A Transformation of Mediation: Procline Hypostases as Dionysian Processions

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Recently, I have argued that both Dionysius and Maximos Confessor subscribe to a doctrine of creation *ex deo*, or creation as divine self-impartation, such that all things are grounded in, and hence derived from, the One God as the ultimate *archē* of existence. This raises a crucial problem: if all things are derived from God in what sense can they be affirmed to be genuinely other than God? Proclus accounts for this otherness through the proliferation of mediating terms. Dionysius transforms this pagan approach into a more 'immediate', *energeic* model of mediation. For Dionysius, creation *ex deo* is *not* creation from the divine *ousia* but from the uncreated energies, or grace, of God. This view is not pantheism but pan*en*theism.

Introduction

Recently, I have argued that both Dionysius and Maximos the Confessor subscribe to a doctrine of creation *ex deo*, or creation as divine self-impartation, such that all things are grounded in, and hence derived from, the One as the ultimate *archē* of existence. In this, they are in continuity with pagan Neoplatonists such as Plotinus and Proclus who affirm the necessity of a unifying principle of reality without which multiplicity itself could not exist. Everything, according to the logic of Neoplatonism, depends upon oneness—for to *be* is to be *one*. Christian Neoplatonists such as Dionysius and Maximos take up this idea and adapt it to their own Christian ontologies, transforming the pagan metaphysics of monism into the Christian metaphysics of monotheism. God alone is the source of being, the irreducible simplicity at the heart of reality constitutive of all things. Now, this metaphysics of monism—or monotheism—raises a crucial problem: if all things are derived from

God, in what sense can they be affirmed to be genuinely other than God? How can the One God produce the multiplicity of creation from himself without becoming implicated in it?

The pagan Neoplatonists try to account for this otherness through the proliferation of mediating terms, such that multiplicity emerges progressively from unity. Dionysius, following the lead of the Cappadocians, rejects this pagan approach in favour of a more 'immediate' model of mediation. The antinomy of sameness and otherness is located within the Triune Godhead itself. Simply put, whereas Proclus conceives of being emanating from the Source by means of successive subordinate hypostases, Dionysius (following the Cappadocians) understands it in proto-Palamite fashion as flowing directly from the Godhead by way of dynamic or *energeic* communications. I argue that this transformation of mediation leads, paradoxically, to both a heightened immediacy between God and creation, and to the emergence of a stronger distinction between them. For the Christians, creation *ex deo* is *not* creation from the divine *ousia* but from the uncreated energies, or grace, of God. This view is not pantheism but pan*en*theism. As Dionysius proclaims: 'God is all things in all things and nothing in any'.

Proclus

As noted above, the Neoplatonic response to the problem of the One and the many involves the multiplication of mediating terms. For Plotinus, this takes the relatively simple form of the three hypostases: One, Intellect, and Soul. Plotinus argues that the One (*ἕν*) 'overflows', as it were, and produces another which is less than itself—the one-many (*ἓν πολλὰ*) of Intellect. This latter then repeats the process in producing the unity-in-multiplicity (*ἓν καὶ πολλά*) of Soul, which in turn informs the unified multiplicity of nature, the term of the emanative process. In this way, the simplicity of the One progressively gives birth to the multiplicity of the world by means of mediating terms, each lesser than its prior until it finally comes to a halt.[1] The basic logic remains that of the innate productivity of perfection: 'The One is always perfect and

[1] See *Enn*.V.2.1, 1–20; *Enn*.V.I.8, 25.

therefore produces everlastingly; and its product is less that itself'.[2] Why is the product less than the producer? For the simple logical fact that if it were equal, it would be indistinguishable from its prior and nothing would actually be generated.[3] In order for the One to generate reality, a bare minimum of otherness (*ἑτερότητι*)[4] is needed. Thus, from the simplicity of the One emerges the subtle duality of Intellect, whence comes the unity-in-multiplicity of Soul, and finally the unified multiplicity of the world. By means of these mediating terms, the simplicity of the One successively expands into, and as, the diversity of the world.

The problem of mediation acquires a much fuller development in Proclus, the vast complexity of which can scarcely be touched upon in this brief treatment. In contrast to the simple triadic scheme of Plotinus, Proclus posits at least five hypostases: the One (*τὸ ἕν*) produces Being (*τὸ ὄν*); Being begets Life (*ζωή*); Life produces Intellect (*νοῦς*); and Intellect begets Soul (*ψυχή*).[5] In addition, it seems that Nature (*φύσις*) represents a sixth, and final, hypostasis.[6] Striking here is the separation of Being from Intellect, which together form the Plotinian Nous understood as the unity of thought and being. This is illustrative of Proclus' systematic and highly logical approach to the problem of mediation conceived in terms of universal and particular. After the One (which transcends categorization), Being is the most universal all-inclusive genus, and thus is the first principle to emerge into existence; everything which is participates in Being. Next is Life, which is a specification of Being (i.e. living being); followed by Intellect, a specification of Life (i.e. intellectual living being); and finally Soul, a specification of Intellect (i.e. rational intellectual living being). If Nature is the final hypostasis, one could perhaps take it as a specification of Soul in the Aristotelian sense of an irrational, appetitive principle characteristic of plants and animals.

[2] *Enn.*V.1.6, 40.

[3] The only other option would be that the effect is distinguished by its *superiority* to its cause, which is logically impossible—for whatever added value it has it must have received from its cause. See *Enn.*V.7, 40.

[4] See *Enn.*V.1.6, 50.

[5] See Dodds, E.R., *Proclus: The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, (Clarendon Press, 1962), 232; Proclus, *Elements*, Prop.101.

[6] See Proclus, *Elements*, Prop.21; *On Parmenides*, VI. 1046.

Following Dodds' schematization, the One (*τὸ ἕν*) is uncaused and possesses maximal unity while all the subsequent hypostases are caused and possess, respectively: unity and maximal being (*τὸ ὄν*); unity, being, and maximal life (*ζωή*); unity, being, life, and maximal intelligence (*νοῦς*); unity, being, life, intelligence, and maximal discursive reason (*ψυχή*).[7] With each successive term a new element emerges such that the simplicity of the One progressively unfolds into an ever more specific multiplicity of causal principles. It might appear at first glance that the higher principles (i.e. unconscious inanimate being) are inferior to the lower principles (i.e. living intellective existence). In truth, however, the lower are pre-contained in the higher, and the higher, by way of mediation, are present to the lower.[8] As we have noted, being depends first and foremost upon unity—the One. Similarly, there is no life apart from being and no intellective being that is not alive. Each principle provides the necessary ground for its subsequent and pre-contains it in a more unified (and thus ontologically superior) manner.[9] Being, in other words, is not merely the cause of inanimate existence in the world but, insofar as it is the source of all the subsequent and more specific hypostases, it is the ultimate—albeit mediated—cause of life and intelligence in the world as well. In this way, reality unfolds from the One in stages, progressively revealing the richness of its implicit multiplicity.[10]

Proclus' solution involves a further multiplication of entities, namely his doctrine of henads according to which there is a kind of unity-in-multiplicity within each hypostasis—including the One. What I want to focus on, however, is Proclus' construal of the internal relations of these 'pleromic' principles in terms of participation. Within each hypostasis there is a threefold division into unparticipated/participated/participating. Each hypostasis, in effect, possesses an

[7] See Dodds, *Elements*, 232.

[8] See Proclus, *Elements*, Prop.7: 'Every productive cause is superior to that which it produces'. Prop.18: 'Everything which by its existence bestows a character on others itself primitively (*πρώτως*) possesses that character which it communicates to the recipients'. See also, Prop.56 & Prop.101.

[9] See *Elements*, Prop.61: 'Every power is greater if it be undivided, less if it be divided'.

[10] By extension, this logic ought equally to apply to the One which, though radically simple, must somehow pre-contain the totality of existence that proceeds from it. This is of course problematic. As Dodds puts it in relation to Plotinus: 'The One cannot be, in Plotinian language, *δύναμις πάντων* (the power of all things) without being also *δυνάμει πάντα* (all things in potentiality): but to admit this is to infect the One with at least the seeds of plurality'. *Elements*, 259.

'unparticipated' (*ἀμέθεκτος*) and a 'participated' (*μεθεκτός*) aspect, or 'moment' as Dillon renders it.[11] Proclus states: 'All that is unparticipated (*ἀμέθεκτον*) produces out of itself the participated (*τὰ μετεχόμενα*); and all participated substances (*αἱ μετεχόμεναι ὑποστάσεις*) are linked by upward tension to existences not participated (*ἀμεθέκτους ὑπάρξεις*)'.[12] Each hypostasis possesses its own monadic principle as the transcendent source of its unity. This principle is 'unparticipated' insofar as it is not directly implicated in multiplicity but preserves its simplicity, what Proclus calls a 'one prior to the many' (*ἕν πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν*). Though unparticipated, the monad generates terms capable of being participated; Proclus terms this emergent multiplicity a 'one yet not-one' (*ἕν ἅμα καὶ οὐχ ἕν*). Finally, there are the participating terms, the most manifold aspect, or 'moment', within each hypostasis which are a 'not-one yet one' (*οὐχ ἕν ἅμα καὶ ἕν*).[13]

This internal participatory relation extends equally to the external relations between hypostases. Strictly speaking, only the One is absolutely imparticipable, while the monads of subsequent hypostases are only relatively imparticipable. In other words, the 'imparticipable' monad of Being participates the One via the latter's lowest aspect, the participating henads, and so on for each of the hypostases. In this sense, the monadic principle is at once a participant (in relation to its prior) and unparticipated (in relation to its subsequent). The lowest stage of one hypostasis coincides with the highest stage of the next. In this way, Proclus attempts to safeguard the radical simplicity of the One while allowing for a kind of mediated, participatory procession into multiplicity. Typical of the Neoplatonic approach, the generative activity of the One (what Proclus terms 'the given' [*τὸ δοθὲν*]) is immediately hypostasized as a participated term (*αἱ μετεχόμεναι ὑποστάσεις*). This proliferation of mediating terms linked by mutual relations of participation is illustrative of the Procline principle of continuity,[14] such that a seamless bridge is constructed between the One and the many. The extreme realism of Proclus dictates that each link in the chain acquires substantial existence as a divine or quasi-divine principle.

[11] See Dillon, John, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, (Princeton, 1987), xix, xxii.
[12] Proclus, *Elements*, Prop.23.
[13] See Proclus, *Elements*, Prop.24.
[14] See Dodds, *Elements*, 216; Dillon, *On Parmenides*, xvii.

The Cappadocians

From a Christian theological point of view, the pagan solution to the problem of the One and the many is obviously problematic insofar as it is both subordinationist and polytheistic. After Nicea, there is no longer any question concerning the consubstantiality of the Christian Hypostases. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *homoousios*, one in essence and activity, distinguished only by relation: the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds.[15] With the anathematization of Arius—and later Eunomius—Christianity closes the door to any kind of descending hierarchy of mediating principles, so fundamental to the pagan Neoplatonists. Henceforth, the distance between the Creator and his creation will have to be overcome by other means. For the Cappadocians this involves distinguishing between God's essence and activities. It is the *energeiai*, or 'energies'[16] *ad extra* that mediate between God and world. While it would be anachronistic to claim that these early Christian Fathers posit a developed essence/energies doctrine akin to the Palamite doctrine in the fourteenth century, a basic distinction between the unknowable *ousia* of God and His knowable attributes, or energies, is already present in the Cappadocian Fathers.[17] Before we get to Dionysius, then, a brief sketch of the Cappadocian understanding of the relation between God's *ousia* and his *energeia* is in order.

It is in response to the challenge of Eunomius who boldly asserted the knowability of the divine *ousia*, that a nascent essence/activity distinction emerges in the thought of Basil and the two Gregorys, Nazianzus and Nyssa. For Eunomius, names are indicative of essence such that to know the name of God is to know the essence of God. Beyond the obvious philosophical problems that arise from defining—and thus finitizing—God, Eunomius' position leads to the theological problem of subordinationism. If the appellation 'unbegotten' applies

[15] See Gregory Nazianzus, *On God and Christ, The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*., (SVS Press, 2002) Oration 29.16.

[16] It has become conventional in the Orthodox tradition to translate *energeia* as 'energy'. As Tollefsen rightly notes, however, the exclusive use of the term 'energy' risks obscuring the philosophical continuity and historical context of *energeia*. Following Tollefsen, I alternately translate *ἐνέργεια* as 'energy', 'activity', 'actuality', or simply transliterate it as *energeia*. See Tollefsen, Torstein, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*., (OUP, 2012) 4–5.

[17] See Bradshaw, David, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, (CUP, 2004)153–207. See Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*.

essentially to God the Father, while 'begotten' applies essentially to the Son, then clearly the latter cannot be *homoousios* with the Father—for 'unbegotten' and 'begotten' are *essentially* two different things. In response to this, the Cappadocians categorically deny that the divine *ousia* is in any way knowable and that the divine names are in any way *essentially* predicable of God. In terms of 'unbegotten', 'begotten', and proceeding, these are simply terms of relation (*σχέσεις*) pointing to the fact that the Father is the *archē* of the Son and the Holy Spirit. All other names refer not to the divine *ousia* but to the *energeiai*, the activities of God *ad extra*. It is by way of these latter that we receive knowledge of the Unknowable.

It is here that we encounter the source material for Dionysius' treatise on the Divine Names. In speaking of the various names ascribed to Christ in the Scriptures—be it Door, Bread, Vine, Way, Light, Stone, Shepherd, etc.—Gregory of Nyssa argues that these apply not to the divine *ousia* but to the *energeiai*:

> Each one of these titles (*ὀνομάτων*) is not the nature (*φύσις*) of the Only-Begotten, not his deity, not the character of his being. Nevertheless he is so named, and the naming is valid; for it is right to consider that there is nothing idle or meaningless among the divine words….What we say is this: as the Lord in various ways provides for human life, each variety of benefit is identified in turn by one or other such title, the foresight (*προνοίας*) and action (*ἐνεργείας*) therein observed becoming a particular kind of name (*ὀνόματα*).[18]

Gregory proceeds by denying that the multiplicity of divine names is applicable to the simplicity of the divine essence, while affirming that they are nonetheless valid and meaningful in relation to God. In a sense, Gregory shares the robust realism of Eunomius; if words are to have meaning, if Scripture is not mere idle talk, if theology is to be a legitimate pursuit, then it must be possible to talk about God in some substantial way. Where Eunomius goes astray is in his belief that he can name—and thus know—the divine *ousia* itself. This Gregory

[18] *Contra Eunomium* II.298.

emphatically denies, arguing that what we *can* know—and thus name—is the diversity of God's providential activities (*ἐνεργείας*). 'It is clear', he concludes, 'that the Divinity is given names with various connotations in accordance with the variety of his activities (*τὸ ποικίλον τῶν ἐνεργειῶν*)'.[19] In this discussion of the divine names we encounter a clear distinction between God's unknowable *ousia* and his knowable *energeiai*, the latter being here identified with divine providence.

The question, of course, is what exactly *are* these *energeiai*? Are they some sort of divine communications *ad extra*—'energies' in the Palamite sense—or merely 'operations' in a more Thomistic sense?[20] The answer is that they are both. Gregory alludes to this when he says that God reveals himself to us 'both by the miracles which are revealed in the works (*ποιοῦντες*) done by him, and from the titles (*ὀνομάτων*) by which the various aspects of divine power (*δυνάμεως*) are perceived'.[21] The reference to miracles suggests a temporal *operatio*, a divine intervention within the created order, something that God *does*.[22] On the other hand, the mention of divine powers—linked to the *energeiai*[23] by their association with the divine names—suggests something timeless pertaining to God himself, something that God *is*. This accords with Gregory's understanding of the *energeiai* as divine attributes. Just as we can describe the outward characteristics of a person without knowing their inward nature, says Gregory, so 'all the words found in holy scripture to indicate God's glory (*δοξολογίαν θείαν*) describe *something of the manifestations around God* (*τῶν*

[19] *Contra Eunomium* II.304. See also II.353: 'In a similar way, he says, the Lord also is by himself whatever he is in his nature, and when he is simultaneously named in accordance with his various activities (*ἐνεργειῶν*) he does not possess a single title covering them all, but is accorded the name in accordance with each idea (*ἔννοιαν*) which arises in us from those activities (*ἐνεργείας*)'.

[20] See Bradshaw *Aristotle East and West,* 165. Concerning the limitations of the Latin rendering of *ἐνέργεια* as *operatio* see, 153–154. Regarding the debate between Orthodox and non-Orthodox commentators over the validity of the essence/energies distinction see Yannaras, Christos, "The Distinction Between Essence and Energies and Its Importance." www.academia.edu. Also, Lossky, Vladimir, *The Vision of God*., (SVS, 1983), 11–24.

[21] *Contra Eunomium* II.102.

[22] It is worth noting that the term here is *ποιοῦντες*. A careful and in-depth philological study would perhaps shed light on whether Gregory employs this term rather than *ἐνεργείας* in relation to temporal works or whether he uses them interchangeably as synonyms for the divine activity.

[23] For the Neoplatonic assimilation of *dynamis* to *energeia* in relation to first principles, see Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*., 25–36.

περὶ τὸν θεὸν τι δηλουμένων)[24]….His being itself (*αὐτὴν τὴν οὐσίαν*), however, scripture leaves uninvestigated as beyond the reach of mind, and inexpressible in word'.[25] In this passage, Gregory expands the scope of the divine names from works, powers, and energies to include the divine attributes 'around God' (*περὶ τὸν θεὸν*),[26] which he identifies with the divine glory. God's glory—to which there are numerous Scriptural attestations—is not merely some 'operation', something that God *does*, but something that God in some sense *is*. [27]

Perhaps the most well-known statement regarding the essence/energies distinction is to be found in Basil's Epistle 234:

> We say that we know the greatness of God, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His providence over us, and the justness of His judgement, but not His very essence (*οὐσία*)…But God, he [i.e. Eunomius] says, is simple, and whatever attributes of Him you have reckoned as knowable is of His essence. The absurdities involved in this sophism are innumerable. When all these high attributes have been enumerated, are they all names of one essence? And is there the same mutual force in His awfulness and His loving-kindness, His justice and His creative power, His providence and His foreknowledge, His bestowal of rewards and punishments, His majesty and His providence? In mentioning any of these, do we declare His essence?.... The *energeiai* are

[24] I have modified the translation slightly to bring out the literal sense of this passage. For other references to the 'things around God' see, *Contra Eunomium* II.89, 582; III.5.59.

[25] *Contra Eunomium* II. 104–105. Emphasis added.

[26] Gregory of Nyssa frequently refers to the energies as the 'things around the divine nature (*τὰ περὶ τὴν θείαν φύσιν*)'. See *Contra Eunomium* II.89, 582; III.5.59. For *περὶ* with accusative as indicative of theological doctrine, see Krivochéine, Basile, «Simplicité de la nature divine et les distinctions en Dieu selon S Grégoire de Nysse» *Studia Patristica* (Berlin, 1985), 88, n.62. Also Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 167.

[27] See Gregory Nazianzus, *Orations* 28.3 (PG 36 29A–B): 'What is this that has happened to me, O friends and initiates and fellow lovers of the truth? I was running up to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the mount, and drew aside the curtain of the cloud, and entered away from matter and material things, and as far as I could I withdrew within myself. And then when I looked up I scarcely saw the back parts of God, although I was sheltered by the rock, the Word made flesh for us. And when I looked a little closer I saw, *not the first and unmingled nature (φύσιν), known to itself* – to the Trinity, I mean; not that which abides within the first veil and is hidden by the Cherubim, *but only that nature which at last even reaches to us* (*εἰς ἡμᾶς φθάνουσα*). And that is, so far as I can tell, the majesty, or as holy David calls it, *the glory which is manifested among the creatures*, which it has produced and governs. For these [i.e., majesty and glory] are the back parts of God'. Cited in Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 168. Emphasis added.

> various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His *energeiai*, but do not undertake to approach near His essence. His *energeiai* come down to us, But His essence remains beyond our reach.[28]

As with the two Gregorys, Basil distinguishes between God's unknowable *ousia* and his knowable *energeiai*—the latter, once again, ranging in scope from works, powers, attributes, providence, judgment, and majesty (i.e. glory). Basil's distinction between God as remaining 'beyond our reach' and God as coming 'down to us' points once again to the *energeiai* as divine communications *ad extra*. As such, the energies really *are* God—albeit not his *ousia*. In all of these cases, a clear distinction is present between God as incommunicable and God as communicable—*both* are God, but according to different modes.

Basil's emphasis upon the absurdity of Eunomius' position reveals the implicit engagement with the philosophical problem of the One and the many. If God is truly simple, how can he insist that the various attributes of God give knowledge of his essence? How can the *ousia* be one if the essential attributes are many? As irreducible simplicity, how can God be the source of contraries, simultaneously wrathful and loving, the source of both rewards and punishments? In truth, what we are confronted with are the consequences of the Christian suppression of mean terms. In the absence of subordinate principles, God is at once ineffable simplicity, the One beyond thought and being, and at the same time the source of multiplicity. The antinomy of sameness and otherness is located within the Trinitarian Godhead itself.[29] In their struggle with Eunomius, the Cappadocians grapple with how to affirm *both* the divine simplicity *and* the diversity that proceeds from God. On the one hand, there is no place for the divine attributes within the divine *ousia*; on the other hand, there are no subordinate hypostases to contain them. And yet they must be affirmed—for Scripture and creation bear witness to the diversity of divine *energeiai* as both knowable and nameable.

[28] Basil, Epistle 234.1, (PG. 32 872C-873B). Cited in Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 166.
[29] See Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*., 138.

Dionysius

If it is with the Cappadocians that we first encounter evidence of a profoundly altered metaphysics, it is nonetheless true that this represents a somewhat oblique engagement with the ontological problem of the One and the many. The Cappadocians, as we have seen, are primarily concerned with the epistemological problem of divine knowledge and its Trinitarian implications. It is with Dionysius that we first encounter a direct engagement with the philosophical problem of mediation. What the Cappadocians accomplished in the realm of epistemology is taken up by Dionysius and applied to the realm of ontology, resulting in a profound transformation of mediation.

Perhaps the most explicit example of this is found in a powerful passage in the *Divine Names* where Dionysius takes direct aim at the metaphysics of Proclus with its proliferation of mediating principles:

> I do not say that the Good (*τἀγαθόν*) is one thing, Being (*τὸ ὄν*) another, Life (*ζωὴν*) and Wisdom (*σοφίαν*) yet others, nor that there are multiple causes (*αἴτια*) and different Godheads (*θεότητας*), superior and inferior, and all producing different effects, but that all these good processions (*ἀγαθὰς προόδους*) and divine names (*θεωνυμίας*) celebrated by us are of the one God (*ἑνὸς θεοῦ*) and that the first name tells of the universal Providence of the one God (*παντελοῦς τοῦ ἑνὸς θεοῦ προνοίας*), while the other names reveal providences more general or specific.[30]

Dionysius explicitly rejects Proclus' mediating terms: there is no descending hierarchy of hypostases such that the One produces Being, which produces Life, which produces Intellect (Wisdom), which produces Soul, and so on. Nor are there multiple principles or divinities responsible for specific entities so that Being is the cause of existence, Life is the cause of vital existence, and Wisdom is the cause of vital intelligent existence. Instead, the entire scheme is radically leveled and attributed in its entirety to the One God. What were multiple subordinate divinities in Proclus are now varying measures of a single

[30] *DN*.5, 816D. All Citations of Dionysius are my own translations in consultation with Luibheid, Colm, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Paulist Press, 1987), and De Andia, Ysabel, *Les Noms Divins*, (Sources Chrétiennes, 2016).

universal providence, the manifold processions of a unitary Good. This change marks a radical new approach to the problem of the One and the many. Rather than try to resolve the tension through the postulation of intermediaries, Dionysius, following the lead of his Cappadocian teachers, locates the source of multiplicity (and hence otherness) within the First Principle itself.[31]

Perl makes the interesting point that this transformation is not merely a response to theological concerns but is in fact the ultimate solution to the philosophical problem of sameness and otherness.[32] For no matter how many intermediaries are posited between the 'imparticipable' One and the many participants, the fundamental problem of the One and the many remains. Whence comes that necessary otherness, however subtly it is rendered? How is it possible for simplicity to be the source of diversity? *That* it must be so is clear—for multiplicity itself depends upon unity, without which it would dissolve into an abyss of infinite divisibility. Yet, *how* it is so remains a mystery. As Perl succinctly puts it, 'the world can be understood only as the effect of the One, but the One, it seems, cannot cause the world'.[33] In Perl's view, Dionysius to his great credit chooses to face the problem head-on. Instead of multiplying intermediaries, which serve merely to obscure, rather than resolve, the antinomy (and which lead inevitably to subordinationism and polytheism), Dionysius fearlessly proclaims that the One God is the sole, *immediate* source of the many. Even more radically than Plotinus, then, Dionysius proclaims that God is 'all things in all things, and nothing in any'.[34]

Once again, however, the question arises as to the nature of these manifold processions of the One God. For, though Dionysius rejects their status as hypostases, he nonetheless affirms them as the multiple expressions of divine providence. An important clue in the above passage is Dionysius' identification of God's providential processions with the divine names—an identification we first encountered in Gregory of Nyssa. Indeed, the *Divine Names* could itself be understood as a kind of commentary on Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of divine *onomata.* To

[31] See Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*.138.
[32] See Perl, *Methexis*., 58–60.
[33] Perl, *Methexis*, 36.
[34] *DN*. VII.3, 872A 15.

cite a few examples, Dionysius says that 'all that the sacred hymnologies of the theologians (i.e. the scripture writers) say regarding the divine names (*θεωνυμίας*) refer, in revealing praises, to the beneficent processions (*ἀγαθουργοὺς προόδους*) of the Thearchy'.[35] Like Gregory, Dionysius calls these processions 'powers'"(*δυνάμεις*): 'whenever we name (*ὀνομάσαιμεν*) the supraessential Hiddenness God, or Life, or Essence, or Light, or Logos, we indicate nothing other than the essence-making (*οὐσιοποιοὺς*), life-begetting (*ζωογόνους*), and wisdom-bestowing (*σοφοδώρους*) powers (*δυνάμεις*) which proceed to us (*εἰς ἡμᾶς*) from Him'.[36] Finally, like the Cappadocians, Dionysius identifies the powers and providences of God with the *energeiai* when he speaks of the 'providential processions and energies (*προνοητικαῖς προόδοις καὶ ἐνεργείας*)' whereby God creates, sustains, and encompasses the whole of creation.[37]

All of this indicates that Dionysius subscribes to a similar distinction as the Cappadocians between God's hidden *ousia* and his manifest *energeiai*, though Dionysius formulates it in ontological terms as a distinction between the One God and his multiple manifestations. The reference to the divine *dynameis* coming down 'to us' (*εἰς ἡμᾶς*) echoes the expressions of Gregory Nazianzus and Basil concerning the immanent aspects of God. The inexpressible One is beyond naming yet reveals himself to us in the divine names by which Scripture hymns the 'beneficent processions' (*ἀγαθουργοὺς προόδους*), the *energeiai* of God *ad extra*. While Dionysius adopts the Neoplatonic language of procession (*πρόοδος*), his meaning is fundamentally different from that of Plotinus and Proclus. For him, the *energeic* processions are not lower effects of the supreme Cause, but *the self-disclosure of the Cause itself*.[38] For Dionysius, as with the Cappadocians, the energies do not immediately coalesce into hypostases but remain iridescent and dynamic—they are the providential *proödoi*, the 'being-making'

[35] *DN*. I.4, 589D. Note here the neologism '*agatho-ourgos*' with its *energeic* connotations (*erga-energeia*).

[36] *DN*. II.7, 645A-B. Also, *DN*. I.8, 597B; *DN* II.5, 644A.

[37] *DN*. IX.9, 916C. Also, 916D.

[38] See *DN* IV.14, 712C: 'He alone is the Good and the Beautiful Himself on account of Himself, *and as a manifestation of Himself through Himself* (*καὶ ὥσπερ ἔκφανσιν ὄντα ἑαυτοῦ δι ἑαυτοῦ*)'. In a sense, one can also say that everything which proceeds from the Neoplatonic One is a self-disclosure of the One. My point here is that the *causal* understanding of procession is crucially modified by Dionysius. The providential processions are not lower 'effects' of the One, but *God himself* according to another mode.

(*οὐσιοποιοὺς*), 'life-begetting' (*ζωογόνους*), and 'wisdom-bestowing' (*σοφοδώρους*) *dynameis* that constitute the world.[39]

Further evidence of Dionysius' transformation of Neoplatonic mediation may be found in his reworking of Proclus' threefold schematic of unparticipated/participated/participating. In a passage that reiterates his rejection of the pagan proliferation of principles, Dionysius responds to a query as to how the One God can be addressed by multiple names such as Being-Itself, Life-Itself, or Power-Itself. His answer is both expected and enigmatic. None of these names refer to additional deities or demiurges, says Dionysius, but 'are derived from beings and *especially the primary beings* (*τῶν πρώτως ὄντων*)', and analogously attributed to God as the Cause who transcends beings *including the primary beings* (*τὰ πρώτως ὄντα*)."[40]

Given his uncompromising rejection of subordinate existences, what are we to make of this peculiar reference to 'primary beings'? Dionysius promptly gives us the answer: the primary beings refer to the 'providential powers (*προνοητικὰς δυνάμεις*) which come forth from the unparticipated God (*ἐκ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀμεθέκτου*)', according to which beings are participants (*μετέχοντα*) in the gifts of existence, life, and so on.[41] The so-called 'primary beings' (or primary realities) are evidently a stand-in for Proclus' participated terms mediating between the unparticipated *archē* and the manifold participants. And yet, given the suppression of mean terms, these *onta* are not hypostasized realities but dynamic communications of God *ad extra*—the 'being-making' (*οὐσιοποιοὺς*), 'life-begetting' (*ζωογόνους*), and 'wisdom-bestowing' (*σοφοδώρους*) *dynameis*.[42] That Dionysius refers to them in ontic terms underscores the realism of the providential powers; though not separate hypostases, they *are* substantial expressions of God, the self-disclosure of the One as many.

The paradoxical character of the powers, processions, or energies of God is further illustrated when Dionysius says of the divine differentiation that 'it is according to these gifts (*δωρεαὶ*) that the things which are imparticipably participated (*τὰ ἀμεθέκτως μετεχόμενα*) are

[39] See *DN*. II.7, 645A–B.
[40] *DN* XI.6, 953C–D.
[41] *DN* XI.6, 956A.
[42] *DN*. II.7, 645A–B. Also, *DN*. I.8, 597B; *DN* II.5, 644A.

hymned through the participations (*τῶν μετεχόντων*) and those who participate (*τῶν μετοχῶν*)'.[43] Once again, the deity is named (or 'hymned') according to both the primary beings (the participated terms) and the secondary beings (the participants). That the primary beings are themselves 'imparticipably participated' represents another revealing oddity. According to the Procline scheme, there is no reason for the middle terms to be described in this way—they are simply participated, while only the first term in the triad is said to be unparticipated. According to Dionysius, however, not only is the transcendent Godhead said to be imparticipable,[44] but even the participated processions are in some sense imparticipable. This points once again to the suppression of mean terms. Insofar as the communications of God *ad extra* simply *are* God, they too are unparticipated; insofar as they represent God in his knowable, immanent aspect, they are participated. The paradoxical nature of all of this stems from the rejection of mediating hypostases such that the antinomy of sameness and otherness is confronted head on. God is at once simple and manifold, transcendent and immanent, unknowable and knowable.

Dionysius' transformation of the Procline doctrine of participation has important implications for his doctrine of creation *ex deo*. Participation is simply another way of talking about the derivation of beings from God. Whereas creation *ex deo* approaches the issue from the perspective of the cause, participation approaches it from the perspective of the effect. Whether one speaks of God constituting the world by means of his providential processions or the world being constituted by its participation in these same processions, one is talking about the same thing—the derivation of the many from the One. In speaking of the 'movements' of the unmoved God (*κινήσεις θεοῦ τοῦ ἀκινήτου*), Dionysius says that we should understand 'the undeviating procession of the energies (*πρόοδον τῶν ἐνεργειῶν*) and the genesis of all things from Him (*ἐξ αὐτοῦ*)'.[45] The procession of the *energeiai* coincides with the generation of beings. Creation *ex deo*, then, does not mean creation from the divine *ousia*, but from the being-making *dynameis* or *energeic* processions by which God constitutes the world.

[43] *DN* II.5, 644A-B.
[44] See *DN* II.5, 644B; *DN* XI.6, 956A; *DN* XII.4, 972A.
[45] *DN* IX.9, 916D.

Insofar as these processions *are* God, the world is indeed created *from* God—for, in the absence of subordinate principles all creative energies must be predicated of God alone. And yet, insofar as these energies are distinct from the essence, the world is not created from God—not, at any rate, in any kind of unqualified *essential* sense.

In conclusion, Dionysius' transformation of mediation does not 'resolve' the ancient antinomy of the One and the many any more than do the mediating terms of Plotinus and Proclus. On the contrary, it radicalizes it such that beings both *are* and *are not* derived directly from God. The problem with the pagan position, from a Christian point of view, is that the proliferation of intermediaries means that the dividing line between the One and the many is never entirely clear. Indeed, the whole thrust of the 'great chain of being' is precisely to establish this continuity. While both Plotinus and Proclus insist upon a fundamental distinction between the One as uncaused, and all subsequent principles as caused, the seamless bridge constructed between the One and the many—especially as one finds it in the later Neoplatonism of Proclus—renders the distinction between God and world ambiguous. For the pagans this may well be a laudable achievement. From a Christian perspective however, which places a much higher premium upon the *otherness* of God in relation to the world, the pagan emphasis upon *sameness* can seem dangerously pantheistic.[46] Paradoxically, by drawing a distinction between God's unknowable *ousia* and his *energeic* processions, Dionysius renders the world at once more immediately related to God and more clearly distinguished from him. On one side of the great divide dwells the invisible and unnameable Creator who *made darkness his hiding place*; on the other side is visible contingent creation. What mediates between them are God's own providential processions that traverse the chasm without bridging it—that is, '*energeically*' rather than essentially or ontically.

[46] Ultimately, both pagans and Christians are struggling to articulate the antinomy of sameness and otherness with respect to the God/world relation. If the pagan emphasis upon sameness tends towards monism, the Christian emphasis upon otherness carries an inherent risk of dualism.