial principles—the Limit and Unlimited—with the henads, an explanation which dispels the ambiguity present in the *Elements of Theology*. In the following treatment I will concentrate only on this question, which also sheds some light on the issues of the henads’ self-perfectness and superessentiality.

#### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROTOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND HENADS IN THE TWO THEOLOGIES

The post-Plotinian Neoplatonists had different means to fill the famous “yawning gulf”<sup>14</sup> in their predecessors’ metaphysical legacy, that is the gap, or break between henology and ontology. Iamblichus’ means was a recourse to the poorly-known theory of the two Ones. Syrianus picked up a couple

10. *Theol. Plat.* III 15.9–14. Plato’s words force Proclus to admit that the One is not only participated in by Being but also participates in it. He explains away this anomaly to the general metaphysical rules of Neoplatonism, saying that participation does not mean the same thing in these cases. Being gets its existence by participating in the One, but the One’s participation into Being means that it is not participating in it qua a primal, transcendent One, but as a One illuminating Being.

11. Superunity (hyperhenosis) is present in *In Parm* VII 1181.39 and *Theol. Plat.* V 28, 103.17. What does this enigmatic superunity mean? Is it the same as the “unity of henads” mentioned *In Parm.* VI 1048.11–14 and “unitary manifold” *Theol. Plat.* III 3, 12.1? This concept would be worthy of special study.

12. For the henadic mode of knowledge especially *Theol. Plat.* I 97.11–98.12, where Proclus attributes to divine truth knowledge concerning everything, even contingents and matter, as opposed to the Intellect and intelligible gods, who know only universals.

13. Although many times Proclus calls all gods and henads superessential in the kefalaiion for the fourth chapter of *Theol. Plat.* III he states that only the primal One is really superessential, *Theol. Plat.* III 1.13.

14. E.R. Dodds’ expression in his commentary section: *Proclus. The Elements of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 1963), 259.

of principles from Plato's *Philebus* and identified them with the monad and indefinite dyad, principles of Pythagorean origin. Furthermore, as Anne Sheppard says, "Syrianus distinguishes between on the one hand the *αὐτομονάς* and the *αὐτοδυάς* which are Forms and belong to the intelligible world, and on the other the *ἀρχηγικὴ μονάς* and *δυάς* which are *above* the intelligible world and are in fact identical with *πέρας* and *ἀπειρία*."<sup>15</sup> Syrianus's solution was the way which Proclus followed. But Syrianus most probably also had a mature theory of henads. We do not have enough of Syrianus to decide what the nature of his answer to the question of the relation between the henads and protological principles was. On the contrary, we have a lot of Proclus on these issues, but nevertheless scholars have been puzzled by where Proclus exactly situates these primordial causative principles. Do they precede the henads or do they follow after them and exist before Being? Are these principles classifying rules for henads, some kind of formal laws co-existing with the henads, or do we have to admit that there are two alternatives, even contrasting, schemes of transition between henology and ontology in Proclus?

Ambiguity in the treatment of the relation of henads and principles is reflected in the structure of the *Elements of Theology*. The core group of propositions dealing with the primordial principles (87–92), is introduced before the "general" theory of henads (113–59); there are some preliminary propositions of henads that appear earlier (6,62,64). However, discussion of Eternity also concerns the Unlimited as Infinity. Propositions 89 and 90 clearly state the existence of a primal Limit and Unlimited and the principles' primacy over Being. Proposition 159 states that "every order of gods is derived from the two initial principles," Limit and Unlimited. This would signify the primacy of Limit and Unlimited over all henads too, unless this proposition were the last of the "general" henadology and located just at the point where superessential procession turns into ontological one.

In the third book of *Platonic Theology*, on the other hand, general principles of henadology are explained in the first six chapters and the theory of primordial principles in relation to the primal Being is introduced after these in the following three chapters (7–10). This exposition gives primacy to a couple of principles, but at the same time confirms henads as the only mediating entities between the primal One and the primal Being. This result, which at first glance appears paradoxical, is possible because Proclus resolves the question by declaring the pair of principles to be henads.

In *Platonic Theology*, book three, chapter nine (36.10–16) Proclus says:

15. Anne Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen, 1980), 52.

Διὸ δὴ καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης ἐνδεικνύμενος ὅπως ἐξήλλακται τῆς ἀπογεννήσεως ὁ τρόπος ἐπὶ τε τῶν διείν ἀρχῶν καὶ τοῦ μικτοῦ, τὸ μὲν πέρασ καὶ τὸ ἀπειρον δεῖξαι φησι τὸν θεόν ἑνάδες γὰρ εἶσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνὸς ὑποστάσαι καὶ οἶον ἐκφάνσεις ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμεθέκτου καὶ πρωτίστης ἐνώσεως, τὸ δὲ μικτὸν ποιεῖν καὶ συγκεραυνῦναι διὰ τῶν πρώτων ἀρχῶν.

That is why Socrates, wishing to show how the mode of generation is different in the case of two principles and the case of mixed says that God “has revealed” the Limit and Unlimited (they indeed are henads which come into existence from the One as the manifestations of the impalpable and first unity), whereas God “makes” the mixed and produces it as mixing through first principles (translation mine).

As far as I know, only a few exegetes of Proclus have paid attention to this most remarkable innovation, among them, of course, Damascius<sup>16</sup> and, among modern scholars, Joseph Combès, Cristina D’Ancona, Gerd van Riel and Edward P. Butler. What is surprising is perhaps that Saffrey and Westerink indicate in their note only the Platonic phrase from *Philebus* (23, 9–10) where Proclus finds grounds for his speculation, but do not comment on Proclus’ view.<sup>17</sup> Saffrey and Westerink do not deal with this specific issue either in their introduction to third part of *Platonic Theology*, otherwise a fundamental essay to the study of henadology.

Among the scholars who have denied the protological principles having the status of the henad, I will mention here only the position of Eduard Zeller. He deals with the question explicitly, representing henadology as a specific Proclean theory to account for the procession of reality from the One and dedicates to the Limit and Unlimited only one, but learned and lengthy footnote. This dividing of the evidence between main text and the note is symptomatic. In effect, he gives the impression that Proclus has two competing theories in the issue and the mode of discussion seems to imply that the protological stuff should be taken as secondary. The reader is left wondering how they are actually integrated to henadology. Zeller comes very close to concluding that we must assume that the Limit and Unlimited are henads, but ultimately he rejects this interpretation. What is important is that first, he does not deal with the Proclean passage which is anomalous to anyone who wants to reject the henadological status of the Limit and Unlimited, second, he overlooks the fact that Limit is introduced later explicitly as a henad in Proclus’ treatment of the articulations of the triads composing the first intelligible triad, thirdly he thinks that because Limit and Unlimited are talked

16. Damascius wonders why “recent philosophers” (οἱ νεώτεροι φιλόσοφοι, meaning Syrianus and Proclus and their followers, *Damasc. De Princ.* 3 109.17 Combès = I 285 Ruelle) in the analysis of the first intelligible triad thought the Limit and the Unlimited to be henads, but rejected this status in the case of the third triad (διὰ τί τὸ μὲν πέρασ ἑνάς, καὶ τὸ ἀπειρον πάλιν ἑνάς ἑτέρα ... τὸ δὲ τρίτον ὁ πατρικός νοῦς οὐχὶ καὶ αὐτὸς ἑνάς τρίτη, 3 110.4–6).

17. H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne*, Livre III (Paris, 1978), 123, note 2. Eduard Zeller, *Philosophie der Griechen* III.2 (Leipzig, 1923), 854–55.

about on the level of the intelligible gods they cannot be henads. This could not be a sound refutation, because for Proclus, henads are always “henads of something,” coextensive with real entities and the first henads necessarily are brought forth in his discourse dealing with the first noetic beings.

BRIEF REVIEW OF THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE MODERN SCHOLARSHIP REGARDING PROCLUS’ SOLUTION IN *PLATONIC THEOLOGY* (III 9 36)

Let us review briefly what the scholars who have been most sensitive to this issue have to say.

Combès writes:

that according to Proclus, Limit and Unlimited are two primary modal functions of the imparticipable One, i.e., primordial henads, which, produced by the cause of the mixed (the One), are principles of being, which is the first mixed (μικτόν) and the model for all mixings.<sup>18</sup>

and a little later that all henads

are, in fact, within the One implicitly, but the first to manifest themselves are Limited and Unlimited, anticipating the whole procession, as the other henads (and there are as many of them as there are different series and functions) manifest themselves only with the first order of intelligible-intellectives, when the first otherness come to split the One-Being into the duality of the One and the substance.

This is a concise and clear description to which I fully subscribe. Combès does not treat the theme further or problematize it, because he is dealing with Proclus only briefly within the limits of his introduction to Damascius’ critique of Proclus.

Cristina D’Ancona<sup>19</sup> is of the opinion that in Proclus we find two incompatible theories explaining how Being emerges from the One. In the first case henads are independent of the couple of the Limit and Unlimited, since they transcend any sort of otherness, being produced from the One “according to the mode of unification” (καθ’ ἕνωσιν). This theory makes henads unities “outside” the One, which forms the area of superessential gods. The second theory subordinates henads to the couple and they are derived from it, being the highest level of intelligible items. In effect, Proclus uses, according to D’Ancona, the word “henad” with two mutually exclusive meanings.

D’Ancona notes and comments on Proclus’ explicit mention of the pro-

18. Joseph Combès, “Proclus et Damascius,” in *Proclus et son influence*, ed. G. Boss and G. Seel (Neuchâtel, 1987), 226–27. My translation.

19. Cristina D’Ancona, “Proclo, Enadi nell’ordine sovrasensibile,” *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 2 (1992): 265–94.



logical principles as henads but she concludes that they cannot be henads (280, translation mine):

If the gods are intelligible henads, they are generated and distinct from the Limit and Unlimited, and the Limit and Unlimited cannot therefore be henads, at least not in the sense of the intelligible. And if the Limit and the Unlimited are henads, then they cannot be them in the same sense as intelligible gods that depend on these principles.

Perhaps one could answer this in the Proclean spirit that since the One and the intelligible henads are causes of the imparticipable Being what else can the first intelligible gods be other than the first Limit and Unlimited? There is also the first unity received from the God before the action of the Limit, which allows the other henads existing here in the secret, and ineffable state of unity to be intelligible gods before the pre-existing characteristics are manifested in a later stage of procession. There are surely also other intelligible gods, such as, for example, the Orphic Phanes, who is manifested in the third intelligible triad and who is the highest god named by mythology in Proclus' system. But are Phanes and other unnamed gods who are like him and might populate the mixtures of the intelligible triad, also self-perfect henads? I think not. And in this case they are not indeed gods in the same sense as the self-perfect henads, but they are gods as bearers of the divine property, that is, gods by participation. Limit is the philosophical name of god which is probably the same thing as the first self-perfect henad, and the first Unlimit is the potency of this god. Proclus does not give any mythological names (like Phanes) for these gods, because they have never been celebrated in a cult according to the Hellenic practice as Proclus understands it.

Gerd van Riel<sup>20</sup> tries to reconcile Proclus' postulate of the absolute simplicity of the henads (expressed forcefully in *ET* 127) and statement (made in proposition 159) according to which henads are composed by *peras* and *apeiria*. At least apparent contradiction between these assertions has puzzled Proclus' interpreters since Nicholas of Methone. Van Riel's solution is that henads are a modality of *peras*. Referring to the passage of *Platonic Theology* where protological principles are declared to be henads Van Riel says:

Given this evidence, the argument of Proclus that *peras* and *apeiria* are henads must be taken literally: *peras* is the first henad which includes in itself *apeiria* (as its generative power) without introducing thus differentiation. At lower levels this structure is repeated:  $\epsilon\upsilon$  is always a henad, and is present in the triad as a modality of *peras*.<sup>21</sup>

20. Gerd van Riel, "Les hénades de Proclus sont-elles composées de limite et d'illimite?", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 3 (2001): 417–32.

21. Van Riel, 428. My translation.

Thus an ambiguity in the Elements of Theology is resolved on the basis of reading *Platonic Theology*. For Van Riel *peras* is a participated One, the henad, and *apeiria* its relation (σχέσις) to entities and the δύναμις of the henad. I think that Van Riel's interpretation is basically correct. The only thing left without explanation is why Proclus calls in the fundamental passage both protological principles henads and not a henad and its potency. If we think that a henad is always a composite thing in the sense of being combination of ἐνωσις and pre-existent ontic determination (ιδιότης) we perhaps could accept that these first henads are principles of pure "oneness" ("one proper in all its purity," 31.10 "totally one in proper sense," 31.13–14) and pure potency (31.19). This kind of compositeness could scandalize only interpreters like the bishop of Methone who are demanding such an absolute simplicity from henads which in effect would efface their difference with the One and thus make vanish the whole possibility of the procession of beings.

Edward P. Butler<sup>22</sup> notices that Proclus equates henads with the protological pair in the above mentioned passage, but seems not to be willing to regard Limit and Unlimited as real henads, characterizing them as principles of classification which do not precede the Gods and are the highest of the forms and instruments of the divine illumination of Being. He sees these principles, as he says as being "relevant for us and to us. They arise from an analysis of the nature of the Gods the ground of which is no real composition."<sup>23</sup> Since Butler's reading of Proclus emphasizes the affirmative pluralism of self-perfect henads and their radical individuality, he is inclined, if I have understood him correctly, to render not only the concept of the protological couple of principles but also the One itself as an analytical device for the comprehension of the unity of the Gods. In this view only the divine henads have a real existence; the One exists only as being all of the henads and each of them at the same time as each of the henads is the One. Thus there could not be a henadic series that is similar to the ontic series.

I think that in his justified effort to resist the monotheizing readings of Proclus, which dissolve the reality of the henads as gods into aspects, functions, and attributes of the primal God, he goes too far and effaces the concept of the primal God in Proclus. This surely is not in agreement with the word of Proclus and probably not with Proclus' meaning either.<sup>24</sup>

22. Edward P. Butler, *The Metaphysics of Polytheism in Proclus*, dissertation, The New School University (New York, 2003).

23. Butler, *Metaphysics*, 391–92.

24. See, for example, among the many passages *Theol. Plat.* III 14.4–9. But Butler is, of course, right when he says that "to posit the One as a 'God beyond the Gods' is in no way consonant with the structure of the henadic multiplicity" (391). Butler's goal is "to restore the doctrine of the henads to its proper place at the center of our understanding of Proclus' metaphysics." Criticizing earlier theories which make "the henads vanishing into the One" (98), Butler perhaps makes

TENSIONS IN *PLATONIC THEOLOGY* BETWEEN REAPPEARING AMBIGUITY AND REAFFIRMATION OF THE SOLUTION IN III 9.36

In fact, this passage (book three, chapter nine [36.10–16]) is the only one where Proclus explicitly calls both of the principles henads. A little later, analyzing primal the Being as mixed, he says (37.21–28):

The mixed, therefore, as we have said, proceed from the prime, and it not only depends upon principles that come after the One, but it proceeds from them too, and it is triadic: first, under the action of God, it receives by participation the unspeakable unity and totality of its existence, from the Limit, it draws its essence and its uniform stability, while from the Unlimited it receives power and the hidden inclusion of all beings in it (translation mine).

The words “not only depends upon” probably refer to the moment of remaining (*μονή*) in the mixed, in the sense of Proclus’ famous triad of cyclical causation, which is valid on all levels of his system. “Proceeds” means that the mixed is no longer only the same as these causes but has moved outside of them and acquired some difference. The most interesting thing to note here is, however, a reference to the ineffable unity and the action of God. These things are introduced before the Limit. Somehow Proclus is bringing the One itself into play as causing the first imaginable form of unity. I think that for Proclus ineffable unity here is the same thing as the one to which he refers twice in *Platonic Theology* and the Commentary on Parmenides by the intriguing term superunity. This is the place and state of the henads considered unfolded “before” and beyond any manifestations on ontic levels.

In the third place Proclus says (92.20–26):

And if I must state my opinion, I would say that the One Itself is the Limit Itself at same time, in the same manner as the first multiplicity is infinite multiplicity. Indeed, it receives all of the power of the Unlimited, since it produces both all henads and all beings, and its power ceases not to be felt until among the most particular beings, and it is therefore an infinity more total than an infinity of total multiplicity and inapprehensible infinity.

Here the primal One itself is represented as a first Limit, the first Unlimited as a first multiplicity and the potency producing all the henads and beings. Instead of the action of God and the Limit—seen in the previous passages as

the One vanish into the henads. I do not say this as a merely dogmatic criticism, but admitting that Butler’s interpretation could reveal authentic Proclean intention which Proclus’ terminology and perhaps his sticking to the Platonic conception of participation made impossible to formulate more clearly. Actually, Butler goes beyond Proclean reconstruction towards positive construction of a modern polycentric theory of henads as superindividuals. This achievement is an impressive piece of systematic polytheistic theology and as such can conceive Proclus’ intention better than Proclus could express it himself within the framework of Platonist reception and conceptual tools of his time.

an independent actor—their functions are reduced, brought back, or to use a term once much used in Plotinian studies in similar situations, telescoped, to the One itself.

But is this passage a refutation of the status of henads for protological principles? Perhaps only apparently so. If the Limit is One Itself how could it be something other than a henad, because we are surely treating here One in its relation to procession of beings. Thus the henadic condition of *peras* is here affirmed and not rejected. The case with the Unlimited is trickier. Proclus' idea of the specific internal relation between the henads, that they are all in each, could justify, however, a reading that sees implied "others" in Proclus' words "all henads." Limit gives to all other henads and is in them that by which they are comparable to the One and to each other, that is unity. Unlimited gives and is in them that by which they are comparable with each other, that is having the same divine and unitary condition but being different in superindividuality as bearers of the pre-existent, preontic distinctions. We can wonder what this really means, but something like this surely is the late Neoplatonic view. At least Limit must be a henad, otherwise we have two different theories explaining same thing, procession of beings from the One, and this would seriously jeopardize the monistic structure of the Proclean thinking.

However, the mention of primordial principles as henads, is not a casual, singular choice of words. In his description of the first ontic triads in *Platonic Theology* Proclus again, and this time perhaps more coherently, returns to the solution given in *Platonic Theology* III 9 (36.10–16). Comparing the intelligible triads with the intelligible and intellectual triads in the fourth part of *Platonic Theology* (IV (3) 16.17–17.14), Proclus shows how the intelligible triads are composed in the following way: in the first triad we have limited, infinity, and being (first mixed), in the second triad henad, potency and intelligible life, and in the third triad henad, potency and intelligible intellect. Even as Proclus calls the primal component a henad only in the second and third triads and limit in the first, he is equating Limit and the henad in each case, as is proved by the passages dealing with the same metaphysical level in the *Parmenides Commentary*, where he says: "For there is one henad to each intelligible triad; a multiplicity of henads is discernible first in the first rank of the intelligible-and-intellectual."<sup>25</sup>

On the whole, the mutual relationship between the primordial principles is more balanced in Proclus' *magnum opus* than in the *Elements*. Only *ὄν τοῦ περιόρου* is present in the *Elements*.<sup>26</sup> Proclus says that potencies are divided into groups dominated by Limit or Unlimited, but all potencies derive from

25. In *Parm.* VI, 1091.20–24. Translation Morrow and Dillon.

26. *ET* prop. 92, 82.30.

the first Unlimited. Why does there not exist the naturally corresponding proposition that all limitedness is from a primal limit?<sup>27</sup> Butler thinks that this dominance of Unlimited-Infinity in the presentation of the *Elements* is accounted for by the works' peculiar emphasis on the cluster of concepts such as power, potency, eternity and so on—in brief, with the concept which from the point of view of *Platonic Theology* belongs to the area of the second intelligible triad.<sup>28</sup> The *Elements*' project is the story of causality; the story of the *Platonic Theology* is more comprehensive and deals with the procession of gods and the articulation of divinity in the procession of beings. Let us remember that this articulation is expressed in the analysis of the intelligible triads. In the *Elements* we have, of course, triads, as structural principles, but we do not have specific concept of the intelligible triads as ontic entities. One reason for the lack of them could be that Proclus had not developed the theory of the articulated triads when he was writing the *Elements*. A feasible and more fascinating explanation, and convincing too, at least for me, is that he did not use these concepts, because they were authorized by and derived from the *Chaldaean Oracles*,<sup>29</sup> and therefore, as concepts of revelation, were inappropriate for use in discourse on pure rational and intellectual understanding that the *Elements* represents.<sup>30</sup>

An alternative explanation could put more weight on the diachronic dimension in the development of the theory. Proclus' concept of the primordial principles in the *Elements* could be more akin to the view of his mentor Syrianus.<sup>31</sup> In the earlier phase part of the Unlimited-Infinity was developed

27. *Theol. Plat.* III, 31.6–8, indeed says so and thus seems to be a more thoroughly thought presentation of the same topic.

28. Butler, *Metaphysics*, 220.

29. "For the intellect of the Father declared that all things be divided in threes," the famous fragment 22 of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which Proclus cites *In Parm.* VI 1091.6 and *In Tim.* III, 243,21. Translation Morrow and Dillon.

30. *The Elements* avoids some terms widely used in *Platonic Theology* (and Proclus' commentaries) which have specific Chaldaean tone. The derived presence of the higher principles is characterized in *ET* as illumination (or radiation), but never σύνθημα, mystical sign of cause. Proclus is not willing to use even less epoptic term symbolon, although in the *Parmenides Commentary* it is used also for authentic philosophical concepts of Plato's theology. *ET* agrees with *PT* that no authentic form of human knowledge, sensation, discursive reason and intellectual intuition, is capable to grasp divine things, but while *PT* (and *Parmenides Commentary*) have many references to the hypernoetic faculties of the human soul, *ET* does not speak about them. Its theory of the possibility of knowledge about the things divine is based on idea that existence of the highest principles could be inferred from their effects at the lower levels (prop. 123). The "flower of the intellect" could be a too revelatory concept for use in *ET* due to the term's origins in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, even if Proclus' theory of the hypernoetic devices is based as well on Plotinian views.

31. Besides Sheppard Concetta Luna has studied Proclus' relationship to Syrianus concerning the doctrine of the protological principles, see her "La Doctrine des principes: Syrianus comme source textuelle et doctrinale de Proclus 2e partie: analyse des textes," in *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, ed. A.Ph. Segonds and C. Steel (Leuven, 2000), 190–227.

more, because the Limit of the superessential level was still closely tied to the One itself. We have seen an echo of this theory in one of the passages of Proclus cited above. *Platonic Theology*, however, testifies to a shift from this older theory to a more precise and novel view in the mature thought of Proclus. One of the utterances expressing his growing precision in this area emerges from Proclus criticism of the Plotinian concept of intelligible matter. “For Unlimited is not the matter of Limit, but the power of it, nor is Limit the form of the Unlimit, but the (mode of) existence of it. But Being consists of both these, as not only standing in the One, but receiving a multitude of henads and powers which are mingled into one essence.”<sup>32</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Proclus’ henadological theory is expressed in somewhat different ways in the two works which have titles referring to theology. The ambiguities of the shorter work are, to some extent, solved in the longer. The crucial modifications of his views on protology and the doctrine of henads could be explained on the diachronic level as a movement from a theory dependent on Syrianus to a view which is that of Proclus in his old age. Alternatively, they can be explained from the point of view of the different designs and aims of the two Theologies. The final dispelling of the ambiguities seems not to be possible, remaining inside the area of evidence of the *Elements* and the *Platonic Theology*, but we are always compelled to seek further light from the *Commentary on Parmenides*. One difference between Theologies’ versions of henadology seems to be undeniable: *ET* has not definite answer to problem of henads and protological principles, *PT* hardly could leave doubt on the fact that at least Limit is a henad according to Proclus.

From these works as a whole a general representation of procession emerges, in which the ineffable unity of henads is seen as a pool of pre-existing properties for beings. Unlimited picks up all of them, triggering a continuous loop of production, but Limit measures this process, setting determinate breaks at certain points, and thus the interplay of the principles forms definite patterns of existence. As Limit measures Unlimited there remain indeterminate potencies after each breakpoint and the procession meets these as its matter for the next loop of the unfolding of existences. This cycle goes on so far that all the pre-existing characteristics are actualized in the ontic domain as a form of mixing, totalities of essences, but even after the last loop there remains ultimate indefiniteness, pure matter or the lower end of all, without impression or illumination of any particular henad, opposed to the ineffable unity—but even it is caused by the One.

32. *Theol. Plat.* III 40.4–8. Butler’s translation modified.