Individuality, Foreknowledge, and the Gift of Creation in Late Antiquity

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by

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Short abstract

In this thesis, I examine the way in which three Byzantine thinkers—Proclus, John Philoponus, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (henceforth simply "Dionysius")—characterize the relationship between the "divine ideas," or the antecedent principles according to which God knows and makes things, and the things made according to those ideas. I contend that all three thinkers appeal to the divine ideas to solve, at least implicitly, a philosophical problem, namely how God can (a) know and intend creatures before creating them (b) without having to logically presuppose the very creatures to be explained. All three want the ideas to be in some sense about the creature, able to serve as the grip by which God knows and intends to create *that* creature before making it. At the same time, they want the ideas to be logically prior to the creature so that the ideas can serve to explain how God knows the creature (logically) *before* the creature comes to be. They face this difficulty, I suggest, because they assume that the creature is individual, having a basic subjecthood enabling it to stand in relations to the divine idea as copy to paradigm and to God as creature to creator or effect to cause. If the creature is, in its very individuality, wholly itself and hence other than the idea, it is difficult to see how the idea could stand in for the creature except by a relation to that same creature, compromising its logical and explanatory priority.

Each thinker, I argue, offers a distinct option in logical space. I also, secondarily, suggest that, in considering this problem at all, these thinkers represent a shift in the so-called "divine ideas tradition."

Long abstract

This thesis is a philosophically-inflected exegesis, examining the logical relationship between the divine idea and the creature as worked out by three Byzantine thinkers: Proclus, John Philoponus, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (henceforth "Dionysius"). Each thinker, this thesis argues, is at least implicitly concerned with how divine providence can be understood to extend to the very numerical identity—or, negatively framed, the otherness or difference—that enables creatures to stand in relations with each other and God. I call this problem the "Creative Foreknowledge Problem," or "CFP." Each thinker attempts to address this problem by positing something like "divine ideas," whose relationship to the creatures made according to them secures divine productive knowledge with respect to those creatures, and by suggesting different relations between and characterizations of both the creatures and the ideas.

This thesis stands to offer insights in both patristics and ancient philosophy. (1) Scholarship in both fields has generally confined its interest in the divine ideas to a few figures: Maximus, Philo, and the Middle Platonists, with a few, brief forays into Augustine and Dionysius. My project thus contributes to scholarship in addressing the divine ideas in figures whose thoughts on the topic have received scant attention, particularly Philoponus. (2) Scholarship both in patristics and ancient philosophy has so far largely taken for granted that positing something like divine ideas allows the philosophers positing them to explain divine productive foreknowledge. So far, however, few if any have considered *how* the divine ideas are intended to secure that productive foreknowledge or what philosophical difficulties might arise in assigning them such work. By considering the philosophical angle, my thesis draws attention to what is happening philosophically in these texts and suggests new

connections among their authors. (3) Finally, there are numerous potential benefits to conducting a specifically argumentative and philosophical analysis: it helps to bring out connections among the thinkers, the concerns that are present but often left under- or unstated in their texts, and the argumentative structure, or logic, organizing those texts. In bringing out those connections, concerns, and structures, such analysis stands to deepen our appreciation for and insight into the ways these thinkers play off one another and their common milieu.

In the first chapter, I briefly characterize the CFP and clarify what it involves: (a) it has to do with the logical relation between the divine idea (or whatever fills that functional role for a thinker) and the creature made in accordance with the divine idea; (b) it has to do with productive knowledge rather than epistemology as such; and (c) it has to do with "individuality" in distinction from particularity and atomicity—the former meaning the numerical identity that enables one to talk about a thing (whether universal or particular) as having relations or properties (e.g. being related to another individual as participated to participant) at all. All three thinkers, I suggest, are committed to the following:

1) God knows a thing before making it by possessing the corresponding divine idea (e.g. λόγος, νόησις, προόρισμος).
2) The divine ideas must somehow "refer" to their products in order to serve as their explanation. This must happen logically "before" those products exist.
3) The divine ideas must also, however, *not* be related to the thing except inessentially for the following reasons:
    a) the idea is supposed to explain the product (explanatory priority), which it cannot do if essentially related to and hence constituted by it, or explained by it; and
    b) the idea must therefore have an identity that is logically prior to its involvement with the product as its producer (logical priority).

In other words, the problem is how the divine idea can be both related to *and* unrelated to the creature. The difficulty, I take it, arises due to another commitment:

4) The divine idea is numerically distinct from the creature made according to it.

One can rephrase the problem in more Platonic terms: where does the otherness in the product come from? It cannot, seemingly, come from the cause; for the cause can only give what it already contains. (Indeed, it is because the cause contains its effect that it knows the effect.) And presumably the one thing it *cannot* contain is difference from itself, or otherness. I take it that this otherness can be reframed positively: as the numerical identity each thing has, which allows it to enter into relationships as *that* thing. The one thing that a cause cannot seemingly contain is the effect's numerical identity, its being *that* thing.

I therefore take myself to be free to make the following claim: where the thinker holds that the idea must (a) contain some reference to its product to exercise its providence and, at the same time, (b) remain unrelated to the product lest its explanatory priority be compromised, the thinker is attempting to explain how the creature's otherness—its being a thing caused, its being a participant, and the like—can be overseen by providence. The difficulty presupposes that it is something to be *not* the cause—and the question becomes how that something is brought about. I finish the first chapter by discussing how my research relates to contemporary scholarship, very briefly explaining my method, and outlining my argument.

The second and third chapters treat Proclus. In the second chapter, I start by noting that several thinkers before Proclus appeal to the divine ideas to explain how God foreknows his creatures. I then claim that Proclus belongs to this same tradition, showing that Proclus thinks the gods know and produce their objects in prepossessing them, or in possessing their antecedents. Recourse to this strategy puts Proclus solidly within the "divine ideas tradition." That fact in turn entitles me to the claim, in the following chapter, that Proclus represents a change in the divine ideas tradition: that he, unlike his predecessors, tries to tackle the difficulty involved in explaining how a divine idea can refer to its object without having to presuppose its object logically. In the third chapter, I make my main argument that Proclus is concerned with how each thing's numerical identity (negatively understood as "otherness," or "difference") is anticipated by providence. I do so by showing that Proclus is indeed concerned with how to maintain that the divine idea *both* contains *and* remains transcendent in relation to the creature made according to it—a difficulty that only arises because Proclus presupposes that the creature *has* a numerical identity not reducible to what is contained in the cause. Finally, I examine what I take to be Proclus' would-be solution to the problem: he attempts to explain how each thing comes to belong to its (apparently constitutive) rank both by appealing to the henads, who implant something like their own individuality in the beings under their care, and by appealing to the One's ability to produce the prime matter that serves as the logical numerical identity of that thing.

In the fourth chapter, I turn my attention to Philoponus. My argument runs as follows. (a) Philoponus tries to maintain both that the divine idea has logical priority with respect to the creature and that the divine has some referential power with respect to the creature. This latter commitment seems to presuppose a sense in which the divine idea is correlative with its product even before it exists (temporally). Philoponus must maintain both these commitments so the divine ideas can serve their purpose: to explain how God knows what he will make. For without logical priority, the idea cannot explain the creature without *presupposing* the thing it is to explain; and without some referential power, it is unclear how possessing the idea would count as knowing the creature before its creation. (b) Philoponus seems to think the connection between the divine idea and its product is something like a common intelligible content. Just as a sculptor knows the statue he will make insofar as he possesses a λόγος or νόησις that is formally identical to that in the statue, so too does God know what creature he will make by possessing its λόγος. (c) However, this solution would face problems if Philoponus were to allow that there existed things like prime matter, which would fall outside the intelligible: a God who foreknows his products by having concepts could not foreknow creatures as individuals because they would be constituted in part by a non-intelligible element (prime matter). One might expect Philoponus to reduce creatures to their forms as far as possible to enable his account to work. (d) That is in fact what we see: he makes several moves that, together, allow him to reduce creatures to their properties considered as structured bundles. (e) It is plausible that Philoponus recognizes the difficulty involved in productive foreknowledge with respect to individuals, and his apparent solution is to reduce, as far as possible, the gap between the concrete individual and its divine idea.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with the divine ideas and individuality in Dionysius. I begin, in Chapter Five, by showing that Dionysius' approach to divine providence depends on the idea that God cares for things by containing them in some sense before they come to be. To talk about the "divine ideas," for him, is to say that God possesses the things he will make in advance. At the same time, Dionysius insists that God cannot be connected to his creatures in

any essential way. His worry is likely the same as Proclus' and Philoponus': were God to be in a mutually defining relationship with the world, he would not be able to serve as its explanation, for then his essence and activity would be explained as much by the world as the world by him. I then make a claim about how seeks to meet both conceptual demands at once: he employs a distinction between God in himself and God in his providential activities (or, in other words, by his conflation of the first and second hypotheses of the Parmenides). God *both* precontains his creatures by possessing their powers and knowledges in a higher degree and knows things in the very creative act. Only in the former sense does he properly "foreknow" the creature, while, in the latter sense, he knows his creatures as strictly concrete individuals. I spend the remaining time in Chapter Five making the case that God, for Dionysius, prepossesses his creatures insofar as he already contains, in a higher mode, their very same powers, or knowledges.

In Chapter Six, I complete the case begun in the fifth chapter. In the first part, I argue that the relationship between God and his creatures is, for Dionysius, analogous to that between a bishop and his subordinates. God complicates his own, perfectly simple activity so as to enable others to join in, participating in his activity. God thus knows concrete creaturely activity, I argue, by knowing his own activity; for they are, in one important sense, one and the same activity. I end the chapter with a change in direction: while I have already shown, in Chapter Five, that Dionysius is concerned with the CFP in at least an abstract, formal sense, I recognize that the case would be stronger were he to show a positive interest in individuality. To make that case, I argue, based primarily on a section, in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, on the resurrection, that Dionysius was likely philosophically committed to (and aware of the need of) the existence of strict individualities. Given his interest in showing that all features of any creature come from God, it becomes plausible to read his interest in the divine ideas and their transcendence in light of his interest in the individual.

In the concluding chapter, I briefly synthesize what my study has brought out, discussing the different approaches taken by the figures discussed in the thesis: Proclus is inconsistent but generally attempts to secure individuality by making it a feature that things get from the henads; Philoponus tries to reduce the difference between a thing and its intelligible content to nearly nothing so as to avoid the problem altogether; and Dionysius takes a dual approach, holding both that God precontains each thing *and* that he knows each thing as distinct from himself insofar as he is its actual cause, produced through his creative act. Finally, I conclude by considering some potential implications for patristic scholarship on this period and, more tentatively, for contemporary philosophical theology.

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Chapter 1: Setting the Stage

1 — Introduction

This thesis examines the way in which three Byzantine thinkers—Proclus, John Philoponus, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (henceforth simply "Dionysius")—characterize the logical relationship between creatures and their antecedents in the divine mind. My primary aim is to show that all three are implicitly interested in a philosophical problem, namely how one can maintain the following claims simultaneously.

a) God productively foreknows (and intends to make) the things he makes.[1]

b) He does so without having to logically presuppose those very things.

Call this problem "the Creative Foreknowledge Problem" (henceforth "the CFP").[2] All three thinkers can plausibly be understood to construct their philosophical "systems" with it in mind. My secondary aim is to show *how* they do so.

These aims need immediate clarification. My thinkers do not put the problem in precisely these terms. They instead address it indirectly or under particular guises—as it is implicated in other concerns. Two such concerns in particular are worth mentioning. First, the CFP is implicated in the difficulties these thinkers face in their attempts to characterize divine foreknowledge as productive. One can understand their difficulty thus. Most human knowledge is speculative, presupposing an object. If I am to know the sapphires raining from the heavens at

[1] Note that, though I use the singular term "God" here, I am referring to both the Christian God and the pagan gods. I use the singular term mostly to avoid cumbersomeness.

[2] If ever there be an academic reader from whom this acronym elicits nary a chuckle, I shall know the time has come to exit the schools.

morn, there must *be* sapphires raining from the heavens at morn. This point involves logical rather than temporal presupposition: if I am to know, right now, the sapphires raining from the heavens tomorrow, there must, in some sense, *be* sapphires raining from the heavens tomorrow. What matters is that my knowledge depends upon the objects rather than the reverse. But productive knowledge—and especially divine productive foreknowledge—is different. It is involved in the very intentional act by which its object is produced; and since the object depends upon the productive act and the productive act involves productive foreknowledge, the productive foreknowledge cannot depend upon the product for its content. It cannot, therefore, stand in any essential relation to its object. To make it bear such a relation would be to make it logically simultaneous with its object, evacuating any explanatory priority from it. At the same time, if it is to be genuine *knowledge* of the object, productive foreknowledge must presumably "refer to" its object in some sense. With these considerations in mind, one can put a slight spin on the CFP, incorporating those broader concerns. How, the problem is, can one maintain the following claims simultaneously?

a) Divine foreknowledge in some sense "refers to" (and to that extent is related to) its products.

b) Divine foreknowledge is explanatorily and logically prior to (and to that extent unrelated to) its products.

Further, all three thinkers, following a tendency common in the ancient world, explain how God knows his creatures by positing "divine ideas," antecedents in the divine mind according to

which God makes things. (In accordance with a common practice in contemporary theology, I shall refer to this tendency as the "divine ideas tradition."[3]) It is from this angle that my thinkers most directly consider the CFP, attempting to establish what relationship must obtain between the divine idea and the corresponding creature in order for the idea to serve its function. On the one hand, they want the idea to be somehow *about* the creature so that it can "reference" it. On the other hand, they do not want the idea to receive its content from the creature since that would compromise its explanatory and logical priority. While one can (I think) rightly understand these thinkers to be concerned with the CFP as such, therefore, it is common to see them approach it primarily as it connects with their attempts to correctly characterize the relationship between the divine ideas and the creatures corresponding to them. In its final and most specific articulation, then, the problem is something like this: in order to serve as a "grip" on the creature, allowing God to intend it, the idea must somehow "refer" to (and hence relate to) the creature; but if it is to explain how the creative act can intend that thing so as to *produce* it, it must be logically and explanatorily prior to (and hence unrelated to) its object: how can the divine ideas manage both tasks at once?

It is with this final articulation that it becomes possible to connect the CFP with the third element from my thesis title: individuality. I use the term stipulatively. As I use it, "individuality" is neither atomicity (i.e. mere indivisibility either physically or conceptually) nor particularity (i.e. mere inability, in contrast with universals, to be present in multiple subjects). Rather, it is the basic, incommunicable subjecthood enabling a thing to bear predicates as its own, stand as one

[3] I am using the phrase "divine ideas tradition" without meaning to suggest that there is a single, coherent "tradition" connecting all the thinkers who draw on artisanal models to explain providence. There is, nonetheless, some family resemblance among the different thinkers who use such models, and it is likely that they were aware of one another directly or indirectly; it is probably safe, therefore, to assume that they shared some sense of the shared promise and difficulties of such a model. "The divine ideas tradition" is also a known shorthand in other areas of theology. See Mark McIntosh, *The Divine Ideas Tradition in Christian Mystical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

relatum in participated–participant relationships, and so forth. I take it that worries about how God intends to produce a given creature before it is there to *be* intended can arise only if the creature is assumed to be individual in this way—that is, because it is assumed to be utterly *distinct* from, or other to, any ideas God might have about it.[4] In other words, the problem arises due to certain presuppositions about individuality and creaturely otherness from God. One can therefore reframe the CFP once more: how can God know and intend to create what, by hypothesis, his ideas cannot be—namely the creature in its otherness from him and his ideas? Or: how can the idea give God knowledge about precisely what is *other* in the product, that is, precisely what the idea is *not*, except by a relation to *it*?[5]

Consider the following illustration. When a builder sets out to build a house according to a blueprint, he already knows the character or form he seeks to reproduce in the building materials. One can, as it were, "read off" the resulting house from the blueprint insofar as its features are present in, or have "answers to" the house's formal properties. By contrast, the fact that it be this or that house cannot be read off from the blueprint. There is some fundamental level on which it, as an individual, is "other than" its blueprint. And while one can say that the blueprint is the blueprint of this or that house, one can only say so once there *is* this or that house for it be to be the blueprint *of*. The situation is, if anything, even more difficult with respect to God's productive foreknowledge. Knowledge of this basic "otherness" of the house might be

[4] Here, I am using the term "creature" to mean not "animal" but "thing created."

[5] One finds related questions, including how God or the One can produce "otherness," at various points in the scholarship on Platonism. See, for instance, Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition.* Studies zur Problemgeschichte der antiken und mittelalterlichen Philosophie (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 49; John Rist, "The Problem of «Otherness» in the Enneads," in *Le néoplatonisme. Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969*." Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris: *Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, 1971): 77–88; see also Gersh on Neoplatonism and Derrida, Matthew C. Halteman, "On the Problematic Origin of the Forms: Plotinus, Derrida, and the Neoplatonic Subtext of Deconstruction's Critique of Ontology," *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006): 35–58; A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and D. Gregory MacIsaac, "The Origin of Determination in the Neoplatonism of Proclus," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr Robert D. Crouse*, eds. Willemien Otten, Walter Hannam, and Michael Treschow, 141–172 (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 163–171.

supplied, in the ancient world, by acquaintance with the preexisting matter used in the making of the product, but that option is unavailable if one is committed to the idea that God arranges for even the very identity, or individuality, of things (as Platonists may want to do and Christians certainly want to do) or if one is directly committed to the idea of God's producing the matter of things as well (as some late Neoplatonists may be and Christians certainly are). If he is to know his product by analogy with the artisan, his ideas *alone* must supply the necessary reference or antecedent to the creature.

Given this connection between the CFP and individuality, one can see how the way creaturely substances are constituted might be a relevant topic for my thinkers as they attempt to answer the CFP. Indeed, I shall suggest that Proclus and Philoponus *do* tinker with creaturely constitution with an eye to the problem. Dionysius does so less clearly in contrast. Nonetheless, given his insistence that there is direct, face-to-face encounter and cooperation (συνεργία) between God and creature, his belief that God bestows individuality on each creature in coming to dwell in that creature, and his probable commitment to the idea that there exist basic numerical identities, or hypostases, in creatures, he is most likely aware that such connections between commitments on individuality and productive foreknowledge do exist.

My secondary aim in this thesis is historical. I suggest that these thinkers represent an important transition in late antique philosophy and theology in two ways. First, they build upon and transform the "divine ideas tradition" that they have inherited from their predecessors. While some thinkers before them *do* hold that God knows what he will make before making it, these three are among the first to wrestle with the difficulties involved in working out the mechanics, as it were. Secondly, in doing so, they are also among the first to explore, however haltingly, the connections between creative foreknowledge and the individual. That is not to say that these

thinkers are necessarily the *first* to recognize these difficulties. I do not want to make such a strong historical claim. Nor do I want to attempt to explain, for now, *why* they are among the first to consider these difficulties, though I shall consider some possibilities in the chapters on the respective figures and in the concluding chapter. It is enough for my purposes to note *that* the shift occurs and that Proclus, Philoponus, and Dionysius represent a different "epoch," as it were. Additionally, by this time, Christians, concerned with Christology and the resurrection, have already begun to work through how to characterize the concrete individual, for which they often use the term "hypostasis."[6] For that reason, it is especially interesting that these thinkers seem to be working through individuality from a different angle, namely in connection with providence. This secondary aim will remain mostly at the periphery, framing my attempts to establish *that* and *how* my chosen thinkers respond to the CFP.

2 — *Clarifications*

A few implications and assumptions need to be mentioned here. First, I must reiterate that I am dealing with *productive*, or *creative*, foreknowledge, not speculative, or "simple," foreknowledge.[7] This has important implications. While epistemology may come into the picture from time to time, as it does in Philoponus, it is not primarily what is at stake for these thinkers. What primarily matters is, rather, the logical relationship between God or his idea on the one hand and the creature, or thing thought, on the other. Further, because logical rather than temporal priority is at issue, I can sidestep certain issues that otherwise crop up around foreknowledge, such as whether God is temporal. God could be temporal and have knowledge

[6] Johannes Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[7] The latter term is used mostly in analytic philosophical theology. See, for instance, Michael Robinson, "Divine Providence, Simple Foreknowledge, and the 'Metaphysical Principle,'" *Religious Studies* 40, no. 4 (2004): 471–483.

that is *logically* prior to its product; or he could be atemporal and have knowledge that is only *posterior* to its product. As it happens, for all three thinkers, God is in at least some sense atemporal. But it is not necessary to dwell on that fact to address their thoughts on productive foreknowledge.

Secondly, the CFP does not *directly* have to do with future actions—nor, therefore, with free will, fate, or the extent to which providence is meticulous rather than general. What concerns the ancients in this case is how God knows the thing he will make, not whether he knows what choices it will make once he brought it into existence. Barring further assumptions, there is nothing preventing one from seeing God as knowing exactly the things he will make without having to commit to a particular stance on determinism. Again, that is not to say that the three thinkers have no stance on this subject. They certainly do. But it is not directly relevant, and so I shall largely leave it aside.

Thirdly, the fact that I am interested in individuality only in a very particular sense (and even then only as presupposed by the CFP) has implications for how I handle the texts with which I am working. Because the individuality that concerns me is subjecthood, or thisness—or, from another angle, basic otherness—, it is not necessary to show that the figures I discuss are especially worried about how providence extends to particulars (καθ’ ἕκαστα) or indivisibles (ἄτομα) *qua* particulars or indivisibles. To the extent that universals are subjects with their own predicates, enabling them to stand in relations to one another and enter into cause–effect, paradigm–copy, or participatum–participant with other things, they too are individuals, and the same problem applies to them. That means that evidence can be drawn from discussions about universals as well those about particulars. Further, because I take it that my three thinkers are aware that the CFP exists, and the CFP presupposes that the things have their own individuality

and "otherness" from their causes, I take it, too, that my thinkers are aware that individuality is among the factors involved in the CFP. I take myself to be entitled, as a result, to the following inference: if a figure is concerned with the CFP, he is at least implicitly concerned with the individual.

I consider this inferential, rather indirect approach legitimate—especially because I consider my argument that the three thinkers take steps to build around the CFP solid—, but it is still worth briefly discussing how my terms, "individual" and "individuality," relate to the terms in which my thinkers express themselves. In brief, my thinkers have no *consistent* terms for the individual in the sense I take to be implicit in their thinking, but all three use terms *around* that idea. Importantly, the Greek terms that come closest are not always (or often) those one might expect. As I have mentioned, terms such as "ἄτομον" and "καθ' ἕκαστον" do refer to some individuals (i.e. distinct, concrete subjects) but only *qua* particular or insofar as those individuals, depending from the final rung in a genus–species taxonomy, carry no further specifications but can only be described. These terms do not, therefore, pick out individuals *qua* individuals. Further, they necessarily exclude Platonic forms and other Platonic causes, things that would count as individuals in the relevant sense.

The terms that come closer to tracking the individual in its concrete subjecthood tend to cluster around existence, subsistence, or substance. Proclus uses the terms "ὕπαρξις" for a subject considered as subsisting in its own right, though only when the subject in question is immaterial and can serve as a principle (e.g. monadic Soul or its derivative souls). And even then, he often associates it with a subject's existing in a certain mode or belonging to a certain kind.[8] He uses the term "ὑπόστασις" in much the same way. When it comes to material

[8] Carlos Steel, "ΥΠΑΡΞΙΣ chez Proclus," in *Hyparxis e Hypostasis nel Neoplatonismo: Atti del I Colloquio Internazionale del Centro de Ricerca sul Neoplatonismo: Università degli Studi di Catania, 1-3 ottobre 1992*, edited by F. Romano and D.P. Taormina (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1994), 79–100.

individuals, Proclus has less clear terminology, perhaps because material individuals, as things that become, are not beings (ὄντα, ουσίαι) in the strict sense. But, as I shall discuss in Chapter 3, Proclus grants that everyday things (ἄτομα) exist as products distinct from their producers, so he is willing to grant them *some* individuality even if he never assigns a term to material individuals as such. Perhaps the closest concept to “individuality,” however, is simply unity: Proclus seems inclined to think that all individual subjects, particulars and universals alike, must first be “one,” though he seems not to use a catchall term for the subjects that *possess* unity.

Philoponus is somewhat easier to characterize. He holds that, strictly speaking, universals do not exist. For him, therefore, terms such as “substance” (οὐσία) and “nature” (φύσις) do not primarily refer to membership in a class or kind owing to certain properties but to separate existence and existents. He can thus use those terms simply to pick out the individual as such. Because individuality comes, as it were, baked into substance, what makes a thing a substance *also* makes it the *individual* substance it is. Philoponus also uses the term “ὑπόστασις,” which serves as a rough synonym for “substance” and “nature,” picking out the concrete existent and its existence as individual.[9]

Lastly, I come to Dionysius, whose terminology is the least clear. As I mention in my chapters on him, he uses terms such as “φύσις” and “οὐσία” to mean something like “ἄτομον,” or “καθ’ ἕκαστον.” But unlike Philoponus, he seems to hold that there *are* universals, meaning that one cannot simply identify substance or nature with the individual as such; it may simply mean *particular* substance or nature. In his case, therefore, more than with the other thinkers, I rely on my supposition that, if a thinker is clearly wrestling with the CFP, he is also implicitly

[9] For the original case that monophysites such as Philoponus equate nature and hypostasis, see Joseph Lebon, “La christologie du monophysisme syrien,” in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht, 425–580. Band I, *Der Glaube von Chalkedon* (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1962, originally published 1951–1954).

concerned with individuality as such. To strengthen the case, however, I also argue that, outside the passages dealing with the CFP, he commits himself implicitly to something like individualities or subjects in his ontology.

Another clarification is in order: in saying that these thinkers are interested in some way in how divine foreknowledge extends to the individual, I am *not* implying they are modern personalists or Scotists, interested in the individual because they see something infinitely valuable in its otherness, its startling concreteness. While such an interest is perhaps inchoately present in this period—Gregory Nyssen implies that at least humans are infinitely valuable, and the debates around the bodily resurrection sometimes come close to thematizing it as well—, it is clear that my thinkers do not even talk directly about the individual in my sense, much less do so from a preoccupation with individuality. I take it that they are more interested in ensuring that divine providence extends to *everything*. The problem is how, *given* that individuals exist as irreducibly themselves and hence other from God and his ideas, God can know and intend them before they come to be.

Some final clarifications should be made regarding the *historical* element in my thesis. I assume that the scholarly consensus on Dionysius is basically correct: he is writing between the mid-400s and 528–532; he is a Syrian monk or is familiar with the Syrian monastic tradition and liturgy; and he is evidently acquainted with Late Neoplatonism if not with Proclus or Damascius themselves.[10] He can therefore be fruitfully set alongside Proclus and Philoponus as both their contemporary and a fellow in a common intellectual milieu. Although he probably flourishes in the period between Proclus and Philoponus, I have chosen to put him after the other two. I do so

[10] Just for a sample, see Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagites: A Christian Mysticism?" *Scrinium* 3 no. 1 (2007): 128–179; Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 2 and 10–14; Christian Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise on the Divine Names* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 12; and Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria.* Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), ix–xii.

because my case for Dionysius' interest in the individual, which is somewhat more oblique, will be more plausible after I have made my cases for the other two. Further, it seems natural to place Philoponus next to Proclus since his thought more directly responds to Proclus'.

3 — *Relation to scholarly literature*

With these clarifications in mind, I am ready to discuss how my thesis connects with the contemporary scholarship on these thinkers. All the elements making up the CFP are already present in the scholarship on my three writers: (a) the need for the cause to be both immanent and transcendent in relation to its effects to be provident over its effects; (b) the fact that the λόγοι, παραδείγματα, or similar antecedents in the divine serve to explain how and in what sense God (productively) foreknows his effects; (c) the difficulty involved in explaining how a cause could bring about something that, by its very nature, it does not contain: the effect *qua* that very effect; and (d) the fact that *all* the above questions only get traction in the first place if one assumes that providence produces or operates upon something that has its own, distinct existence and identity.

In the past, however, scholars have tended to thematize those elements in relative isolation. That is not to say that they have failed to recognize that the elements are connected. They frequently make reference to such connections. For instance, E.R. Dodds notes the connection, in Proclus, between the cause's ability to be simultaneously transcendent and immanent and its capacity to provide for the objects it cares for. But such remarks are generally made only in passing while discussing the elements themselves. The relations *among* these elements have not themselves been an explicit focus. The consequence is that it has gone basically unremarked that, when considered together, they may form a single system to explain

how divine providence cares for all things—and that despite the fact that, as E.R. Dodds puts it, providence as a theme "bulks almost as large in Neoplatonism as does … predestination in … Christian theology" from the same era.[11] It has also gone unremarked, therefore, how the attempt to combine these elements might face tensions such as the one that constitute the CFP. There are two near exceptions to the rule, which I shall discuss shortly; but the exceptions simply prove the point: few have attempted to clarify the connections among these elements in a way that would allow one to see the challenges that might face the system comprising them and hence why my writers might have needed to characterize the elements in certain ways.

My project thus contributes to the scholarship on Proclus, Philoponus, and Dionysius by drawing together these disparate threads so as to bring out those connections. In this section, I shall sketch the various scholarly conversations in which those elements have been treated. I shall then briefly note what stands to be gained by my intervention. I shall then be in a position to outline my thesis and commence the argument proper.

3.1 — Divine ideas and foreknowledge

Many scholars recognize that, for Platonists and Christians, God's having λόγοι, παραδείγματα, or the like for creatures serves an important function in his care for creation. More particularly, they seem to recognize that, if God produces things in accordance with, or "looking to," certain antecedent principles, it somehow explains in what sense God knows "what he is doing" in making creatures. So common, indeed, is this idea that it rarely gets thorough commentary—at least for the period in which my thinkers are writing. So, for instance, in an article on Maximus the Confessor's view on the divine λόγοι, Jordan Daniel Wood says simply that the λόγοι are

[11] E.R. Dodds, ed. and trans., *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 263.

"the preexistent ideas" whose role in Dionysius and his earliest commentators is to serve as paradigms.[12] "A thing's *logos*," he says, "comprises and establishes [its] whole ontological continuum," i.e., "its nature, power, and activity."[13] And it does so by serving a "paradigmatic function."[14] And because God's paradigms for things are also connected with his will to produce things, Wood seems to think, God knows the things he makes as he knows his own thoughts and wills.[15] But *how* God knows the creature by knowing his own paradigms for the creature is left unclear. The thought seems to be that we all know how a paradigm, blueprint, or model can serve as proxy for the creature modelled on it.

One can find the same assumption in scholarship on my three writers. Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, with reference to Philoponus, calls the λόγοι "principles of knowledge" as well as "principles of making." God's making is his "acting in accordance with" his "knowledge of beings."[16] As is often the case in the literature, the relation between the knowledge and the making is left imprecise, but the thought *seems* to be that God in some sense knows the beings he will make. And, as with Wood, this knowledge of beings yet unmade somehow grounds the practical knowledge of God in making, and both are made possible by God's possession of the paradigms of things. Christian Schäfer says that God can give each things its appropriate form and place in the cosmic order "because each thing's essence (οὐσία) and proper being is present in God's mind as [part of] a perfect ensemble of ideas."[17] He further notes with apparent approval that other scholars, including Perl, have "observed" that Dionysius holds that there are divine

[12] Jordan Daniel Wood, "Creation is Incarnation: The Metaphysical Peculiarity of the *Logoi* in Maximus Confessor," *Modern Theology* 34, no. 1 (2018): 86.
[13] Wood, "Creation is Incarnation," 87.
[14] Wood, "Creation is Incarnation," 87.
[15] Wood, "Creation is Incarnation," 84.
[16] Thorstein Theodor Tollefsen, "Proclus, Philoponus, and Maximus: The Paradigm of the World and Temporal Beginning," in *Platonism and Christian Thought in Late Antiquity*, eds. G. Pavlos, Lars Fredrik Janby, Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, and Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, 100–114 (London: Routledge, 2019), 103.
[17] Christian Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise on the Divine Names* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 96.

ideas, or paradigms, specific to “individuals.”[18]Again, the suggestion seems to be that God knows what he is doing in creating because he has a unique, infinitely specific blueprint for each creature. And, again, how the forms serve that function is left unasked.

3.2 — Immanence and transcendence as necessary for providence and in connection with knowledge

3.2.1— *E.R. Dodds*

Much classic and contemporary scholarship on Platonism has noted the emphasis figures such as Proclus put on the fact that causes are simultaneously immanent in and transcendent in relation to their effects. Only a few scholars, however, flesh out what they take this immanence and transcendence to involve, explaining how it connects with providence and divine knowledge. I shall note three scholars who seem to recognize this connection even if they articulate it only in a rather diffuse way. I start with E.R. Dodds. In his commentary on Proclus’ *Elements*, he says that Proposition 23, where Proclus introduces the participated–unparticipated distinction, is rightly called “le théorème fondamental du traité, que l’on pourrait appeler théorème de la transcendence,” adding that it is, “at the same time,” his theorem on “immanence.”[19] Dodds does not say why it should matter so much that the cause be simultaneously transcendent and immanent, but there are hints throughout his commentary. My suspicion is that, ultimately, it matters because such simultaneity is necessary for providence. Providence functions by establishing participatory relationships between causes and effects. But there are difficulties in establishing the conditions for such a relation. “If,” Dodds says in the same passage on Proposition 23, “participation is to be real, the Form must be immanent, and therefore divided; if

[18] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius*, 96, note 38.
[19] Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 210. Dodds is quoting Émile Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Tome I: *Antiquité et le moyen age*; Fascicule II: *Période hellénistique et romaine* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1927), 477.

it is to be participation [in] one undivided principle, the Form must be transcendent, and therefore not directly participated."[20] Dodds explains this reasoning elsewhere. He identifies "being in" an effect with being "conditioned by" that effect so that "the lower causes are in one sense closer to their effect than the higher, as being more readily affected by them."[21] Transcendence, for Proclus as Dodds reads him, is something like logical priority over and non-relation to an effect, while immanence is logical simultaneity with and relation to an effect. Were the cause to be "in" its effect only, it would be characterized by it and hence not the simple, unchanging character that it must be "to give unity to the many immanent universals" seen in its effects.[22] Therefore, it must be transcendent. But participation requires a relation, meaning that there must also be an immanent cause. Therefore, to secure providence, Proclus, for Dodds, must secure simultaneous transcendence and immanence in his causes—and it is in part for that reason that Proposition 23 is *the* fundamental theorem in Proclus' treatise.

While he is even less explicit on this point than on the connection between immanence, transcendence, providence, Dodds does also hint that providence involves a divine foreknowledge and that that foreknowledge in turn depends upon God's containing, without relation, the things that he makes. He says, in his commentary on Proposition 124, that Proclus' view that the gods know their objects by knowing themselves first is akin to Aquinas' (and Dionysius') view that God knows creatures by knowing their preexistent likenesses in him.[23] And in his commentary on Proposition 30, he notes that Christian thinkers such as Aquinas use the idea that the effect "remains" in its cause to explain how God knows creatures. While he does not directly say that *Proclus* uses the idea that way, Dodds seems only a step away from making

[20] Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 210–211.
[21] Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 269.
[22] Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 210–211.
[23] Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 266.

such a suggestion: he has already suggested that Proclus thinks, like Aquinas, that God knows creatures by knowing their preexistent likenesses in him, and he is fully aware that it is the "remaining" that grounds creaturely identity with the gods or the One for Proclus.

3.2.2 — *Jonathan Greig*

In his book *The First Principle in Late Neoplatonism*, Jonathan Greig considers the attempts made by the Late Neoplatonists Proclus and Damascius to square the idea that there exists a causal synonymy between causes and their effects—generally secured by saying that the cause in some sense anticipates the effects—with the equally important idea that the first principle, being utterly simple, cannot anticipate its effects even in potency. In setting out his account, Greig acknowledges that Proclus attempts to incorporate within his causal framework both elements that seem to make causes relative to their effects and elements that seem to be geared to ensure that the causes remain unrelated to their effects.[24] Greig supplies a partial rationale. Proclus must do so in part because, unlike his predecessor Plotinus, he "allows for enmattered, intelligible forms which are derived from intelligible Forms which exist in themselves."[25] These enmattered forms are numerically distinct from one another and the form "in itself" and, further, are dependent upon their participants. Greig does not say whether there are reasons for Proclus to take aboard such a commitment, but the effect is clear. Because Proclus is already committed to these enmattered forms, he cannot hold that it is one and the same cause that is directly present in each instance. Otherwise, it would not really be present "in" each instance.

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[24] Jonathan Greig, *The First Principle in Late Neoplatonism: A Study of the One's Causality in Proclus and Damascius*. Philosophia Antiqua 156 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), 105.
[25] Greig, *The First Principle*, 102, 116.

Greig hints at a connection between divine causal, providential knowledge and the gods' precontaining the effects they produce by "anticipating" them. The One cannot be said to anticipate the effects for which it (indirectly) provides; the reason is that, if it were actually to anticipate them, it would have to have an implicit multiplicity, and its character, and capacity to ensure that character is bestowed equally across its various instances, would be compromised. In contrast, the gods *do* anticipate their effects.[26] He notes that, for Proclus, the gods know all things and hence provide for all things by precontaining them.[27] While he does not say so directly, Greig is almost certainly aware that, for Proclus, there is some connection between the providence and the need for transcendence and immanence in the relation between cause and effect. Again, his entire book is about how, for Proclus and Damascius, the first principle does or does not contain, or anticipate, its effects and how that same concern can be found in how they treat causes in general. Greig goes a long way towards making the final step to stating something like the CFP: all he would need to add is that the reason Proclus must maintain the unparticipated and participated causes simultaneously is, in part, so that the cause can have the necessary priority to avoid deriving anything from those for whom it is supposed to provide and, simultaneously, the relation necessary to ensure it actually counts as *providing* at all.

3.2.3 — *Ysabel de Andia*

Ysabel de Andia seems to sense especially clearly the important link (at least in Dionysius) between the fact that God has ideas, or paradigms, for things and the fact that God knowingly determines which creatures will come to be.[28] "Les paradigmes," as she puts it at one point, "en

[26] Greig, *The First Principle*, 190.
[27] Greig, *The First Principles*, 238, footnote 54.
[28] Ysabel. de Andia, *Henosis: L'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite*. Leiden; New York: Brill, 1996. For her equation between "ideas in the divine mind" and the paradigms, see 157, 278, 286.

tant qu’ils sont des prédéterminations ne sont pas seulement des modèles des réalités créées, mais aussi la science des futurs contingents.”[29] It is in possessing the paradigms that God foreknows and determines each concrete thing in salvation history.[30] She is, unfortunately, somewhat less clear on the fact that the paradigms must be both immanent and transcendent in order to perform their function in divine foreknowledge; but the idea is still there. The paradigms, she says, are simultaneously paradigmatic and efficient, or creative, causes, with the paradigmatic aspect answering to God as “in himself,” i.e. as precontaining and transcending his effects, and the creative aspect answering to God in his role as “efficient cause.”[31] And these two “moments” in the paradigms are somehow linked.[32]

But de Andia’s account never draws together, decisively or clearly, all these elements—at least not explicitly—so as to conclude that the paradigms’ simultaneous immanence and transcendence in relation to their effects is necessary for them if they are to perform their function in God’s knowledge regarding the things he makes. Perhaps that is because she implicitly divides the “philosophical” and “ontological” from the “theological” and “historical.”[33] In treating the two as distinct, de Andia may have been tempted to treat questions about logical or ontological priority as distinct from questions about divine foreknowledge.

3.2.4 — *Eric Perl*

Eric Perl, in his work on Proclus and Dionysius, never directly says that one must ascribe to the cause both immanence and transcendence in relation to its effects to ensure it can provide for its effects. He does, however, make claims that, taken together, paint such a picture. I shall consider

[29] de Andia, *Henosis*, 263
[30] de Andia, *Henosis*, 263–264.
[31] de Andia, *Henosis*, 261–262.
[32] de Andia, *Henosis*, 261.
[33] de Andia, *Henosis*, 262.

his argument in *Theophany*, his book on Dionysius. First, Perl insists that the cause must be transcendent. That is, he clarifies, “it is not conditioned by its effects.”[34] It must remain so because it is in being unconditioned that it can also be (productively) present to all its effects, constituting its effects by bestowing upon them the properties, or determinations, that give them their intelligible content.[35] That content, he claims, is the same thing as being, or existence.[36] So, in bestowing properties on its effects, the cause bestows existence on them. At the same time, Perl claims that the cause must be immanent, where immanence is nothing more than the very same productive activity viewed from a different phenomenological angle. Insofar as a cause is accessible to thought through its effects, it is immanent.[37] Perl thus clearly claims, more so than most writers on Dionysius, Proclus, or Philoponus, that transcendence and immanence are in fact necessary for providence. More than that, he explains *why* they are so: it is because they are the means by which providence functions. Perl sees all the major Platonic figures his book treats—Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, and Dionysius—as recognizing this same connection. In all essential respects, he takes Dionysius to be in agreement with Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus.

It is worth noting that Perl also connects immanence, transcendence, and their relation to providence with the λόγοι, or παραδείγματα. According to him, the divine ideas are the “defining or determining principles which make things to be.”[38] They must therefore be both transcendent and immanent in order to perform their function, and all that Perl says about the need for God and causes more generally to be both transcendent and immanent with respect to their effects apply to them. He has thus gone farther than other scholars working in this period.

[34] Eric Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 24.
[35] Perl, *Theophany*, 20, 45–46.
[36] Perl, *Theophany*, 5–10.
[37] Perl, *Theophany*, 19–20.
[38] Perl, *Theophany*, 29.

In doing so, he has done an immense service for the scholarship by thinking through, even if in a sometimes rather diffuse way, the connections among transcendence, immanence—in short, the logical relation between the cause and its effects—and divine providence.

But even Perl never quite strings all these insights together or focuses on the connections among them all in one place. My suspicion is that this fact is due in part to his peculiar take on the God–world relation is involved. According to Perl, for Dionysius as for Proclus, Plato, and the whole Platonic tradition, God is reality's "whole content." Further, the "various features … found in a thing … constitute" its "entire intelligible content, all that there is in it for the mind to encounter. And since to be is to be intelligible, they constitute the whole … thing itself. A being can be nothing but … its intelligible determinations."[39] All things' intelligible content and, by Perl's own logic, all things, can be "nothing but" God's "differentiated presence."[40] So, while Perl has in one sense brought all the elements involved in the CFP and its possible solution into play, there is another, perhaps more fundamental sense in which he has not. Indeed, he arguably dissolves the entire frame in which the problem could arise by dissolving its very elements. God, λόγοι, and creature are blended together so as to preclude any problems from ever forming.[41] I shall return to Perl's position at various points throughout the thesis. For now, I shall simply say that, whatever his reason for not thematizing and systematizing the connections he clearly recognizes, he ultimately leaves that work for another to undertake. My work, in some sense, can be seen as taking up that challenge. Further, and finally, if I am right about Perl's reasons for not further elucidating the connections that he recognizes, I have yet further reason to thank him: it would suggest that he implicitly *denies* individuality, in something very like my sense, to God and creature alike; depending on the level at which one analyzes either, the apparently individual

[39] Perl, *Theophany*, 30–31.
[40] Perl, *Theophany*, 31.
[41] I suspect that is simply because there is nothing left to constitute a problem, but that is another matter.

turns out to be collapsible into its other. Perl would thus be recognizing that there is some implicit logical relation between God's capacity for providence, his λόγοι, his knowledge regarding creatures, and the individuality or non-individuality found in him and in creatures.

Having said all that, I take it I can now restate with greater weight what my work offers. My thesis is, to my knowledge, the first scholarship (a) to work through all these connections systematically and (b) to investigate the relation between divine antecedents and creatures in these particular writers.

3.3 — Individuality

Finally, I should note the connection between my work and the growing literature on individuality in late antiquity—even in my relatively narrow sense.[42] Richard Sorabji has shown, in his book on the self, that there is a general interest in late antiquity in something akin to numerical identity or subjecthood—particularly among the Stoics, though one can find answering interests in some Peripatetics and Platonists.[43] More directly important for me is a recent book by Johannes Zachhuber, in which he argues that Christological debates surrounding

[42] If one simply looks at individuality or particularity in their *broader* senses, there is much more literature available. For instance, there is the debate over individual forms in Plotinus—A.H. Armstrong, "Form, Individual and Person in Plotinus," *Dionysius* 1 (1977): 49–68; Paul Kalligas, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus: A Re-Examination," *Phronesis* 42, no. 2 (1997): 206–227 and "*Logos* and the Sensible Object in Plotinus." *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997): 397–410; P.S. Mamo, "Forms of Individuals in the 'Enneads,'" *Phronesis* 14, no. 2 (1969): 77–96; John Rist, "Forms of Individuals in Plotinus," *Classical Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1963): 223–23 and "Ideas of Individuals in Plotinus: A Reply to Dr. Blumenthal," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 92 (1970): 298–303; A. Petit, "Forme et individualité dans le système plotinien," *Les Cahieres philosophiques de Strasbourg* 8 (1999): 109–122; and Christian Tornau, "Qu'est-ce qu'un individu? Unité, individualité et conscience de soi dans la métaphysique plotinienne de l'âme," *Les Études philosophiques* 90, no. 3 (2009): 333–360. There is also the literature discussing numerical identity in the resurrection and literature on the Stoics on numerically identical entities across successive cosmic epochs. For some engagement with the Stoics (and, to a lesser extent, Christians) on these topics, see Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapter 3. For the Stoics, see A.A. Long, "The Stoics on World-Conflagration and Everlasting Recurrence," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 5 (1985): 13–37.

[43] Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Chalcedon gave rise to a new emphasis on the individual as hypostasis—something like a pure numerical identity or subject in my sense. In John Damascene, on this account, one finds the idea that even concrete οὐσίαι subsist only in the individual, or hypostasis.[44] My own project cannot be seen as directly following from Zachhuber's, certainly not in any simple way: my questions arise largely from difficulties surrounding divine foreknowledge, and I consider my writers' motivations to tinker with creaturely constitution in that light, though Philoponus is certainly *also* involved in relevant debates around Christology. Even so, my work could be seen as building upon Zachhuber's work. My work derives some plausibility from his case that an interest in the individual is already underway. At the same time, my argument, if successful, bolsters his case by showing that there are other spheres in which that interest is developing more or less contemporaneously and in connection with other theoretical commitments. Perhaps concern for providence is one contributing force in the development Zachhuber traces.

4 — Method

My method in this thesis has two major elements: argumentative and philosophical analysis on the one hand and close reading on the other. I read all three authors as having certain philosophical and theological commitments, some received from tradition and some possibly reached by their own reasoning, and that they want to hold these commitments together as coherently as possible. That is not necessarily to say that they are intentionally systematic. It *is* to say that they are seeking philosophical and theological coherence, and one can therefore draw out the presuppositions and arguments on which they depend for that coherence by examining how they argue locally and how they combine the various elements in their broader thought. In

[44] Johannes Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), especially chapter 9.

practice, that means that I look at the argumentative structure in individual passages, noting its philosophical and theological premises and attending to the wider context in which a given argument falls. I then compare relevant passages from across a given corpus. Often, it is possible to find a passage that supplies explicitly the presuppositions that are left implicit in another passage. And finally, where possible, I draw insights from the interlocutors with whom a thinker is dealing: in my chapter on Philoponus, for instance, it is relevant that he *could* have made certain argumentative moves against Proclus based on their shared assumptions about temporality but did *not*.

At points, I employ other, subordinate methods. Where it is relevant, I do more traditional exegetical work, drawing on historical context to elucidate a particular term or claim, especially where my writers are engaged with one another. There are, further, certain points at which I engage in my own philosophical argumentation, as when, in chapters three, four, and six, I evaluate the responses to the CFP that I have found in my writers. While these other methods *are* present, I use them almost exclusively as a supplement to the close reading and argumentative analysis.

5 — Outlining the argument

My thesis comprises seven chapters. This chapter is intended simply to lay the groundwork for the other six by (a) setting out the CFP, (b) explaining in what sense I think it can be found at work in my three Byzantine writers, (c) connecting it with the related Greek vocabulary in their corpora, and (d) overviewing the most relevant scholarship.

Chapter two and chapter three will form a single unit dealing with Proclus and, to a lesser extent, his predecessors in the “divine ideas tradition,” or “exemplarist tradition.” I note the use

to which figures such as Alcinous, Atticus, Philo, and Origen put the "divine ideas" in explaining divine productive foreknowledge. In doing so, I hope to show that something new and distinctive has begun by the time Proclus is writing: he attempting to explain how it is that the divine ideas can fill their role despite the demand that they somehow both be "about" their objects and be logically prior to their objects. They must meet the first demand to ground fore*knowledge* and the second to ground *fore*knowledge. I then turn to Proclus himself, beginning the case that he is interested in the CFP. I begin that argument in this chapter by making the claim that he can legitimately be included in the "divine ideas tradition." He, like others in that "tradition," holds that providential foreknowledge is possible because the divine in some sense possesses antecedents to its products, antecedents whose possessing somehow counts as knowledge about the eventual products.

In chapter three, I continue my case that Proclus is interested in the CFP. To do so, I first examine his participatory ontology, noting its use in enabling providence to trickle down to each and every thing. This frame, I argue, comes with two commitments that also happen to be elements in the CFP: a numerical distinction between a cause and its effect and the need for the cause to be in some sense "about" its effect (by anticipation) to serve its role in providence. In the second main section, I note that Proclus introduces a distinction between participated and unparticipated cause to maintain a "distance" between a cause and its effects. Proclus does so, I argue, because he wants to maintain that the cause has logical priority over its effects—and that precisely so that it can perform its providential function. Proclus, then, holds all the basic elements making up the CFP and, indeed, seems to have found a way to begin addressing it. Some challenges remain. In the third and final main section, I claim that, in his texts specifically on providence, Proclus apparently recognizes the possibility that he might need to explain where

the effect's "self" comes from. His tentative solutions are to say that the gods provide the basic unity that makes each thing a self and, with respect to material entities, that the One produces prime matter to function as each thing's basic individuality. Neither, I suggest, finally works; but *that* Proclus is thinking with the CFP in mind seems entirely plausible despite that fact.

In chapter four, I turn to Philoponus. My argument runs as follows: (a) Philoponus tries to maintain both that the divine idea has logical priority over the creature and that the divine has some referential power with respect to the creature. Philoponus must maintain both commitments so the divine ideas can serve their purpose: to explain how God knows what he will make. (b) Philoponus seems to think the connection between the divine idea and its product is something like a common intelligible content. Just as a sculptor knows the statue he will make by possessing a λόγος formally identical to that in the statue, so does God know what creature he will make by possessing its λόγος. (c) However, this solution would face problems were Philoponus to allow there existed things, like prime matter, that fell outside the intelligible: a God who foreknows his products by having concepts could not foreknow creatures as individuals because they would be constituted in part by a non-intelligible element (prime matter). One might expect Philoponus to reduce creatures to their forms as far as possible to enable his account to work. (d) That is in fact what we see: he makes several moves that, together, allow him to reduce creatures to their properties considered as structured bundles. (e) It is plausible that Philoponus recognizes the difficulty involved in productive foreknowledge with respect to individuals, and his apparent solution is to reduce, as far as possible, the gap between the concrete individual and its divine idea.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with the divine ideas and individuality in Dionysius. As with the previous thinkers, I begin by showing that his approach to divine providence depends on

the idea that God cares for things by containing them before they come to be. His talk about the "divine ideas" is another way to say that God possesses the things he will make in advance. At the same time, Dionysius insists that God cannot be connected to his creatures in any essential way. (I appeal especially to the *Divine Names*, Chapter VII to show this.) I then discuss how he attempts to meet both conceptual demands at once: by employing a distinction between God in himself and God in his providential activities (or, in other words, by his conflation of the first and second hypotheses of the Parmenides). God *both* genuinely precontains something of his creatures by possessing their properties in a higher degree and knows things in the very act of producing them. That argument is already sufficient to show that he is interested in the problem that concerns me in this thesis, but I set out to show that, plausibly, he was also interested in extending divine providence to individuals in a positive sense. To do so, I argue, based on several different key passages in his *Divine Names*, that Dionysius was likely philosophically committed to strict individualities in his ontology—knowingly so.

In the seventh, concluding chapter, I summarize the answers to the CFP that my thinkers give and then consider the potential upshots my argument might have for the scholarship not only on my thinkers individually but also on patristics and ancient philosophy scholarship on this period in general.

Chapter 2: Proclus and His Predecessors

1 — Introduction

This and the next chapter form a unit. In them, I make five main claims. First, Proclus follows the divine ideas tradition in holding that providence knows what it will make by possessing antecedents to the things it makes, and one can therefore include him in that tradition. Secondly, he goes further than previous thinkers in the tradition in wrestling with how the divine ideas secure divine creative foreknowledge. Thirdly, in the way he approaches the matter, he shows an interest in the CFP as inflected by his Platonic commitment to a participatory metaphysic. Fourthly, he is probably aware that the problem hinges on how he characterizes the "thisness," or bare subjecthood, that a thing must have to relate to other things. Finally, he proposes a solution, suggesting that the gods bestow a basic unity, or identity, on things even before their determination by Being.

In this chapter, I focus on establishing the first and second and setting the stage for the other three claims. My first task is to trawl the divine ideas tradition before Proclus for examples. In doing so, I hope to achieve two things: first, to illustrate the use to which the tradition before

Proclus puts the divine ideas in securing divine creative foreknowledge; secondly, to show that these earlier accounts face a common limitation: they assume that simply positing divine ideas is enough to achieve the correct relation between idea and creature. This claim is important for the next chapter as it allows me to show in what way Proclus represents a new stage in the tradition's development. It also prepares the ground for my chapters on Philoponus and Dionysius, lending plausibility to the idea that these thinkers might be intentionally working through how to relate divine ideas to creatures. After sampling the earlier divine ideas tradition, I turn to Proclus himself. I draw evidence from his *In Parmenidem* and *De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam* to show that, though it takes a slightly different form in him than in the previous thinkers, he does employ the same basic approach as they do in characterizing divine creative foreknowledge: God foreknows the things he makes by possessing their antecedents—that is, their divine ideas.

These are uncontentious claims, for which there is considerable precedent in the existing scholarship. My examples from the predecessors to Proclus have comes from other scholars, Daniel Tolan, Thorstein Tollefsen, and John Dillon in particular.[45] Further, the idea that, for Proclus, divine providence involves precontainment is rather benign, even if the exact sense in which Proclus thinks the gods and other causes "precontain" what they produce involves taking some interpretive stances.

If I offer anything new, it is in how I arrange these insights. In this chapter, that includes drawing attention to the ways that Proclus might be said to belong in the same, exemplarist vein as the previous figures and that, considered as a figure in that tradition, he represents a new

[45] John Dillon and Daniel J. Tolan, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," in *Christian Platonism: A History*, eds. Alexander J.B. Hampton and John Peter Kenney, 34–52 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 46–49; Daniel J. Tolan "The Impact of the Ὁμοούσιον on the Divine Ideas," in *Platonism and Christian Thought in Late Antiquity*, eds. Panagiotis G. Pavlos, Lars Fredrik Janby, Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, and Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, 129–150 (London: Routledge, 2019), Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 2.

phase or developmental stage. Fortunately, this chapter need not be terribly novel on its own. Its main purpose is to set up the next chapter, allowing me to make the more interesting claim that Proclus can be seen to construct his system with an eye to something akin to the CFP.

2 — Sampling the Predecessors

Certain beliefs about providence are commonplace by the time Proclus arrives on the scene. They are held even across traditions: Jew and Christian, Stoic and Platonist alike can agree that God—however one goes on to elaborate his character—oversees the cosmos providentially; that his providential care extends to everything, from the universal to the particular; that his providential activities include his making the world and, to various degrees, its contents; and, finally, that he knows what he is making before he makes it—that is, that he has creative foreknowledge.[46] Similarly widespread is an appeal to imagery drawn from human artisanship to characterize divine creative foreknowledge. For many thinkers in these traditions, God knows what he will make because he possesses something akin to an "idea," whether "inside" or "outside" the divine mind, upon which he patterns his product. Though these thinkers tend not to say as plainly *why* they rely on such an image, one can imagine the appeal: to the extent that the product resembles or is identical to the idea according to which God makes it, God already knows and possesses the product in knowing and possessing its idea.

I now turn to a few examples, starting with the (probably) second-century Platonist philosopher Alcinous. In his *Didaskalikos*, Alcinous says the cosmos is ordered by three principles: matter (ὕλη), the ideas, or paradigms (τὴν παραδειγματικήν), and the all-causal,

[46] There are obviously important differences as well. For instance, from fairly early on, Christian thinkers insist that God creates the world (and each thing in it) from nothing, whereas pagan Platonist thinkers tend to be more comfortable with talking as though there were something like matter as an object on which providence operates in making the world.

paternal God (τὴν τοῦ πατρός τε καὶ αἰτίου πάντων θεοῦ).[47] He explains the relationship between the forms and God thus:

> Form is, in relation to God, his thinking (νόησις); in relation to matter, measure (μέτρον); [and,] in relation to the sensible world, the paradigm … For, in general, all that we can conceptualize must come to be with reference to something whose model must preexist, just as if one thing were to be derived from another, as my image derives from me; and even if the model does not always subsist eternally, in any event, every artisan, having the model within himself, applies its structure to matter.[48]

Alcinous seems to picture God as an intellect (νοῦς) or an intellective entity (νοερόν) whose thoughts (νοήματα) or intellective activities (νοήσεις) serve as models for what he produces.[49] Some caution is due here. Strictly speaking, Alcinous never says God himself makes things according to these paradigms, leaving open the possibility that other agents, such as lesser gods, produce things according to them instead. Nor does he say that the forms serve to secure creative foreknowledge and, with it, providence. But both inferences seem plausible considering the artisanal analogy. For the artisan, it is the νόησις that secures productive knowledge. He knows what he will make because he possesses its form. So, too, does God know what he will make because he has its paradigm in mind. I shall consider one other passage as supporting evidence: "If the world," Alcinous says, "does not arise from mere chance, it is born not merely *from* (ἐκ) something but also *due to* (διά) something—and not only this but also *to resemble* (πρός)

[47] Alcinous. *Eseignement des doctrines de Platon*, ed. John Whittaker, trans. Pierre Louis (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990), IX, Whittaker 20 (163,11–14).

[48] Alcinous, *Enseignements de Platon*, IX, Whittaker 20–21 (163,14–163,23): Ἔστι δὲ ἡ ἰδέα ὡς μὲν πρὸς θεὸν νόησις αὐτοῦ, ὡς δὲ πρὸς ἡμᾶς νοητὸν πρῶτον, ὡς δὲ πρὸς τὴν ὕλην μέτρον, ὡς δὲ πρὸς τὸν αἰσθητὸν κόσμον παράδειγμα … Καθόλου γὰρ πᾶν τὸ γινόμενον κατ' ἐπίνοιαν πρός τι ὀφείλει γίνεσθαι, οὗ ὥσπερ εἰ [γὰρ] ἀπό τινός τι γένοιτο, ὡς ἀπ' ἐμοῦ ἡ ἐμὴ εἰκών, δεῖ τὸ παράδειγμα προϋποκεῖσθαι· εἴ τε καὶ μὴ εἴη ἔξω τὸ παράδειγμα, πάντῃ πάντως ἕκαστος ἐν αὑτῷ τὸ παράδειγμα ἴσχων τῶν τεχνιτῶν τὴν τούτου μορφὴν τῇ ὕλῃ περιτίθησιν. I owe this reference to Jones, "The Ideas as the Thoughts of God," 322–324.

[49] Alcinous, *Enseignements de Platon*, IX, Whittaker 21 (163,32–34): Εἴτε γὰρ νοῦς ὁ θεὸς ὑπάρχει εἴτε νοερόν, ἔστιν αὐτῷ νοήματα, καὶ ταῦτα αἰώνιά τε καὶ ἄτρεπτα, εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, εἰσὶν αἱ ἰδέαι. Note that Alcinous makes a distinction the demiurge, who is responsible for actually producing or ordering the cosmos, and the God on whose thoughts the world is modelled. Depending on how distinct the demiurge is from the highest God, Alcinous may be a slightly un-paradigmatic divine ideas thinker. I owe this point to John Dillon, "Logos and Trinity: Patterns of Platonist Influence on Early Christianity," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 25 (1989): 5.

something," then there must be forms on which the world is modelled.[50] He is assuming that, if the world is not to come about by mere chance, it must come about by some intent or to some end. Whatever it means for things to come about by something other than chance, it involves their having more than immanent causes. My suspicion is that he means the forms allow for providential oversight.[51] That suspicion is borne out by the fact that Alcinous thinks the forms are divine thoughts and that one can read his argument as abductive: he posits divine ideas to explain why there is a cosmic order rather than a mere churn, just one happenstance after another. Now, it need not follow, from the fact that the world must be ordered by providential ideas, that the divine must have ideas to know what he is doing; but it would be reasonable, not least because such a picture would involve only a slight twist on the account from the *Timaeus*.[52]

The connection between the divine ideas and providence is still clearer in Atticus (whom, sadly, we have mostly in fragments):

> Knowing that God is, through his relation to the forms, all things' "father and maker" and lord and guardian and, based on the works themselves, seeing that the craftsman first conceived (νοῆσαι) what he was intending to make and then afterward applied the conception's likeness to the things made (τῶν πραγμάτων), [Plato] concludes … that God's thoughts (νοήματα) are prior to things, models (παραδείγματα) for the things that come to be, bodiless and intelligible, always remaining identically the same, being first themselves and then, to others, a partial cause, making them what they are.[53]

[50] Alcinous, *Enseignments de Platon* IX, Whittaker 21 (163,38–41).

[51] I have been unable to find scholars who make this claim as such, though John Dillon *seems* to be pointing that direction by translating "διὰ τι" as "by the agency of something." See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 281; and he comes closer in Dillon and Tolan, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," 44.

[52] Certainly, that is how scholars such as John Dillon read him; so too Richard Sorabji, "Universals Transformed: The First Thousand Years after Plato," in *Universals, Concepts, and Qualities: New Essays on the Meaning of Predicates*, eds. P.F. Strawson and Arindam Chakrabarti, 105–125 (London: Routledge, 2006), 110. See also Alcinous, *Enseignements de Platon*, Whittaker 27 (167,13–15), where Alcinous says more directly that providence cares for creation. See also A.H. Armstrong's "The Background of the Doctrine 'That the Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect,'" in *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979).

[53] Quoted in John Dillon and Daniel J. Tolan, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," 45. The text is Atticus, *Atticos: Fragments*, ed. Édouard Des Places (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977), Fragment 9, Des Places 69: Νοήσας γὰρ θεὸν πρὸς αὐτὰ τῶν ἁπάντων 'πατέρα καὶ δημιουργὸν' καὶ δεσπότην καὶ κηδεμόνα καὶ γνωρίζων ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τὸν τεχνίτην πρότερον νοῆσαι τοῦθ' ὃ μέλλει δημιουργήσειν, εἶθ' οὕτω τῷ νοηθέντι κατόπιν ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων προσάγειν τὴν ὁμοιότητα, ταὐτὸν δή, τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ νοήματα πρεσβύτερα τῶν πραγμάτων, τὰ τῶν γενομένων

Atticus makes a more explicitly artisanal analogy, but the thought seems to be much the same as in Alcinous. Both agree (a) that God is either an intellect (νοῦς) or something that *has* an intellect (νοερόν), (b) that the ideas are his thoughts or concepts, and (c) that the ideas function as paradigms, enabling God to know what he will make.

I now turn to authors outside the pagan Platonic tradition, namely to those in the Jewish and Christian traditions. In these traditions, as in the Platonic, there is a tendency to resort to divine ideas or their equivalent to explain divine productive foreknowledge. Consider the following passage from Philo:

> For God, because he is God, understood in advance that a beautiful copy would not come into existence without a beautiful model (παράδειγμα) and that no sense-object would be without fault unless it was modeled on the archetypal and intelligible idea. Having resolved to create this, our visible world, he fashioned first the intelligible world, in order that in fashioning the physical world he might be able to use an immaterial and most godlike model, producing from this older model a younger copy that would contain within itself as many sensible classes of being as there were in intelligible ones in the original.[54]

Philo does not make clear, in this passage, why there must be an intelligible model for the sensible world. Given that the intelligible world apparently needs no such model, it may have to do with the sensible as such; perhaps the sensible, or material, *needs* such planning while the

παραδείγματα, ἀσώματα καὶ νοητά, 'κατὰ ταὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντ' ἀεί', μάλιστα μὲν καὶ πρώτως αὐτὰ ὄντα, παραίτια δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῦ εἶναι τοιαῦθ' ἕκασθ' οἷάπερ ἐστί…

[54] Philo of Alexandria, *De opificio mundi*. I use the following edition: *Philonis Alexandrini Opera Quae Supersunt. Volumen I: De opificio mundi. Legum allegoriarum (I-III). De Cherubim. De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini. Quod deterius potiori insidieari soleat*, ed. Leopold Cohn (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1896), I.4, Cohn 4,21–5,16: προλαβὼν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς, ἅτε θεὸς, ὅτι μίμημα καλὸν οὐκ ἄν ποτε γένοιτο δίχα καλοῦ παραδείγματος οὐδέ τι τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀνυπαίτιον, ὃ μὴ πρὸς ἀρχέτυπον καὶ νοητὴν ἰδέαν ἀπεικονίσθη, βουληθεὶς τὸν ὁρατὸν κόσμον τουτονὶ δημιουργῆσαι, προεξετύπου τὸν νοητόν, ἵνα χρώμενος ἀσωμάτῳ καὶ θεοειδεστάτῳ παραδείγματι τὸν σωματικὸν ἀπεργάσηται, πρεσβυτέρου νεώτερον ἀπεικόνισμα, τοσαῦτα περιέξοντα αἰσθητὰ γένη, ὅσαπερ ἐν ἐκείνῳ νοητά. My translation is taken from John Dillon and Daniel J. Tolan, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," 42. Their translation in turn is taken, with only slight modification, from the Loeb series: *Philo: Volume I: On the Creation, Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*, trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library 226 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929).

intelligible does not. On the other hand, it might simply be that Philo considers the κόσμος νοητός not to be a creation in the strict sense. Perhaps he considers it to be more like God's planning or "thinking up" what he will do before he does it. There is some reason to think so: not much later in the same text, Philo compares God's constructing the κόσμος νοητός to an architect's planning out a city before building it. Indeed, he suggests it may be nothing but God's thinking things out (λογισμός) in creating. But the fact remains that he uses language suggesting craft when he talks about the intelligible world: God "molds it beforehand" (προεξετύπου). Maren Niehoff reads this language as suggesting the λόγοι and κόσμος νοητός are creations or products, as does Harry Wolfson—though Wolfson seems to think it *first* existed from eternity with God and *then* was given separate, intelligible existence before being used as a model.[55] John Dillon and Daniel Tolan are ambiguous.[56] And David Bradshaw seems to downplay the artisanal language, preferring a reading on which the κόσμος νοητός is nothing but God viewed in relation to creation.[57] I myself suspect Philo is simply ambiguous on this point, at least in his language. Luckily, I need not settle the dispute or even take a side for my purposes. Whether it be a creation or a divine thought with a certain content, the intelligible model is supposed to serve a role like the mental form in the craftsman's case. Philo wants to say that, in some way, God's having a plan for creation entitles us to say that he knew what he was doing when he created.

[55] Harry A. Wolfson, "Extradeical and Intradeical Interpretations of Platonic Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, no. 1 (1961): 11; Maren Niehoff, "Philo's Role as a Platonist in Alexandria," *Études platoniciennes* 7 (2010): 35–62.

[56] John Dillon is ambiguous on this point. He says, on the one hand, that the ideas are, for Philo God's "creation" (159), but he immediately follows up the thought by talking simply of "the dependence of the Paradigm [i.e., the ideas as a collective] on God" (159) and equating the "sum-total of the Ideas in activity" with "the active element of God's creative thought" (159). Daniel Tolan is similarly ambiguous. In the space of two brief paragraphs, he claims that the Word, or Λόγος, in which the ideas are contained is "something created by God," "God's creative aspect," and "a second God." Tolan, "The Impact of the Ὁμοούσιον," 133.

[57] David Bradshaw, "The Vision of God in Philo of Alexandria," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (1998): 494–495.

Similar language can be found, finally, in the early Christian tradition. Following Tolan and Dillon, I wish to note one in particular: Origen. His (admittedly few) words on the matter are worth noting. He is among the earliest Christian thinkers to resort explicitly to divine ideas language in talking about providence, and he seems to take the model as unproblematic. Here is a representative passage from his *Commentary on John*.[58]

> For I think, just as a house and a ship are built or framed according to architects' plans, the principle of the house and of the ship having their respective plans (τύπους) and reasons (λόγους) in the craftsman; thusly, all things come about according to the reasons made clear in advance by God in his wisdom … And it must be said … that God made ensouled wisdom, entrusted to her the moulding and the forms for existence and matter from the plans which exist in her, but I stop short of saying if this is also their essences. Thus, therefore, it is not difficult to say that, roughly, the principle of beings is the Son of God (ἀρχὴν τῶν ὄντων εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ)...[59]

Origen shares the artisanal imagery found in the previous three writers, but he goes a step further. He says not only that God has ideas for the things he makes and that they come to be in accordance with those ideas but also that it is his possessing those plans (τύπους) and principles (λόγους) that allows one to characterize his creative act as *wise*, connecting it with the biblical idea God orders all things through Wisdom. Perhaps even more clearly than Alcinous, Atticus,

[58] Dillon and Tolan, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," 46–49; Tolan "The Impact of the Ὁμοούσιον," 129–150 (London: Routledge, 2019); Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, chapter 2.

[59] Origen, Band 4: Der Johanneskommentar, ed. Erwin Preuschen, vol. 4 of *Origenes Werke*. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftseller der ersten Jahrhunderte (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 1903), I.19.114–116, Preuschen 24,1–15: … ἵνα κατὰ τὴν σοφίαν καὶ τοὺς τύπους τοῦ συστήματος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ νοημάτων τὰ πάντα γίνηται. οἶμαι γάρ, ὥσπερ κατὰ τοὺς ἀρχιτεκτονικοὺς τύπους οἰκοδομεῖται ἢ τεκταίνεται οἰκία καὶ ναῦς, ἀρχὴν τῆς οἰκίας καὶ τῆς νεὼς ἐχόντων τοὺς ἐν τῷ τεχνίτῃ τύπους καὶ λόγους, οὕτω τὰ σύμπαντα γεγονέναι κατὰ τοὺς ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ προτρανωθέντας ὑπὸ θεοῦ τῶν ἐσομένων λόγους· »Πάντα γὰρ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἐποίησε.« καὶ λεκτέον ὅτι κτίσας, ἵν' οὕτως εἴπω, ἔμψυχον σοφίαν ὁ θεός, αὐτῇ ἐπέτρεψεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ τύπων τοῖς οὖσι καὶ τῇ ὕλῃ <παρασχεῖν καὶ> τὴν πλάσιν καὶ τὰ εἴδη, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐφίτημι εἰ καὶ τὰς οὐσίας. Οὐ χαλεπὸν μὲν οὖν παχύτερον εἰπεῖν ἀρχὴν τῶν ὄντων εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, λέγοντα· | »Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος, τὸ Α κὰι τὸ Ω, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος«. ἀναγκαῖον δὲ εἰδέναι ὅτι οὐ κατὰ πᾶν ὅ ὀνομάζεται ἀρχή ἐστιν αὐτός.
The translation is that of Tolan, "The Impact of the Ὁμοούσιον on the Divine Ideas," 135. Origen also sets himself elsewhere (Origen, *De Principiis*, ed. Paul Koetschau, vol. 5 of *Origenes Werke*. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftseller der ersten Jahrhunderte 22 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 1913), II.3.6, Koetschau 121–122.) against the Platonists and their commitment to ἰδέας. However, as Tolan points out, given that Origen *also* clearly holds to exemplarism after some fashion, the most natural reading would be that Origen is attacking a particular characterization of the divine ideas—as outside the divine mind, say—rather than the doctrine of exemplarism *simpliciter*. (Tolan 135–136) See similar discussion in Dillon and Tolan, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," 47.

and Philo, then, Origen connects the idea that God has ideas for things to his wisely arranging for and making the things he makes.

3 — Assessing the predecessing

There are obviously important differences among these thinkers: Origen, for instance, wants to avoid saying that the ideas or paradigms for things are "substances," for any such claim would come too close to the Platonic view, on which (according to one interpretation) the Ideas stand "outside" the Demiurge.[60] In contrast, at some points, Philo seems perfectly comfortable talking as though God had engaged in *two* creative acts, one whose product was intelligible and another whose product was the sensible world. (Though it is certainly also possible to read the κόσμος νοητός as the Λόγος and hence as merely God himself as seen in his creative activity.) The Platonists seem to be comfortable with the idea that God simply impresses his ideas upon matter, which acts as a (logically) preexistent object or patient for divine activity, while Origen and Philo seem not to be as inclined to allow matter that role. Indeed, Origen is pretty clearly set *against* doing so.[61]

But for all their disagreements, these thinkers have a notably broad agreement in other matters. They all put the divine ideas, or their own answer to the divine ideas, to similar use. They all think that God is, in some sense, intelligent. And they further think that God must in some sense think up or possess thought or ideas on which to model creatures. Finally, it is clear, at least in Atticus, Philo, and Origen, that these two commitments are connected. It is because God has such ideas that one can say that he knows what he will make even before he makes it. Both the Neoplatonists and theists like Philo and Origen have tradition-based reasons to hold such a view: the *Timaeus* obviously lends itself to such a view, with the Demiurge looking to the perfect models before making the world; and the Christian and Jewish scriptures similarly talk about God as a personal intelligence who ponders things in his wisdom or his λόγος before

[60] Origen, *De principiis* II.3.6, Koetschau 121–122. See also Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).
[61] Origen, *De principiis* II.1.4–II.3.7, Koetschau 110.

speaking them into existence. But beyond these commitments, there is the fact that such a picture makes *intuitive* sense—at least if one thinks that an artisan first comes up with an idea and then sets out to implement that idea by molding his matter accordingly.

More tentatively, I suggest that these thinkers are all, on an intuitive level, appealing to artistic imagery in an attempt to meet the difficulties involved in explaining how God knows what he will make without having to depend on his creatures to explain his knowledge in turn. All want to give God some priority over his products. Otherwise, in what sense does he provide for or oversee them as opposed to simply watch them unfold? Yet all want things to come about according to something like a *plan*. Merely mechanical production is not what they have in mind, so God must have the things he wants to make "in mind" somehow before he makes them. One can see how the artisanal imagery fits the bill at least on the surface: if the idea can "stand in for," or "proxy for," the creature whose idea it is, God has an object for his creative knowledge *without* having to presuppose the very creature that is supposed to be logically dependent upon his (knowingly) creating it.

Such a solution, unfortunately, is insufficient. Here, as in the more general case, the CFP rears its head. If it is to ground God's foreknowledge, the idea must presumably have some relation to the creature it corresponds to; otherwise, it is unclear in what way, in possessing and knowing the idea, God would possess and know that creature. One might suggest that the idea shares a content or character with the thing that will be made according to it, much as a model house shares certain structural characteristics with the house made according to it. But such an attempt falls short: the house made according to the model must always differ at *least* in the fact that it has its own numerical identity and existence, a certain "otherness" from the model

according to which it was made. In that respect, the model does not provide a "grip" on the house *except* insofar as it is the model *of* the house and hence has already entered into a relation with it.

These earlier thinkers do not seem to notice, much less concern themselves with, such problems. Notice that they put little emphasis on any transcendence that the models or divine ideas might have with respect to their copies. Their emphasis is on the opposite: they want to stress the way in which the ideas antecedently "refer" to their eventual products so that one can say truly that they are "about" their products and can serve as the proxy or grip by which God foreknows the things he will make.[62] All the figures cited seem to assume that, once one posits that God has the paradigms in mind, it naturally follows that God will be able to know and intend the things that he makes. At best, they might think that the divine ideas, by the mere fact that they are numerically distinct from and somehow prior to the things made according to them, can explain the divine productive knowledge and intention toward creatures. It is because these earlier thinkers do not delve into the difficulties involved that Proclus—and Philoponus and Dionysius after him—are such pivotal figures: these latter figures realize the need to work out the mechanics involved and, more particularly, the need to balance the ideas' referential use with their logical priority with respect to the corresponding products.

I wish to make one final clarification before proceeding. In this section, I have not been making the claim that Proclus is the first to think through how the divine ideas are to secure divine productive foreknowledge, the first to see the potential difficulties facing such an account, or even the first to propose his solution. Others may well have begun to think through these problems. What I am making is the weaker claim that Proclus is approaching the problem with

[62] That is *not* to say that they do not care about transcendence. Philo clearly does: see Reydams-Schils, "Philo Judaeus." So does Alcinous, who may well introduce the secondary and tertiary causes into his system in part in order to maintain the first God's νοήσεις as not having their being in producing order in the sensible.

more care than one sees in the previous thinkers; that should be sufficient for my purposes in this chapter.

4 — Proclus the Successor

I now turn to Proclus. I argue that he follows in the divine ideas tradition. I also begin laying the groundwork for the claim that, he, unlike his predecessors, has begun to think through how the divine ideas are supposed to play their role: I note that he, unlike them, posits a mechanism to explain how God, in possessing divine ideas amounts, knows the products he will make. He considers the mechanism to involve self-knowledge, the cause knowing itself *qua* cause and so knowing its effect in the bargain.

4.1 — Providence and God's knowing what he will make

In keeping with the Platonic tradition and Greek pagan religion as he sees them, Proclus assumes (a) that providence extends to all things and (b) that it produces and arranges the things to which it extends.[63] Further, like his predecessors from the previous section, Proclus holds that, in order to exercise providence over the universe, "God and the gods" must "know all things."[64]

[63] Proclus. *Commentaire sur le* Parménide *de Platon. Livre III.* Volume III, Part 2: *Texte et traduction*, eds. and trans. Concetta Luna and Alain-Philippe Segonds (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011), 183 (954,22–24) and 187 (957,17–25). Henceforth, I shall give simply the abbreviated title ("*In Parm*."), the book, and the volume/part and page number in the Luna/Segonds edition, followed by the Cousin edition page and line number. I generally follow the English found in Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, trans., *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*. Introduction and notes by John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

[64] *In Parm*. IV, Luna/Segonds IV/1, 204 (968,12): Τὸν δὲ θεὸν καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἀνάγκη πάντα γιγνώσκειν... This is hardly a new insight. Just to take one example of its acknowledgment in previous scholarship, consider Mark Edwards' mention of divine foreknowledge in a list of Platonic distinctives. "Platonism and Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Byzantine Platonists, 284–1453*, eds. Frederick Lauritzen and Sarah Klitenic Wear (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 2021), 32–47. See also *Elements of Theology*, Props. 121 and 124. These propositions do not, strictly, say that knowledge in the gods is necessary for their providential activity; however, they do apparently connect knowledge with providence. One can find the same connection implicit in Proclus' *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*: Proclus, *Dix problèmes concernant la providence*, vol. I of *Proclus: Trois études sur la providence*, ed. and trans. Daniel Isaac (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977), I, §4. I shall cite this text from this point on as "*TP*." Where more precision is helpful, I include also Isaac's page numbers and the section line numbers. I follow Jan Opsomer's and Carlos Steel's translation: Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, trans., *Proclus: Ten Problems*

Otherwise, as he puts it in his commentary on the *Parmenides*, their action would be the sort attributable to "an irrational being and not a divine cause," characterized by "necessity, not intelligent forethought."[65] One can find a similar commitment in his *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, where he describes the gods as having a knowledge that stands on a spectrum with but is superior to sense perception, discursive knowledge, and intellection—a knowledge whose defining characteristic is its providence.[66]

Further, Proclus takes it that, in order to have such knowledge, the gods must possess something akin to divine ideas: the antecedent principles that "answer to" the things that are made in accordance with them. These similarities can be seen in the following passage in the *In Parmenidem*:

> And if there is a single cause that orders all things, and … it knows itself—that is, knows itself as a cause—then it knows also the things [it causes], and will therefore also contain the things which it knows. Then, if Intellect is the cause, it will also regulate all things with respect to one another; for the demiurge … is one, and the whole [world] is multifarious, not all its parts possessing the same dignity and rank. Who is it that measures out their ranks, if not he who established them all? Who is it that has set each thing in its proper station … if not he who produced them? Who is it that has ordered them all in a single harmonious ordering, if not he who gave each … its existence and nature? If, then, he put them all in order and determined [their ranks], he was evidently

Concerning Providence. Ancient Commentators on Aristotle (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012).

[65] *In Parm*. III, Luna/Segonds III/2, 11 (790,28–33). See also *TP* I, §4.
In this way, he sets himself apart from Plotinus, for whom providence involves no knowledge of the objects of providence. Proclus would certainly agree with Plotinus that the knowledge is not discursive; it involves no "mulling," or "planning." But, because he wants to maintain genuine that the gods show genuine concern for the things under their care, he must allow a kind of knowledge to them. Riccardo Chiaradonna, "Plotinus' Account of Demiurgic Causation and Its Philosophical Background," *in Causation and Creation in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Brian D. Prince, 31–50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Enrico Peroli, "Divine Causality: Demiurge and Providence in Plotinus," in *Fate, Providence and Free Will: Philosophy and Religion in Dialogue in the Early Imperial Age*, eds. René Brouwer and Emmanuele Vimercati, 231–248. Ancient Philosophy & Religious 4 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020).

[66] And see, too, that this knowledge involves containing some antecedent, just as an intellect foreknows a thing by possessing its λόγος. *TP* III, §§13–14. See also Parmenides' *Platonic Theology*: Saffrey, H.D. and L.G. Westerink, *Proclus: Théologie platonicienne,* 6 vols. Collection des Universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–1997), I.XIV for the claim that the gods produce and contain all things in themselves and that this claim connects with their extending providence to all things. Immediately after, he says they comprehend knowledge of all things in themselves and that they produce the essence of all things from themselves. See, finally, *Platonic Theology* I.X, which says divine knowledge is of all things, even down to matter and things that "are not."

not ignorant of order and disorder in things, for otherwise his action would be that of an irrational being and not of a divine cause, characteristic of necessity, not of intelligent forethought. And if in thinking himself he knows himself, and in knowing himself knows also the essence that he possesses—that he is an immovable cause and the goal of desire for all things—he knows also those beings for which he is an object of desire, for his being an object of desire is not accidental, but his very essence.

Either, then, he will be ignorant of his … essence, or in knowing this he will also know that he is an object of desire, and in consequence will know that all things are relative to each other ... Knowing determinately the things that desire him, he knows their causes, since he is looking at himself and not at the things dependent on him. And if his knowledge of the causes of all things is not to be irrelevant, he necessarily determines the order of all things in accordance with these causes ... Is it because he is going to create all things that he thinks them, or does he create them all because he thinks them? But if he thinks all things because he is going to create them, his inner activity … will be inferior to that which goes outside himself; it will be for the sake of something other than himself that he knows beings, that is, he will know them for the sake of something inferior to him. And if this is absurd, he is the maker of all things by his knowledge of himself. And if this is true, he will make external things to resemble what he has in himself.[67]

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[67] *In Parm.* III, Luna/Segonds III/2, 10–12 (790,10–791,27): Εἰ δὴ ἔστιν αἴτιον ἕν τι πάντα συντάττον, εἰ μὲν ἀγνοοῦν ἑαυτό, πῶς οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἔσται πρὸ αὐτοῦ τὸ καὶ εἰδός ἑαυτὸ κἀκείνῳ τοῦ αἰτίῳ εἶναι αἴτιον ὑπάρχον; Ἔσται γὰρ τῶν ἐν τῷ παντὶ γιγνωσκόντων ἑαυτὰ χεῖρον τὸ ἀγνοοῦν ἑαυτό, ἀλλὰ καὶ κρεῖττον, ὅπερ ἀδύνατον· εἰ δὲ γιγνῶσκον ἑαυτό, δῆλον ὅτι εἰδὸς ἑαυτὸ αἴτιον ὂν οἶδε καὶ ὧν ἐστιν αἴτιον, ὥστε περιέξει κἀκεῖνα [τὰ] ἃ γιγνώσκει. Εἰ ἄρα νοῦς ἐστιν αἴτιος, {ἢ} καὶ συντάξει πάντα ἀλλήλοις· εἷς γὰρ δημιουργὸς τοῦ παντός, τὸ δὲ πᾶν ποικίλον ἐστί, καὶ οὐ τῆς αὐτῆς μετέχει τὰ μέρη πάντα καὶ ἀξίας καὶ τάξεως. Τίς <οὖν> ὁ τὴν ἀξίαν αὐτῶν μετρῶν ἢ ὁ ὑποστήσας αὐτά; Τίς δὲ ὁ τάξας ἕκαστον ὅπως ἔδει καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκείας ἕδρας, ὡδὶ μὲν ἥλιον, ὡδὶ δὲ σελήνην, ὡδὶ δὲ τὴν γῆν, ὡδὶ δὲ τὸν μέγαν οὐρανόν, ἢ ὁ παραγαγὼν αὐτά; Τίς δὲ ὁ συντάξας πάντα καὶ μίαν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἁρμονίαν ἀποτελέσας ἢ ὁ καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἑκάστοις καὶ τὴν φύσιν δούς; Εἰ τοίνυν καὶ ἔταξεν αὐτὸς πάντα καὶ τὴν ἀξίαν ἑκάστων ἀφώρισεν, οὔτε τὴν τάξιν δήπου τῶν πραγμάτων οὔτε τῆν ἀταξίαν ἠγνόηκε· τὸ γὰρ οὕτω ποιεῖν ἀλόγου φύσεως ἦν, καὶ οὐ θείας αἰτίας, καὶ ἀνάγκης ἴδιον, ἀλλ’ οὐ νοερᾶς προμηθείας· ἐπεὶ καὶ εἰ νοῶν ἑαυτὸν οἶδεν ἑαυτόν, εἰδὼς δὲ ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἣν ἔλαχεν οἶδεν ὅτι ἀκίνητον αἴτιόν ἐστι καὶ ἐφετὸν πᾶσιν, οἶδε καὶ οἷς ἐστιν ἐφετόν· οὐ γὰρ κατὰ συμβεβηκός ἐστιν ἐφετός, ἀλλὰ κατ’ οὐσίαν.

Ἢ οὖν ἀγνοήσει τί ἐστι κατ’ οὐσίαν ἢ τοῦτο γνώσεται καὶ ὅτι πάντα αὐτοῦ εφίεται καὶ τίνα τὰ πάντα· τῶν γὰρ πρός τι τὸ μὲν ἕτερον ὡρισμένως εἰδέναι, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον ἀορίστως οὐκ ἐπιστήμης ἴδιον καὶ πολλῷ μᾶλλον οὐδὲ νοήσεως· εἰδὼς δὲ ὡρισμένως τὰ ἐφιέμενα αὐτοῦ, τὰ αἴτια αὐτῶν οἶδεν ἅτε εἰς ἑαυτὸν βλέπων, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὰ μετ’ αὐτόν. Εἰ δὲ μὴ μάτην ἕξει τὰ αἴτια τῶν πάντων, ἀνάγκη δήπου κατ’ ἐκεῖνα πάντων ὁρίζειν τὴν τάξιν καὶ οὕτως εἶναι πάντων ἀκίνητον αἴτιον ὡς αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι πᾶσιν ἀφορίζοντα τὴν τάξιν. Πότερον οὖν διότι ἔμελλε ποιεῖν πάντα, ἐνόησεν αὐτά, ἢ διότι ἐνόει πάντα, διὰ τοῦτο ὑφίστησι πάντα; Ἀλλ’ εἰ διότι ἔμελλε ποιεῖν πάντα, νοοίη πάντα, τὴν ἔνδον ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν στροφὴν καταδεεστέραν ἕξει τῆς ἔξω προϊούσης καὶ ἄλλου ἕνεκα τὴν γνῶσιν ἕξει τῶν πάντων καὶ τῶν δευτέρων χάριν εἴσεται τὰ ὄντα· εἰ δὲ ταῦτα ἄτοπα, τῷ νοεῖν ἑαυτὸν ποιητὴς ἔσται πάντων. Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, τοῖς ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὰ ἔξω παραπλήσια ποιήσει· τοιαύτη γὰρ ἡ κατὰ φύσιν τῶν πραγμάτων τάξις, τῆς μὲν ἔνδον ἐνεργείας ἠρτῆσθαι τὴν ἔξω προϊοῦσαν, τῆς δὲ παντελοῦς τῶν ἰδεῶν μονάδος τὸν ὅλον κόσμον, τῶν δὲ διακεκριμένων μονάδων τὰ ἐνταῦθα μέρη τοῦ παντός.

This passage is actually about the demiurgic intellect, not the One or the henads per se. Nevertheless, it illustrates the general view Proclus takes when it comes to causes’ providential knowledge. See also *In Parm.* III, Luna/Segonds III/2, 22–23 (798,24–799,21).

The argument in this passage is a bit tangled, but one can draw four main claims from it. First, the "single cause that orders all things" knows itself as cause. Secondly, in knowing itself as cause, it knows, in some indirect fashion, the things that it produces. Thirdly, its thinking must logically precede the things produced. Fourthly, this precedence is to be explained by the fact that the cause possesses a certain character: "what [it] has in [itself]" before producing anything. That is, the manner in which the effect is antecedently present in the cause is as a character that the cause itself already possesses—though it should be noted this point will need qualification later.[68]

These claims all point to an implicit question raised by the other antique thinkers from the last chapter: how is it that providence knows what it is doing when it produces things? And Proclus answers the problem in much the same way as they: the cause must contain or possess something antecedently "answering to" the world, so that we can say that providence made the world "in accordance with" that something. It seems safe to conclude that Proclus, like his predecessors, is interested in showing how it is that the divine knows and intends to make certain things before it makes those same things—and hence before those things exist.[69]

Proclus also provides, in this passage, a way in which to characterize things' antecedents in the divine mind. It is here that he differs from his predecessors. In the passage above, it seems that what the cause knows in advance—what it precontains—is in fact its own character rather than some freestanding "ideas" or "thoughts," whose content differs from the cause itself. The character that comes to be present in the things that are produced so as to resemble it are present,

[68] One can find the language of knowledge by precontainment in *De providentia* §§ 63–65 as well. The term in question is "ἡ πρόληψις." For *De providentia*, I use the edition by Daniel Isaac. Proclus, *Providence, fatalité, liberté*, vol. 2 of *Proclus: Trois études sur la providence*, ed. and trans. Daniel Isaac (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1979).

[69] Further support can be drawn from the *TP*, where Proclus suggests that the antecedents in providence function much as the λόγοι in a productive intellect. See *TP* III, §§13–14.

beforehand, in the cause itself. Consequently, he can say that the cause knows the effect (in advance) by knowing itself.

There are two different ways in which such a claim can be understood based on the passage. One might think about the relationship as akin to that between a blueprint and a house. If the same pattern that is found in the house is also found in the blueprint, there is a sense in which one knew the house even before the blueprint was put to use in making it—namely by knowing the very same pattern that would end up being in the house. Alternatively, one might think that the cause contains its effect in the sense that its effect is, by necessity, nothing but the character found in the cause, diminished or reduced in intensity. One might say that the number "ten" in some sense contains, virtually, the numbers "nine," "eight," and so forth. In considering the number "ten" with various subtractions, one also has some idea what the number "eight" is. So, too, the cause might be said to "contain" the various possible ways in which its own fullness can be reduced. On either interpretation, cause *x* knows effect *y* not in the sense that there is a two-term relation, with *y* already existing as the second term, but in the sense that *x* knows the effect-types it can produce.[70]

There are good reasons to favor the second interpretation over the first: if Proclus were to admit that the character found in the cause and that found in the effect are the same, univocal, he would be forced to explain what makes the two the same. He would have to introduce, in other words, a further principle.[71] This is the so-called "Third Man Problem" from the *Parmenides*, and

[70] Indeed, one could say that, in a sense, Proclus has anticipated both Dionysius and, through him, Aquinas. They too say that God knows his creatures before making them in that as he knows the ways in which his own essence is imitable.

[71] Eric Perl, "The Presence of the Paradigm: Immanence and Transcendence in Plato's Theory of Forms," *Review of Metaphysics* 53, no. 2 (1999): 357–359, recognizes this problem. His article discusses Plato, not Proclus, but Perl is inclined to read Proclus as basically in agreement with Plato: Perl, *Theophany*, 22–24. Where Perl differs from me is in thinking that the cause knows itself as cause not because its effects, or their characters, are derivable from its own character but because its effects are nothing but the cause itself appearing *as* their constitutive character, or "whatnesses." I take it my own option is better because (a) it draws directly from passages like the one outlined above rather depends, as Perl's does, on a too-quick move from a contentious reading of Plato to a reading of Proclus and (b) Perl's option depends on the view that the whole of each participant is nothing but the appearing of

Proclus, in order to avoid it, specifically states that the character in the cause and the character in the effect are given the same name only in the sense that the latter is derived from the former.[72] I shall assume, going forward, that the latter is the more likely interpretation.

If it is correct that the latter interpretation better characterizes his account, then Proclus has both a very powerful way to explain how and in what sense the divine "foreknows" all things—for it is intuitive to think that the "plan" thus foreknown makes the resultant product rational in some sense—*and* a motive for showing how all things are in some manner contained in the highest causes—for providence can only intend the things that it precontains. To ensure that all things fall under its purview, therefore, it is necessary that providence have the precontained answer to each and every thing that it produces.

4.2 — An aside on an alternative interpretation

I must now make a brief aside in order to answer a potential interpretive challenge. Consider the following passage from the *In Parmenidem*:

> For in intelligising himself [God] knows all things whose cause he is, having more accurate knowledge than if someone had apportioned him knowledge [about those] objects … [F]or knowing each thing on the causal level is superior to all other … knowledge. So then, his knowledge does not involve any trouble, because in his case the knowing element remains in itself, and by knowing itself alone knows all other things … for he himself … produces all things, and in his bottomless thoughts he contains causally and in single simplicity the unified knowledge of all these things; it is as if someone had constructed a ship and embarked men on it of whom he himself was the creator, and as if he were to launch the ship on the sea and bring to bear certain winds upon it, … and thus

the cause—a view that fails to make sense of Proclus' talk of the recalcitrance and aptitude of the participant. Also relevant is an argument made by Lloyd Gerson, who claims that Proclus' solution to the "Third Man Problem" is to posit a "minor real distinction" between at least certain causes (namely the forms, or ideas) and their essences. The essence in the cause and in the effect are the same; the difference lies in the fact that, in the cause, the essence is undiluted by mixture with other characters and that the cause gives its essence to the effects. While Gerson is not thinking of the topic of foreknowledge, one *might* take his understanding of how certain causes contain and anticipate their effects could be applied to offer an alternative to my view. His view, however, seems to fall afoul the fact that Proclus specifically excludes the idea that causes genuinely share a property in common with their effects.

[72] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds IV/1, 66 (880,3–12) and 75–76 (886,3–13).

> he would send the ship off to be carried along, and he should be able to do all this by … conceiving of it; as if by the very fact of imagining [them], he were to produce the external existence of all the things which he possessed within himself in his imagination. It is obvious that he himself, then, would be the cause of all those things which would befall the ship by reason of the winds on the sea, and thus, by contemplating his own thought, he would both create and know what is external, not requiring any effort of attention towards them. So too … does the divine intellect, having all things' causes, simultaneously produce and know all things without leaving its own conning tower.[73]

This passage is similar to the previous one in several important respects: it suggests God knows things because he knows himself *qua* cause and, hence, knows his effects as well. In consequence, he has no need to turn his attention outward to know the things he produces. He knows them because he already knows his own thoughts, from which it follows that he knows the things whose character is in line with those thoughts. In all these respects, this passage supports the previous one, strengthening the case (a) that Proclus does think about divine pre-creation knowledge in terms akin to those found in the divine ideas tradition and (b) that this knowledge is to be understood as knowledge that comes not through external awareness but by

[73] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds IV/1, 189–190 (958,23–959,10): αὐτῷ γὰρ τῷ ἑαυτὸν νοεῖν οἶδε τὰ πάντα ὧν αἴτιός ἐστιν, ἀκριβεστέραν γνῶσιν ἔχων ἢ εἰ τὰς συστοίχους τοῖς γιγνωσομένοις αὐτῷ τις γνώσεις ἀπέμενε· τὸ γὰρ ἐξ αἰτίας γιγνώσκειν ἕκαστον πάσης κρατεῖ τῆς ἄλλης γνώσεως. Ἀπράγμων οὖν ἡ γνῶσις, διότι τὸ γιγνῶσκον ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένει καὶ ἑαυτὸ μόνον εἰδὸς οἶδε τὰ πάντα, καὶ οὔτε αἰσθήσεως οὔτε δόξης ἢ ἐπιστήμης δεῖται πρὸς τὴν τῶν αἰσθητῶν γνῶσιν· αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ταῦτα πάντα παράγων καὶ ταῖς ἀβύσσοις ἑαυτοῦ νοήσεσι κατ' αἰτίαν καὶ ἐν ἁπλότητι μιᾷ περιέχει πάντων τούτων τὴν ἡνωμένην γνῶσιν. Οἷον εἴ τις ναῦν κατασκευασάμενος ἐμβιβάσειεν ἀνθρώπους εἰς αὐτὴν ὧν ἐστιν αὐτὸς ὑποστάτης, καὶ τῇ θαλάττῃ τὴν τὴν ναῦν ἐπιδοίη καὶ ἀνέμους δή τινας παραγάγοι τὴν Αἰόλου τέχνην ἔχων, καὶ οὕτως ἀφείη φέρεσθαι τὴν ναῦν καὶ ταῦτα πάντα αὐτῷ τῷ ἐννοῆσαι ποιήσειεν· οἷον εἰ φαντασθεὶς οὕτω ταῦτα ὑποστήσειεν ἐκτὸς ἃ ἔνδοθεν ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ φανταστικῶς, δῆλον δή ὅτι πάντων τῶν περὶ τὴν ναῦν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνέμων ἐν τῇ θαλάττῃ συμπιπτόντων αὐτὸς ἔχει τὴν αἰτίαν, καὶ τὰς ἑαυτοῦ θεωρῶν ἐννοίας ἅμα καὶ ποιεῖ καὶ γιγνώσκει τὰ ἔξω μήδεν τῆς ἐπ' αὐτὰ δεόμενος ἐπιστροφῆς. Οὕτω γὰρ δὴ καὶ ἔτι μειζόνως καὶ ὁ θεῖος νοῦς ἔχων τὰς αἰτίας τῶν πάντων ἅμα καὶ ὑπίστησι πάντα καὶ θεωρεῖ, μὴ ἐξιστάμενος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ περιωτῆς.

It is unclear exactly how far this is to be taken to refer to providence in general and how much to the divine Intellect (νοῦς) in particular. In the previous passages, starting around Luna/Segonds IV/1, 177 (950,33), he makes it clear that he is attempting to maintain, against various opponents, that providence oversees and knows all things. He then turns from talking about providence's coming from the gods (τὴν … γνῶσιν τῶν θεῶν: *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds IV/1, 185 (956,12) to its coming simply from God (ὁ θεός: *In Parm.* Luna/Segonds IV/1, 187 (957,17).

Strictly speaking, this passage is dealing with Intellect rather than the higher hypostases (e.g. Being) or the henads. However, it has to do with the Intellect not *qua* Intellect but *qua* god—that is, insofar as it has the One present in it and, as a result, functions providentially. (*In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds IV/1, 204 (968,16–20)) This consideration, combined with the fact that Proclus refers to the Intellect as "God," or "the divine" in this passage, gives sufficient ground for thinking that the point being made is relevant to providential activity in general.

self-knowledge. Indeed, this passage is perhaps even clearer in drawing the parallels between divine providential knowledge and the analogy with a craftsman—albeit one whose mere thoughts are enough to bring his craft into being.

There are, however, some notable differences between this passage and the previous one, differences having to do with the manner in which the cause "knows itself *qua* cause." In the previous passage, the cause is said to precontain its effect in the sense that its character contains, in some virtual sense, various different "reductions." In this passage, in contrast, it seems that the cause knows itself because it stands in a relation to an actual effect. Much as the imaginer knows that he has produced a ship with sailors because his thoughts bring about corresponding realities, the cause knows itself because it knows that it has brought about something as its effect. (One can construe this knowledge either as inferential in some sense or as direct and by acquaintance. Proclus would no doubt favor the latter, but little hangs on my showing that he definitely intended one or the other.)

This account seems to stand in tension with that in the previous passage; indeed, it may seem to undermine the latter. For the main reason for saying that the cause knows its effects by knowing itself is that one can thereby explain how the cause knows and brings about its effects. To serve that function, the "divine idea" must have explanatory priority over its effects; but if one makes that self-knowledge *relative* to the effect, it no longer helps in explaining the effect. Consider: *qua* substance, a man may have priority over his offspring, but *qua* father, he is correlative with and so does not explain the offspring. If anything, they explain one another, the father being father only insofar as the offspring is offspring.

One might attempt to reconcile this passage with the previous one, claiming that, as a mere illustration and not a claim in its own right, it does not represent a genuine alternative view

with respect to causal knowledge. There are two reasons, however, to take this passage at face value. First, it is not an isolated instance. There are other passages that talk about causal knowledge in the same terms, minus the illustrative flair. Take the following for instance:

> But if God, in knowing himself to be the cause of those things subsequent to him, knows also those things of which he is the cause, then we must take our stand also against Aristotle, and show how Intellect according to him, in knowing itself to be the object of desire for all things, also knows all things such as strive towards it, and in knowing itself definitively also knows all things that strive towards it definitively. For there is no way in which someone who knows definitely one side of a relation cannot also know the other side. He also, then, will have a definite knowledge of all things, inasmuch as he knows himself definitely.[74]

In this passage, it is made clear that a cause knows its effect by knowing that it stands in a definite relation to that effect. Since a relation involves two terms, this causal knowledge must, it seems, presuppose the effect. And there are other passages like it as well.[75]

Further, it is difficult to rule out or reconcile this passage because Proclus has obvious reasons to maintain *both* that the cause knows its effect by knowing its own character, prior to all relation, and that it knows its effect by knowing its own status as a cause, i.e. in relation to an effect. On the one hand, to say that *x* knows *y* because it already possesses the character or blueprint according to which *y* will be made allows Proclus to lean strongly into the craftsman model. Just as the model in the craftsman's mind is logically prior to and hence can explain the thing made in accordance with it, so too does the divine essence *qua* imitable under a certain

[74] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds IV/1, 198 (964,19–31): Εἰ δὲ δὴ γιγνώσκων ὁ θεὸς ἑαυτὸν αἴτιον ὄντα τῶν μετ’ αὐτὸν γιγνώσκει καὶ ὧν αἴτιός ἐστιν, ἐντεῦθεν στησόμεθα καὶ πρὸς Ἀριστοτέλην καὶ δείξομεν ὅπως ὁ κατ’ αὐτὸν νοῦς ἑαυτὸν εἰδὼς ὄντα πᾶσιν ὀρεκτὸν οἶδε καὶ τὰ πάντα ὅσα ὀρέγεται αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἑαυτὸν ὡρισμένως εἰδὼς οἶδε καὶ τὰ ορεγόμενα αὐτοῦ ὡρισμένως· γῶν γὰρ πρός τι θάτερον ὡρισμένως εἰδότα θάτερον μὴ εἰδέναι ὡρισμένως ἀμήχανον· πάντων γὰρ καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἕξει εὴν εἴδησιν ὡρισμένην ἑαυτὸν ὡρισμένως εἰδώς. Οὐκ ἄρα ἀφαιρετέον τοῦ νοῦ τῆν πάντων γνῶσιν ἔχοντος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνῶσιν ἣν ἔχων οἶδε καῖ ὅτι ὀρεκτός ἐστιν πᾶσιν.

[75] For instance, *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds IV/1, 152 (934,34–38): Ἐκ δὲ τῆς ἕκτης, ὅτι νοητικὴ τῶν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς οὐ συστοίχως, ἀλλὰ κατ’ αἰτίαν· ἑαυτὴν γὰρ νοοῦσα παράδειγμα οὖσαν, οἶδε καὶ τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῆς δευτέρως καὶ τῷ ἑαυτὴν αἰτίαν οὖσαν εἰδέναι.

Here, again, the cause (in this case the form) seems to know its effect because it knows that it is in fact engaged in a certain activity *in relation* to its effect.

aspect come logically prior to and hence explain this or that thing modelled on it. The difficulty with such a view is whether it explains how the blueprint "hooks up to," as it were, the product that is in fact produced—not merely *qua* that character but *qua* different from or other to the blueprint. On the other hand, to say that *x* knows *y* because *x* stands in a certain causal relationship to it already would allow Proclus to say that the cause knows not only that it *can* produce things according to a certain type but that it in fact *does* so—and that it knows them not merely under a certain aspect, say *qua* this or that kind but *qua* particular, numerically distinct effect.

I am not going to attempt to resolve this tension here. If anything, the fact that such a tension exists in Proclus supports my thesis. For one thing, it shows that Proclus is aware that providence somehow hangs on the way in which he construes the connection—if any—between the antecedent knowledge by which providence functions and the things provided for thereby. While he is happy to use language suggesting that a cause knows its effects by knowing its own character *prior* to the effects—by knowing itself as possessing primitively the character it bestows—Proclus is nonetheless aware that there are reasons to attempt to incorporate the relative into providence. As will become clear in my next chapter, he arguably attempts to maintain *both* providential relativity and unrelatedness by introducing the distinction between participated and unparticipated causes. Secondly, the vacillation shows that Proclus is attempting to hold two different thoughts in tension, one that relation is essential to providential knowledge, the other that providential knowledge *cannot* stand in relation to what comes after it lest it cease to be transcendent.

Whichever way one interprets Proclus on this point, the main point stands: he thinks that providence, in order to produce things, must know them "in advance." And he thinks that, in

order to know things in advance, providence must have some antecedents to the things it makes. Finally, it possesses those antecedents insofar as it already possesses within itself their causes. All this is enough, I think, to show that Proclus can be seen as having something akin to a "divine ideas tradition" picture in mind for providence and creative foreknowledge.

Chapter 3: Proclus’ solution

1 — Introduction

Having argued, in the previous chapter, that Proclus belongs to the divine ideas tradition, I am now in a position to make my next claims: that, in his attempt to show exactly *how* the divine ideas secure divine foreknowledge, Proclus shows himself to be interested in something akin to the CFP; and that he is likely aware that his solution to that problem hinges on how he characterizes the “thisness” that all things must have in order to stand in relation to other things in the universe (τὸ πᾶν). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I make a final claim, namely that Proclus proposes a tentative solution to the CFP: the gods assign each thing even its very selfhood, enabling it to take up its place in the universe.

This argument comprises three main moves, corresponding to three main sections. In the first section, I claim that Proclus is interested in the CFP. In making that claim I examine the participatory framework according to which, for Proclus, the universe is structured. I suggest that this frame is intended, among other things, to ensure that all things have antecedents in their providential causes, enabling the causes to oversee the things under their care. At the same time, I suggest, Proclus wants to avoid the implication that, in precontaining the effects, providence is also antecedently related to those effects. It is in order to strike this balance that he posits the distinction between “participated” causes, which relate directly to and hence “belong to” their effects, and “unparticipated” causes, which remain transcendent and hence secure the needed logical priority over their (indirect) effects. I end the section by claiming that, if one reads the problem with immanence–transcendence while keeping in mind the fact that Proclus wants to say the divine foreknows all things by knowing itself, it becomes at least plausible that Proclus is actually interested in the CFP.

In the second section, I note that this solution, so far, falls short. Things' thisness—the sheer, numerical otherness by which they are distinct from their causes and from one another—remains unexplained. But Proclus is, I take it, aware that his system has such a shortcoming: he wants to say that providence extends to all things even in this respect, arranging them and putting them in their rank and file. He vacillates between two tentative solutions. On the one, the gods, or henads, bestow on things the basic unity enabling them to receive further determinations, stand in participation relations, and so forth. This solution remains within the general participatory frame that Proclus prefers. His second solution, on the other hand, departs from the participatory frame: "prime matter," the basic, unitary stuff that receives all further determinations and functions as the thisness for at least material things, is simply produced directly by the One, who knows and intends nothing at all. In the third and shortest section, I consider whether either solution works. I argue that they do not.

Since this chapter contributes to the scholarship on Proclus mainly by drawing new connections among various topics in Proclus—immanence and transcendence, foreknowledge, participation, prime matter, and even individuality—so as to draw attention to his concern with the CFP, it inevitably covers territory that previous scholars have thoroughly explored. That Proclus attempts to reconcile immanence and transcendence and that their reconciliation matters for providence has been well established since E.R. Dodds and L.J. Rosán wrote their important works on Proclus.[76] Much the same can be said for my claims that Proclus wants to extend providence to the individual, that the individuality at stake is something more like mere, basic subjecthood than atomicity or particularity, and that the point where universal providence and the individual meet is therefore crucially important for Proclus: Edward Butler makes more or less

[76] E.R. Dodds, ed. and trans., *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) and Rosán. See also David C. Schindler, "What's the Difference? The Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context," *Saint Anselm Journal* 3, no. 1 (2005): 1–27.

these claims across numerous articles.[77] Finally, that the gods know things through their unity and that this knowledge is what enables them to arrange things as individual and universal or participated and participant has received treatment from Carlos Steel, Jan Opsomer, and Jonathan Greig. In these and other areas, I build on (and, in broad strokes, agree with) previous scholars.

In arranging these elements in a new way, I contribute to current scholarship in four main ways. I am, to my knowledge, the first scholar to suggest that Proclus develops and clarifies difficulties latent in the divine ideas tradition.[78] I am also the first to explore thoroughly the connection between Proclus' idea that there must be antecedents in the divine cause in order for providence to know its effects and his desire to maintain that the cause must be both transcendent and immanent with respect to its effects.[79] Previous scholars have sometimes talked as though Proclus posits the participated–unparticipated distinction to explain how a cause can be present to spatially and temporally discontinuous participants.[80] This tendency obscures the fact that it is primarily logical priority and simultaneity that are at issue. I attempt to bring that issue more clearly to the surface. I am also, to my knowledge, the first to suggest that Proclus is aware that participation leaves an unexplained "remainder," which gap he attempts to fill by saying that the

[77] See especially "The Gods and Being in Proclus," 93–114 and "Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold," 83–103. Jonathan Greig makes the same point if only briefly: Jonathan Greig, "Proclus' Reception in Maximus the Confessor, Mediated through John Philoponus and Dionysius the Ps.-Areopagite," in *Reading Proclus and the Book of Causes, Volume 3: On Causes and the Noetic Triad*, ed. Dragos Calma, 117–167 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 132. So does Carlos Steel: "Providence and Evil," in *All from One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin, 240–257 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also, however, Marije Martijn and Lloyd P. Gerson, "Proclus' System," in *All from One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin, 98–121 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 64. Martijn and Gerson suggest that it is at the point where the immanent and transcendent meet that the system flounders.
[78] Armstrong, A.H. "The Background of the Doctrine 'That the Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect.'" In *Plotinian and Christian Studies*. London: Variorum Reprints, 1979; Lloyd Gerson, "Why the Intelligibles Are Not Outside the Intellect," in *Platonism and Its Legacy: Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, edited by John F. Finamore and Tomáš Nejeschleba, 1–11 (Bream, Lydney: The Prometheus Trust, 2019).
[79] It is talked about by other scholars, though. See, for instance, Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, "Introduction," in Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, trans., *Proclus: Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, 18–19.
[80] For instance, see Pieter d'Hoine, "Platonic Forms and the Triad of Being, Life, and Intellect," in *All from One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin, 98–121 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 108.

gods bestow a pre-essential unity on things.[81] Fourthly, in connecting divine creative foreknowledge with individuality, I am treating a topic that has seen only brief treatment before: A.C. Lloyd spends a few pages considering the difficulty involved; but my argument is more thorough and, again, connects it with a desire to resolve something like the CFP in a way that Lloyd does not.[82]

Before moving on to the argument proper, one final clarification is called for. Given my dependence on Butler, my final claim—that Proclus offers a solution to the CFP involving the gods' bestowing on things the unity that their determinations presuppose—should not be understood as claiming novelty as an explanation of how the gods bestow unity on things. The novelty of the claim instead consists in the suggestion that Proclus posits the henadic bestowal of unity as a solution to the CFP and in the drawing out of the problem that he *still* faces on this account, considering that even the bestowal of unity on a thing by the gods seems to presuppose a subject capable of receiving it.

2 — Proclus likely has the CFP in mind

In this section, I attempt to make plausible the idea that Proclus, being concerned with the relation between transcendence and immanence in providence *and* with showing how providence has ideas by which it directs all things, is *also* concerned with the CFP. The first step will be to

[81] Ysabel de Andia does at least acknowledge an adjacent problem in her work on Dionysius: the problem is whether the aptitude or receptivity displayed by effects in relation to their causes comes before or after their causes' being present to them. She claims that Proclus manages to overcome the problem, at least with respect to *divine* participation, by making the receptivity and the granting instantaneous: "Proclus résout le problème difficile," she says, "de savoir si c'est l'aptitude à recevoir les puissances divines qui rend possible leur presence ou si c'est par leur presence et leur communication que celles-ci donnent aux êtres l'aptitude à les recevoir, en disant que ces deux operations sont simultanées." Ysabel de Andia, *L'henosis*, 87. The problem with this resolution is that it neglects the fact that the cause is supposed to be *prior*, at least logically, to the thing it explains: if it is supposed to explain not only the character it grants to its recipient but the recipient's very receptivity, then it does not help to say that the two are logically simultaneous. Then one is left without a clear antecedent to the receptivity in the cause.
[82] Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, 159–163.

examine how Proclus attempts to bring all things under providential oversight, which he attempts to accomplish by appealing to the Platonic hierarchy. Because the universe comprises different ranks, each participating in the previous and giving rise to the next by providing its own implicit content, Proclus can ultimately say that *all* things, to the extent that they are precontained in their cause, are known by the first, providential causes. Given that providence can, for Proclus, be understood along artisanal lines, it is plausible to think that, in attempting both to maintain *both* that the cause somehow "refers" to its effect by precontaining it *and* that the cause, nonetheless, is not related to and so does *not* stand in a "referring" or "intending" relationship with its object, Proclus has in mind something akin to the CFP. That conclusion, in turn, has implications for how Proclus is to be read in relation to the previous divine ideas tradition and the thinkers historically downstream from him.

2.1 — Precontainment

For Proclus, the world is a system comprising multiple levels, each linked with the one above it and the one below it. "Providence," in this system, is the manner in which each thing, except for those on the bottommost rung (particulars), provides for the ones below it. A thing provides for those below it by serving as their constitutive cause, or the principle that makes them what they are. It does so by bestowing its own character on them so that they have a share in, or "participate in," it. And it is by making all things what they are through this relationship that the highest principle(s) can be said to care for and arrange the world as a whole and all the things in it. In addition, as mentioned in the previous section, it is by containing all things that the highest causes, providence in the proper sense, can be said to "know" its effects "before" it brings them about.

To understand how Proclus sees providence as extending to things, one must understand how participation in general works. We shall therefore begin by discussing the system as a whole—how participation knits it together and ensures providence in general.

For ease, I shall leave off the reason for the different additions to the Platonic universe. I shall only give an overview, noting the relationships among the different elements. Only later will I return to *why* Proclus might have felt to posit so many different entities.

2.1.1 — *Participation: an overview*

Proclus makes numerous claims about how participation works, some argued for and some inherited along with his Platonic framework. In general, these points seem intended to explain two things: what accounts for the common character found in sensible individuals (e.g., how Alexander the Great and Louis XIV are both human despite their being different in number and various characteristics) and how the world came to be arranged in the hierarchy found in the Porphyrian tree (e.g., how it is that humans are in some sense "higher" than irrational animals, which are higher than plants, and so forth).

First, each thing—except the highest, the One—receives its character from some other thing, which serves as its principle.[83] The initial reason for positing such principles is the need to explain how different sensible individuals can have the same character. For instance, the fact that Alexander the Great and Louis XIV are both human is explained by the fact that they both have a share in, or participate in, "the human," or "humanity." It is this principle that makes them what they are, and their humanity is thus derivative, coming not from themselves but from the principle.

[83] Properly speaking, the One is not a *thing* at all, but I refer to it as such here given the need to accommodate human language.

Secondly, the principle "bestows" its own character on its effects.[84] Thus, thirdly, such a cause must already possess or "contain" the character that it bestows on its effect;[85] and fourthly, therefore, the cause cannot produce anything greater than or equal to itself. It follows that the effect cannot be "more than" the cause.[86]

Fifthly, the cause is understood to be distinct from its effects and from the participant upon which the effect is bestowed.[87] Since Proclus does not make this point as directly as the others, I shall bring to bear some additional texts to support it. In Proposition 27 in his *Elements*, Proclus makes it clear that the product or participant stands "as another thing alongside" its producer.[88] Similarly, in Proposition 30, he says that "if it [i.e. the product] be other than [the producer], it is distinguished from it and separate."[89] Finally, as I shall discuss at greater length a little later in this chapter, each principle can only produce its effect in a (sensible) participant if that participant is "suited for" and "cooperative with" it, suggesting that there is a real distinction and relation between principle/cause and effect/participant. There would presumably be no need to talk of the "fitness" of a participant or its cooperation if it had no identity except precisely *as* the character bestowed by its cause.

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[84] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, ed. and trans. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), Prop. 18. I shall cite propositions from Dodds' edition simply as "*ET*," followed by the proposition. I tend to follow Dodds' translation, generally making only minor changes. Where key changes are made, I note them.

[85] *ET* Prop. 18.

[86] *ET* Prop. 7: Πᾶν τὸ παρακτικὸν ἄλλου ἐστι τῆς παραγομένου φύσεως. Later in the same proposition, he provides the following addition: "Again, it is impossible that the producer ever be inferior [to its product]." He goes a little further, saying that the cause must be greater than its effect, for a key discussion of which see A.C. Lloyd, "The Principle That the Cause is Greater than Its Effect," *Phronesis* 21, no. 2 (1976): 146–156.

[87] See *ET* Prop. 41: καὶ ἑαυτοῦ συνεκτικὸν ὑπάρχον, καὶ οὕτως ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὄν, ὡς ἐν αἰτίῳ τὸ αἰτιατόν, οὐ γαρ ὡς ἐν τόπῳ, οὐδὲ ὡς ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ, καὶ γὰρ ὁ τόπος τοῦ ἐν τόπῳ ἕτερος, καὶ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου τὸ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ὄν. Here, there is pretty clearly a distinction made between the participated cause and its participant.

[88] *ET* Prop. 27: καὶ τὸ παραγόμενον ἄλλο παρ' αὐτό ἐστιν. I take it this should also settle the disagreement in the literature over whether a participated form is merely the unparticipated form seen from a certain perspective (i.e., from a lower ontological rung), merely the element within the unparticipated forms that *is* participable, or a genuinely numerically distinct entity produced by the unparticipated form. (Gerson, "Proclus and the Third Man," §§11–16 represents the second view; Radek represents the first.) Proclus seems to fall in the lattermost camp. The thing produced by a constitutive cause is something completely new and numerically distinct. See also Prop. 30.

[89] *ET* Prop. 30: εἰ γὰρ ἄλλο, διακέκριται καὶ ἔστι χωρίς.

In addition to the difference in level between sensible particulars and principles, there is stratification *within* each group. Proclus notices that the sensible world is not "flat." It has a certain structure, with some things belonging to narrower, more specific, and loftier categories than others. Animals are in some sense "higher" than plants, having a trait not present in their vegetable companions—namely, animacy. Humans, in turn, stand out among other animals for their reason. Yet in each case, there is not a clean break with the previous "rung." Each level presupposes and is included within the former. Humans are still animals, having their animacy in common with gazelles and okapi. They are also still living things, sharing their life with both non-rational animals and plants. One never finds an animal that is not also a living thing, though the reverse is not true; there are many living things that are not animals.[90]

It is perhaps for this reason that Proclus holds that even the principles from which sensible particulars derive their being in turn derive from other principles. There is an internal arrangement among them, with some providing for others. This brings us to the sixth point: principles are ranked according to their scope; the higher the principle is, the more universal are its effects.[91] Proclus will see the fact that the category "animal" contains the category "rational animal," or "human," as signifying that the principle "Life" is superior to the principle "Reason." This should not be understood as meaning that the superior principle is superior *merely* because its participants or effects are greater in number (though that will also be the case for Proclus). It is rather that some categories in the sensible realm seem to presuppose one another. Again, one can find many things that have a share in Life but not in Reason, but there never appears a particular that has a share in Reason but not in Life. It is therefore also true that there are liable to

[90] *ET* Prop. 57.
[91] *ET* Prop. 25; also Prop. 60.

be more animals than there are rational animals, but the mere numbers are less the point than the fact that the latter category presupposes the former.

Along with this rule come some related but distinct ones, the most notable being that higher principles always go before and cooperate with lower principles. The lower principles depend upon their superiors to bring about their own effects. Life's activity presupposes Being's activity, which is why one never finds living things that are not also beings.[92]

This insight lets us circle back around to what led to the point in the first place. The more complex a thing is, the more principles are involved in its making: Louis XIV receives his rational nature from Reason, his animacy from Soul, his living from Life, his bare existence from Being, and so forth. (It also follows that the "lowest" rungs in the hierarchy reflect the highest in being the simplest: stones, receiving their character from Being and the One only, are simpler than plants, animals, and humans.[93])

Seventh, Proclus holds that superior principles provide for inferior principles in a way analogous to but not the same as the way principles in general provide for their participants. Even the principle "Humanity," if it is to exist, must participate in Being. And *all* things, whether the daffadowndilly in the vase by the window, the Life in which it shares, or even Being, must be have a share in unity. Unity alone, as that which makes each thing *a* thing in the first place, is without any principle superior to it.

It should be noted that a complication arises when Proclus attempts to clarify in what sense the highest cause and principle, the One, "produces" and "contains" its effects. Proclus sometimes talks as though the One cannot contain the things it causes; and his usual reasoning for this denial seems to be that, because its single character is unqualified unity, the One must

[92] *ET* Prop. 57, Corollary.
[93] *ET* Prop. 58.

also be perfectly simple. As perfectly simple, it cannot contain, even virtually, any multiplicity within itself. That means that it cannot, for instance, have any activities (ενέργειαι), precluding any relation with its effects.[94] Perhaps more important for our purposes, it cannot possess any even notional "subsections" or "regions" that might serve as the exemplar for the sundry characters that arise among its effects. I simply note that, *despite* this apparent snag in his otherwise pristine system, Proclus holds that the One *is* still in some sense a cause and therefore must in some sense contain its effects. Taking the One in its causal aspect, therefore, the participatory system I have been describing in this section holds all the way from the One to the lowest participants in its unity.

2.1.2 — *The roles in the hierarchy*

There are, roughly speaking, four "roles" in the hierarchy. First, there are sensible particulars, which have no character on their own. They take their characters, including what they are (e.g. a human, a dog, a sunflower), from the principles in which they participate. Sensible particulars or participants are the everyday objects with which we humans are familiar.

Second, there are the principles known as "monads." They are the principles that first possess a given character, which they then bestow on all their participants. Proclus introduces them in Proposition 21 in his *Elements*:

> *Every order has its beginning in a monad and proceeds to a manifold coordinate therewith; and the manifold in any order may be carried back to a single monad*.
>
> Since, then, in every order there is some common element, a continuity and identity thanks to which some things are said to be coordinate and others not, it is apparent that the identical element is derived, by the whole order, from a single originative principle. Thus, in each order or causal chain, there exists a single monad prior to the manifold,

[94] It does, however, still somehow manage to "produce" the henads and "Limit" and "Infinitude." How it does so is unclear. See Greig, *The First Principle*, "Chapter 5" and "Conclusion," especially 311.

> which determines for that order's members their unique relation to one another and to the whole…[95]

Perhaps the most familiar example is "Man," which serves as the monad that ultimately explains the common element, "humanity," in all humans.

Proclus adds two other roles: self-complete substances and irradiations from those substances. Proclus introduces both in *Elements* Proposition 64:

> *Every original monad gives rise to two series, one comprising substances complete in themselves, the other comprising irradiations which have their substantiality in something other than themselves.*
>
> For if the outgoing proceeds by a declension through terms akin to the constitutive causes, from the wholly perfect must arise things complete in their kind, and by these latter the things incomplete must be mediated in due sequence: so that there will be on order of substances complete in themselves, and another of incomplete substances. The latter are upon such a level that they belong to their participants: for being incomplete they require a substrate for their existence. The former make the participants belong to them: for being complete they fill the participants with themselves and establish them in themselves, and for their substantial existence they have no need of inferior beings. Accordingly those substances which are complete in themselves, which by their discrimination into a manifold they fall short of their original monad, are yet in some wise assimilated to it by their self-complete existence; whereas the incomplete not only as existing in another fall away from the monad which exists in itself, but also as incomplete from the all-completing monad…
>
> From this it is apparent that of the henads some proceed self-complete from the One, while others are irradiated states of unity; and of the intelligences come are self-complete substances, while others are intellectual perfections; and of souls some belong to themselves while others belong to ensouled bodies, as being but phantasms of souls. And so not every unity is a god, but only the self-complete henad; not every intellectual property is an intelligence, but only the existential; not every irradiation of Soul is a soul, but there are also reflections of souls.[96]

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[95] *ET* Prop. 21: Πᾶσα τάξις ἀπὸ μονάδος ἀρχομένη πρόεισιν εἰς πλῆθος τῇ μονάδι σύστοιχον, καὶ πάσης τάξεως τὸ πλῆθος εἰς μίαν ἀνάγεται μονάδα. … ἐπεὶ οὖν καθ' ἑκάστην τάξιν ἐστί τις καὶ κοινωνία καὶ συνέχεια καὶ ταυτότης, δι' ἣν καὶ τάδε μὲν ὁμοταγῆ λέγεται, δῆλον ὡς ἀπὸ μιᾶς ἀρχῆς ἥκει πάσῃ τῇ τάξει τὸ ταὐτὸν. ἔστιν ἄρα μονάς μία πρὸ τοῦ πλήθους καθ' ἑκάστην τάξιν καὶ εἱρμὸν τὸν ἕνα λόγον τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ τεταγμένοις παρεχομένη πρός τε ἄλληλα καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον.

[96] *ET* Prop. 64: Πᾶσα ἀρχικὴ μονὰς διττὸν ὑφίστησιν ἀριθμόν, τὸν μὲν αὐτοτελῶν ὑποστάσεων, τὸν δὲ ἐλλάμψεων ἐν ἑτέροις τὴν ὑπόστασιν κεκτημένων.

Εἰ γὰρ καθ' ὕφεσιν ἡ πρόοδος διὰ τῶν οἰκείων τοῖς ὑποστατικοῖς αἰτίοις, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν παντελείων τὰ τέλεια καὶ διὰ τούτων μέσων τὰ ἀτελῆ πρόεισιν εὐτάκτως· ὥστε αἱ μὲν ἔσονται αὐτοτελεῖς ὑποστάσεις, αἱ δὲ ἀτελεῖς. καὶ αὗται μὲν γίνονται ἤδη τῶν μετεχόντων (ἀτελεῖς τὰρ οὖσαι δέονται τῶν ὑποκειμένων εἰς τὴν ἑαυτῶν ὕπαρξιν)· αἱ δὲ

In addition to giving rise to the principle below it—Being to Intellect, Intellect to Life, and so forth—each principle *also* gives rise to two different "series." The first are those that exist without needing to exist "in" another. That is, they are self-standing substances in their own right. These hypostases belong to the same rank and class as their respective monad and have the same character. Each individual soul is, *qua* soul, the same as the monadic Soul that generates it. The difference is in their scope: while the monadic Soul has (indirect) effects over *all* material participants that in any way display "soul," the various minor souls all have more or less limited scopes—caring for one particular body, say.

The other series comprises entities that Proclus calls "irradiations." These entities possess the same character as the corresponding monad and the perfect, participated terms but, unlike the latter two kinds, cannot exist on their own. They must exist "in" something else. It seems safe to assume, following Greig, that these entities are the same as the "implanted potency" that Proclus mentions in Proposition 81:

> *Every separately participated thing is present to its participant through a certain inseparable power, which it implants [in the latter].*
>
> For if it itself exists separately from the participant and is not in it, as something that subsists in itself, then there must be a medium holding them one to the other, [one] more akin to the participated [than to the participant] yet actually being in the participant. For if the former is separate, how can it be participated by that which contains neither it nor any emanation from it? Accordingly, a potency or irradiation, proceeding from the participated to the participant, must link the two; and this medium of participation will be

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ἑαυτῶν ποιοῦσι τὰ μετέχοντα (τέλειαι γὰρ οὖσαι πληροῦσι μὲν ἑαυτῶν ἐκεῖνα καὶ ἑδράζουσιν ἐν ἑαυταῖς, δέονται δὲ οὐδὲν τῶν καταδεεστέρων εἰς τὴν ὑπόστασιν τὴν ἑαυτῶν). αἱ μὲν οὖν αὐτοτελεῖς ὑποστάσεις, διὰ τὴν εἰς πλῆθος διάκρισιν ἐλαττωμέναι τῆς ἀρχικῆς αὐτῶν μονάδος, διὰ τὴν αὐτοτελῆ ὕπαρξιν ὁμοιοῦνταί πῃ πρὸς ἐκείνην· ἀτελεῖς καὶ τῷ ἐν ἄλλοις εἶναι τῆς καθ’ αὑτὴν ὑφεστώσης καὶ τῷ ἀτελεῖ τῆς πάντα τελειούσης ἀφεστήκασιν.

Cor.: ἐκ δὴ τούτων φανερὸν ὅτι καὶ ἑνάδες αἱ μὲν αὐτοτελεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνὸς προῆλθον, αἱ δὲ ἐλλάμψεις ἑνώσεων· καὶ νόες οἱ μὲν οὐσίαι αὐτοτελεῖς, οἱ δὲ νοεραί τινες τελειότητες· καὶ ψυχαὶ αἱ μὲν ἑαυτῶν οὖσαι, αἱ δὲ τῶν ψυχουμένων, ὡς ἰνδάλματα μόνον οὖσαι ψυχῶν. καὶ οὕτως οὔτε πᾶσα ἕνωσις θεός, ἀλλ’ ἡ οὐσιώδης μόνον, οὔτε πᾶσα ψυχῆς ἔλλαμψις ψυχή, ἀλλ’ ἔστι καὶ τὰ εἴδολα τῶν ψυχῶν.

> distinct from both. There will be three things: that through which the participation takes place, the participated, the participant.[97]

In this passage, the participated is distinct from both the participant *and* "that through which the participation takes place." It seems natural to read the "separate participated" as identical with the participated form mentioned in Proposition 24 and the "self-complete substances" from Proposition 64. It would then seem natural to read the "incomplete" irradiations as the "inseparable powers," which function as something akin to essential properties in the participant.

An illustration might help to pull all these elements together. The principle known as Soul gives rise both to self-complete substances, namely particular souls, and irradiated "animacy," which is akin to souls except for the fact that it can only exist "in" the ensouled subject. This irradiation functions as the particular "animacy," or self-movement, that the particular soul grants to the body for which it cares.[98] The body, in this case, is the "sensible particular."

2.1.3 — *How this structure ensures the gods contain all things*

As should be clear from the discussion above, Proclus takes great care to construct a system in which every element derives its character ultimately from the One. Each and every character—everything that each thing is—is contained in its own character. As a result, the gods, considered as the particular "ones" deriving from the One, know all things in advance in knowing their own character and, further, can be said to arrange all things in their respective places in the universe

[97] *ET* Prop. 81: Πᾶν τὸ χωριστῶς μετεχόμενον διά τινος ἀχωρίστου δυνάμεως, ἣν ἐνδίδωσι, τῷ μετέχοντι πάρεστιν.
εἰ γὰρ [καὶ] αὐτὸ χωριστὸν ὑπάρχει τοῦ μετέχοντος καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἐκείνῳ, ὡς τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἐν ἑαυτῷ κεκτημένον, δεῖ δή τινος αὐτοῖς μεσότητος συνεχούσης θάτερον πρὸς θάτερον, ὁμοιοτέρας τῷ μετεχομένῳ καίτοι ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ μετέχοντι οὔσης. εἰ γὰρ ἐκεῖνο χωριστόν ἐστι, πῶς τοῦτο μετέχει, μήτε αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ἔχον μήτε ἄλλο ἀπ' αὐτοῦ; δύναμις ἄρα ἀπ' ἐκείνου καὶ ἔλλαμψις εἰς τὸ μετέχον προελθοῦσα συνάψει ἄμφω· καὶ τὸ μὲν ἔσται δι' οὗ ἡ μέθεξις, τὸ δὲ μετεχόμενον, τὸ δὲ μετέχον.
[98] Proclus suggests as much at *In Parm.* VI, Luna/Segonds 37 (1062,22–33).

by bestowing their respective characters on them. There are three channels along which their providence can pass: that from superior to inferior monad, that from monad to particular hypostases, and that from particular hypostases to sensible particulars. Let us take each in turn.

First, when a monad produces its various particular counterparts, it passes along its selfsame character to them. The difference is not in quality but in universality or scope: the monadic Soul gives its character, directly or indirectly, to all things that can participate in it; by contrast, the particular souls to which it gives rise only oversee and bring animacy to those individuals that participate in them. It is easy to see how the monad precontains its direct effects: the character in them is identical with the character originates.

On the other hand, when one monad gives rise to the next, it does so not by simply giving it the same character in a derivative fashion. Rather, the inferior monad, in constituting *itself*, attempts to imitate the superior monad.[99] The result is a different character rather than merely a less universal one. For instance, Being gives rise to (Intelligible) Intellect. When the Intellect imitates Being, it falls short. Being is simple; in contrast, Intellect comprises multiple forms, all distinct from one another and from the whole. The unified character present in Being has become "refracted," with distinctions and imperfections arising where there were none.

There is one sense in which the character seen in the inferior monad is novel.[100] Intelligence is not found in Being; it first appears in the monadic Intellect. That makes sense. After all, were the character found at higher levels, the Intellect would no longer be the monad from which all "intellectual" things derive their intelligence. It would, in fact, be merely another

[99] *ET* Prop. 99. See also discussion in John Whittaker, "The Historical Background of Proclus' Doctrine of the αὐθυπόστατα," in *De Jamblique à Proclus: Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique XXI*, 193–230 (Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1975). Reprinted in John Whittaker, *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984).

[100] See, relatedly, D. Gregory MacIsaac, "The Origin of Determination in the Neoplatonism of Proclus," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr Robert D. Crouse*, eds. Willemien Otten, Walter Hannam, and Michael Treschow, 141–172 (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 163–171.

participant in the same order.[101] At the same time, there is a sense in which the character found in a given monad *is* found in the superior monad.[102] To see how, let us return to the illustration from earlier: white light has its own character. It is not the mere sum when one adds up the other colors. Nonetheless, it does contain the other colors in the sense that, if one were to pass it through a prism, it would break, revealing the other colors that were within it. There is also a sense in which one could say that one can derive the various colors from the white light by subtracting from it in various ways. As the numbers one and nine are contained within the number ten, so the red and the blue lights are contained within the white light—and, by analogy, the complex character found in Intellect is contained within Being as a reduction. If one bears this illustration in mind, it becomes clear that, even if there is one sense in which the character found in the lower hypostases is "novel," it is perhaps more correct to say that the character is merely the character already found in the superior—with a few tweaks and reductions.

Here, I would like to make an aside, returning to the problem I flagged earlier. Having introduced the idea that the monads, with respect to their peculiar characters, are self-constituting, Proclus has left himself the resources to hold that the One somehow contains its effects without compromising its perfect simplicity. He could argue that, while the One does not possess the effects' characters in the sense that it does not exhibit the same reductions in unity that they do, it *does* contain them in the sense that their most basic (and, on a certain level, their only) character, namely their unity, is already present in its own unity, even if *how* they are one—their declension from pure unity with all the particularities that entails—is not.[103] Proclus would simply need to allow, as he already implies elsewhere, that its perfect unity consists in a certain

[101] Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 252.
[102] This whole difficult situation is noted by Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 50–54.
[103] Objectors I have in mind include Andrew Radde-Gallwitz in his "Pseudo-Dionysius, the Parmenides, and the Problem of Contradiction," in *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage, Vol. 2,* eds. John Douglas Turner and Kevin Corrigan, 243–254 (Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 247–249.

intensity and that all other characters are simply its own character displayed at lesser intensities. Indeed, I think that it is implicit that he *does* hold that, so far as its character is concerned, the One contains its effects in this sense: the henads, or gods, being simply lesser "ones," would not be able to contain their effects in their own unity if simple unity were, as such, contrary to containment for Proclus. The sense in which he wants to maintain that the One cannot contain its effects but the gods *can* will come clearer, I think, when one considers my discussion in section on "ἐν" and "πρό."

With that aside finished, let us return to discussing the different senses in which participation can occur. Participation in its final form occurs between sensible, material things and their principles. This form is simultaneously the paradigm for participation in general and the odd one out among the three kinds that Proclus discusses. It is paradigmatic in that the common characters found in sensible things were the reason for positing forms in the first place (and, by extension, all the other true causes). It is the odd one out in that, unlike in the other cases, it involves a character being given to a thing that lacks any determinate character; it has no character in itself, unlike both particular hypostases (which have their own character even if it be derivative) and monads (which have their own character insofar as they constitute themselves by imitating their superiors). There is also the fact that the character is *not* the same in both cases: unlike with the particular hypostases, the character the sensible participant receives is different in that it is in an effect.[104] While it is distinct from the other ways in which participation works, the participation of sensible particular in hypostasis still serves much the same purpose as the others: it allows an approximation of the character of the One to be extended to entities on the lower rungs.

[104] See *ET* Prop. 18 for the idea that the same character is different in the cause and the effect because the former possesses the character "primitively" while the latter possesses it "derivatively."

All three channels ensure that all things receive their character, in the final instance, from the One: the One produces its particular hypostases, the henads, which in turn bestow irradiated unities upon all possible sensible particulars. In addition, the One gives rise to Being, which in turn gives rise to Life, which gives rise to Soul, which gives rise to Nature. Since each monad arises from the previous as an enervation or reduction, it receives its character from the previous as well; and, in passing on its character to its own particular counterparts—monadic soul to Particular souls, for instance—it passes its character on to the sensible particulars as well. Each rung and kind in the universe, therefore, save the sensible particulars themselves, serves some role in passing along the effects already precontained in the One to the things below it. Even more important is the natural conclusion that all the characters found in all things are precontained within the One.

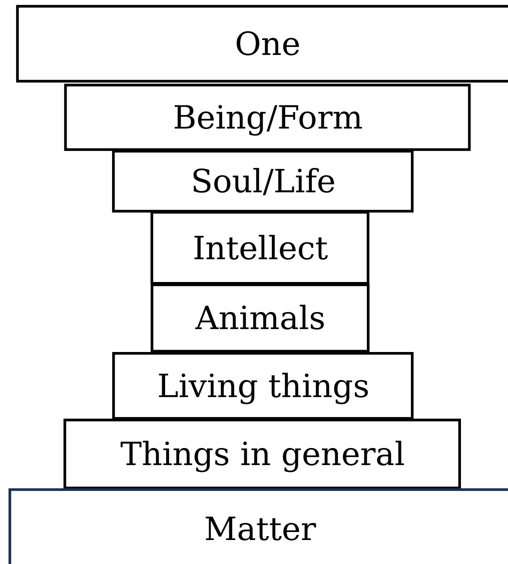
2.1.4 — *Numerical distinction and receptivity*

There remains a final complication. As noted in the overview, Proclus assumes that the material participant—as with other participants—is distinct from both its cause and the effect that the cause produces in it. Obviously, this presents a potential challenge: whence comes the very substratum on which the cause operates? In this section, I shall explore this topic further, both strengthening the case that the participant (though not *qua* participant) does have a numerical identity logically distinct from and prior to its participation in a given cause *and* showing that Proclus has a way to attempt to make even this receptivity come down from above.[105]

[105] In doing so, I am going against some scholars for whom there *is* no subject distinct from the cause's activity or operation. To put it as L.M. de Rijk does, there is no "*subjectum participationis*." L.M. de Rijk, "Causation and Participation in Proclus: The Pivotal Role of Scope Distinction in His Metaphysics," in *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, eds. E.P. Bos and P.A. Meijer, 1–34 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 16, note 58. He seems to think this must be the case because, as he rightly points out, the participant *qua* participant does not preexist (logically or temporally) its participation. Other scholars in this camp include Eric Perl and Dirk Baltzly. See Perl,

The point from which to start is that Proclus builds an "other" to the hypostatic hierarchy into his system. Each form can only operate on the subject if it has been made into a suitable substratum by the previous, superior hypostases. And, at the far extreme, even the most universal hypostases can only operate on something because it is there to be operated upon in the first place—that is, it is a subject that can stand in a participatory relationship with them, having received from them a certain "irradiation." For Proclus, then, the universe something like this:

Theophany, 24–25. So too thinks Dirk Baltzly, "Mereological Modes of Being in Proclus," *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008): 395–411. I do not address their arguments at length because I do not see their position as clearly following from the texts they comment on. Later in this chapter, however, I briefly point out how any view on which there is no subject for the participation must stand in tension with Proclus' recourse to the language of cooperation between the participant and its causes.



Within this picture, it is not enough that there be descending hypostases. When it comes to producing the material world, at least, there must also always be a subject "there" and susceptible to the forms and other causes.

I shall now bring to bear some texts from Proclus as evidence. In the *In Parmenidem*, in a passage dealing with the relationship between the forms and the matter on which their images are impressed, Proclus makes the claim that it is not the forms alone that determine or bring about their participants. Rather, they only bring about or produce their participants in cooperation with those same participants.[106]

> [E]very … agent works upon that which is by nature susceptible to its actions, that is, upon what is able to receive its action, so that when the Demiurge will create something with a certain character, the subject that is fitted to receive it, whatever the character may be, by its very aptitude presents itself as a collaborator with the agent that can create … [A]ll things would be alike if each thing came to be according to divine creativity alone. For since that creativity is always the same and present to all things, unless there were a difference in the aptitudes of the subjects how could we explain their variety …?[107]

[106] This point tells against de Rijk. Contrary to what he says, there *must* be some sense in which the participant is logically presupposed by the form. Otherwise, it would make no sense to talk about its receptivity as a factor in the form's ability to bring about a form-copy in it. It would be enough to say that the form produces these form-copies and that they are lesser than and distinct from it.

[107] *In Parmenidem* IV, Luna/Segonds 10 (842,37–843,12): πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ πᾶν τὸ ποιοῦν εἰς τὸ παθεῖν πεφυκὸς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ποιεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ καταδέξασθαι τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ὥστε καὶ ὁ δημιουργός τι τοιοῦτον ποιήσει· τὸ

In this passage, Proclus makes it clear that, in order for a creative agent to bring about its effect, it must have a subject on which to operate. The form Man can only bring about "manhood" if there be a subject, *x*, in which it can bring about that effect. Additionally, the subject must be receptive to the form; the form cannot simply bring about any effect it will. It can only operate upon its subject to the extent that the subject itself is cooperative with it. Even though it has no character on its own, the subject has its own, peculiar integrity, including an ability to receive or resist the form. All these considerations suggest that the subject is not merely a negative image, representing the bound to the cause's own power. It is, rather, something that stands "beside" and in relation to the causes that operate upon it.[108]

This is a potential complication for Proclus. He is attempting to maintain three claims that stand in apparent tension:

δὲ ἐπιτήδειον εἰς ὁτιοῦν διὰ τῆς ἐπιτηδειότητος αὐτῆς ἑαυτὸ προσάγει τῷ ποιῆσαι δυναμένῳ, τοῦτο δὲ δι' ἐφέσεως· ἡ γὰρ προσέλευσις ὄρεξιν ἔχει τοῦ ᾧ πρόσεισιν αἰτίαν. Ἔπειτα καὶ πάντα ἂν ὡσαύτως εἶχεν, εἰ κατὰ μόνην ἕκαστον ἐγίγνετο τὴν θείαν ποίησιν· ἐκείνης γὰρ ὡσαύτως ἑστώσης καὶ πᾶσι παρούσης, εἰ μὴ παρὰ τὴν τούτων ἐπιτηδειότητα γίγνοιτο τὸ διάφορον, πόθεν αὐτοῖς ἡ ἐξαλλαγὴ καὶ τὸ τὰ μὲν ὡσαύτως ἀεὶ μετέχειν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλοτε ἄλλως;

Note that this passage actually says only that every *creative* (demiurgic) agent works upon what is receptive to it. However, I take it to be clear from Proposition 72 in the *Elements* that even principles that fall higher upon on the ontological ladder than the demiurgic principles need to have their subject "prepared" for them:

> And the principles which bring into existence the prerequisite foundations for other gifts are causes in relation to more effects, since they generate even the receptivity which is a condition for the specific forms' presence. … From this it is apparent why Matter, taking its origin from the One, in itself lacks form; and why body, even though it participates in Being, is in itself without participation in soul. For Matter, which is the basis (ὑποκείμενον) of all things, proceeded from the cause of all things; and body, which is the basis of ensouled existence, is derived from a principle more universal than soul, in that after its fashion it participates Being.
>
> Τὰ δὲ τῶν προϋποκειμένων ἄλλοις ὑποστατικὰ πλειόνων αἴτιά ἐστιν, ὑφιστάντα καὶ τὰς ἐπιτηδειότητας πρὸ τῆς τῶν εἰδῶν παρουσίας. … ἐκ δὴ τούτων φανερὸν διότι ἡ μὲν ὕλη, ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ὑποστᾶσα, καθ' αὑτὴν εἴδους ἐστὶν ἄμοιρος· τὸ δὲ σῶμα καθ' αὑτό, εἰ καὶ τοῦ ὄντος μετέσχε ψυχῆς ἀμέτοχόν ἐστιν. ἡ μὲν γὰρ ὕλη, ὑποκείμενον οὖσα πάντων, ἐκ τοῦ πάντων αἰτίου προῆλθε· τὸ δὲ σῶμα, ὑποκείμενον ὄν τῆς ψυχώσεως, ἐκ τοῦ ὁλικωτέρου τῆς ψυχῆς ὑφέστηκε, τοῦ ὄντος ὁπωσοῦν μετασχόν.

I am therefore confident that there need be no worry about whether the rule that demiurgic causes need a subject on which to operate can be legitimately applied to other causes.

[108] See also *ET* Prop. 79, which shows that an agent (ποιοῦν) can only act on what has the necessary capacity to be acted upon. If one ask whether the One is an agent, note Prop. 26, where it is at least called a producer (τοῦ πάντων παρακτικοῦ).

a) All things fall within providential oversight.

b) Providential oversight functions through participation, with the thing overseen "precontained" in the thing that is caring for or overseeing it.

c) Each participant is distinct from its cause.

Even if Proclus succeeds in showing that all things derive their *character* from the One through the channels mentioned in the previous section, it is not clear that he succeeds in showing that *all things* derive from the One. For it seems that there is an irreducible "otherness" to the subject on which at least creative causes operate. Whatever that is, it is not explained by the cause, which only bestows its character upon the subject by cooperating with it. If the "otherness" found in the subject is not somehow attributed to an antecedent in the divine, it cannot fall under providence.

Proclus recognizes the problem: in the *In Parmenidem*, shortly after the passage I cited above, he asks where the very receptivity found in things comes from. His response is not, however, very illuminating: he says that receptivity to the forms is to be attributed to a cause prior to the Demiurge, namely a cause that is both creative, or demiurgic, and "paternal."[109] This cause is what prepares the subject (ὑποκείμενον) on which the Demiurge operates. Ultimately, however, if one asks what makes matter ready to receive the work done by the Demiurge, one must simply say that it is due to the fact that the subjects on which it works have "a desire for the Good."[110]

Fortunately, Proclus addresses the same problem elsewhere in his corpus. See the following proposition from the *Elements*:

[109] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds 11 (844,13–15). I also take it that Proclus' willingness to answer the question "Whence the subject's receptivity?" is a plausible reason to doubt Lloyd's claim that matter is, for Proclus, dissolvable into a "composition of causes." Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, 117–119.
[110] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds 13 (845,15–24).

Proposition 71: *All those characters which in the originative causes have higher and more universal rank become, in the resultant beings, through the irradiations which proceed from them, in some fashion, substrates for the more particular principles. The irradiations from the superior principles thus receive the processions from the lesser principles, while the irradiations from the latter are founded upon those from the former … [S]uccessive rays strike downwards upon the same subject* (τὸ αὐτὸ … ὑποκείμενον), *the more universal causes affecting it first, the more specific ones supplementing the former by bestowing their own gifts upon the participants.*

For if the more determinative causes cooperate before the secondary causes, being present through their superfluent power even to things with a less perfect receptivity (τοῖς ἀτελεστέραν ἔχουσι τῆν ἐπιτηδειότητα), irradiating upon even these, whereas causes subordinate in rank confer their gifts later, then it is plain that the irradiations from the superior causes, being the first to occupy the common participant (τὸ μετέχον ἀμφετέρων), serve as a support for the gifts given by the subordinates, which use these irradiations as a foundation and act upon a participant prepared for them by the more general principles.[111]

If a participant be receptive to one principle (i.e. can take on its character), it must have received a different, more basic character from another principle. For example, a thing must first be in order to be a *living* thing; in order to be a *rational* animal, it must be an animal, and so forth. Soul can only bring about its effect on a body because the body has the necessary prerequisite: existence, which it receives from Being. And even Being can only bring about existence in its subjects because the way has already been prepared for it by the very highest principle, the One. Each character that the participant receives thus becomes its receptivity to the next character, coming from an inferior principle.

[111] *ET* Prop. 71: Πάντα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἀρχηγικοῖς αἰτίοις ὁλικωτέραν καὶ ὑπερτέραν τάξιν ἔχοντα ἐν τοῖς ἀποτελέσμασι κατὰ τὰς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἐλλάμψεις ὑποκείμενά πως γίνεται ταῖς τῶν μερικωτέρων μεταδόσεσι· καὶ αἱ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνωτέρων ἐλλάμψεις ὑποδέχονται τὰς ἐν τῶν δευτέρων προόδους, ἐκεῖναι δὲ ἐπὶ τούτων ἑδράζονται· καὶ οὕτω προηγοῦνται μεθέξεις ἄλλαι ἄλλων, καὶ ἐμφάσεις ἄλλαι ἐπ’ ἄλλαις ἄνωθεν εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ φοιτῶσιν ὑποκείμενον, τῶν ὁλικωτέρων προενεργούντων, τῶν δὲ μερικωτέρων ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκείνων ἐνεργείαις τὰς ἑαυτῶν μεταδόσεις χορηγούντων τοῖς μετέχουσιν.

εἰ γὰρ τὰ αἰτιώτερα πρὸ τῶν δευτέρων ἐνεργεῖ, διὰ περιουσίαν δυνάμεως καὶ τοῖς ἀτελεστέραν ἔχουσι τὴν ἐπιτηδειότητα παρόντα καὶ ἐλλάμποντα κἀκείνοις, τὰ δὲ ὑφειμένα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν δεύτερα χορηγεῖ τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν, δῆλον ὡς αἱ τῶν ὑπερτέρων ἐλλάμψεις, προκαταλαμβάνουσαι τὸ μετέχον ἀμφοτέρων, ἐπερείδουσι τὰς τῶν ὑφειμένων μεταδόσεις· αἱ δὲ ταῖς ἀπ’ ἐκείνων ἐμφάσεσιν ὑποβάθραις χρῶνται, καὶ δρῶσιν εἰς τὸ μετέχον, προειργασμένον ὑπ’ ἐκείνων.

There is one final clarification that should be made. There are two senses in which the form needs a ὑποκείμενον on which to operate. First, there is the sense in which it refers to the immanent forms produced in the participant by the previous hypostases. Life needs there to be something to which Being has already given being and so forth.[112] Secondly, there must be something there to receive the activity at all—especially if the participant is to be distinct from its cause. It functions more like an Aristotelian subject. I shall call these ὑποκείμενον-1 and ὑποκείμενον-2. Alternatively, when referring to the Greek is less important, I may simply translate the single Greek term differently, the former as "substratum," the latter as "subject."

Strictly speaking, all I have shown is that Proclus attempts to show how both the character belonging to things and even the very receptivity that constitutes them as receptive substrata on which other causes can operate—their "otherness" to the cause in one relevant sense at least—can all be traced back to their antecedents in providence. I have shown that ὑποκείμενον–1, being nothing but an irradiated character, is precontained by providence, but ὑποκείμενον–2 still remains to be explained. That suggests a gap remains in the system. I shall return to this point later in this chapter, when I claim that Proclus has a would-be solution to this problem. For now, however, it is enough to say that, even if there *is* such a gap, it does not take away from the fact that Proclus *does* indeed try to explain how each thing—both its character and, at least in sense, its receptivity—is precontained within and so foreknown by providence.

2.1.5 — *How participation is meant to secure providence*

The whole system can be understood as an attempt to ensure that providence is extended to each thing. That is, nothing comes about by chance; each thing is "precontained" in its causes

[112] *ET* Prop. 71.

and brought about in accordance with them.[113] To that end, he must ensure that the causes have an impact all the way from the topmost to the bottommost rung.

On its face, participation explains how providence functions by explaining the identity between the cause and its effect. Because the cause "precontains" its effects, it already possesses the very character that will be present in its effects. This character serves as a "grip," as it were, allowing Proclus to say that the individual participant is preconceived or anticipated by the cause insofar as its character is already known. When it produces the effect, it knows *exactly* what will be produced—namely, the character it bestows.

Let us return to the *In Parmenidem* given our discussion in this section. As shown in the previous section, Proclus attempts to explain the manner in which all things are known by providence—by its containing all things. As discussed in *this* section, he spends considerable effort in building a philosophical system in which the universe forms a single, enormous hierarchy, with all effects ultimately contained in their causes.

I take it that, in showing that providence extends to all things by containing all things in advance, Proclus is *not* merely interested in showing that providence extends *causally* to all things. Instead, it seems probable that he is interested in showing that providence contains all things in part because it is in this manner that providence can also *foreknow* all things and hence said to arrange them according to its good design. He does not, to my knowledge, say exactly that, but he comes close in the passage I have already cited. In the *In Parmenidem*, he makes it clear that he wants to maintain that any providence worth the name requires a cause that knows its products by knowing their precontainment in itself.[114] If one frames things in the terms used

[113] *In Parm*. III, Luna/Segonds III/2, 10–12 (790,10–791,27).
[114] Ibid.

by the divine ideas tradition, he is attempting to show how all things are ultimately already "referred to," have their "answer" or "proxy" in the divine mind.

2.2 — The divine idea is not essentially "of" its effect

At this point, I turn to discuss a point I mentioned earlier: that Proclus is concerned not only with showing that providence "anticipates" its effects—and so foreknows them—but also with showing that this precontained effect is not somehow correlated with the effect so as to presuppose it logically.

To demonstrate this point, I shall consider a distinction that Proclus draws in his *Elements* and his *In Parmenidem*: the distinction between the "participated" (μετεχομένον) and the "unparticipated" (ἀμεθέκτον) cause. This distinction serves an important function for Proclus. In introducing it, he hopes to avoid two problems that might otherwise appear in his account: his concern is (a) that, if the form becomes "related to" its effect, it cannot function in the same way in relation to all its effects and (b) that, the form, if its nature becomes correlative with its effects, no longer has explanatory priority over those effects. His main purpose is thus to avoid making the form—and, by extension, any other true cause—correlative with its effect. By attributing providential oversight to the unparticipated cause while delegating any correlation with the effect to the participated cause, Proclus seeks to avoid these problems.

2.2.1 — *The participated and the unparticipated*

Let us begin by looking at *Elements*, Proposition 23:

> *Every unparticipated produces from itself the participated, and every participated substance is linked by upward tension to unparticipated existences.*

> For on the one hand the unparticipated, being a monad (as belonging to itself and not to another and as transcending the participants), generates the things that are participated. For either it must remain fixed in sterility and isolation … or else it will give something from itself, in which the receiver becomes a participant and the given attains substantial existence as a participated term.
>
> Every participated term, on the other hand, becoming relative to the certain one by which it is participated (τινὸς γενόμενον ὑφ’ οὗ μετέχεται), is secondary to that which in all is equally present (τοῦ πᾶσιν ὁμοίως παρόντος) and has filled them all from itself. That which is in one is not in the other, while that which is present to all alike (τὸ δὲ πᾶσιν ὡσαύτος παρόν), that it may illuminate all, is not in any one but is prior to them all (ἵνα πᾶσιν ἐλλάμπῃ, οὐκ ἐν ἑνί ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ πρὸ τῶν πάντων) … [For] a principle which was in all (ἐν πᾶσιν ὄν) would be divided amongst all and would itself require a further principle to unite the divided; and further, all the particulars would no longer participate the same principle but this one and that another, through the diremption of its unity. And if it be in one out of all, it will belong not to all but to that one. Inasmuch, then, as it is both common to all that can participate and identical for all, it must be prior to all: that is, it must be unparticipated.[115]

The first thing to note is that the “unparticipated” is the same as the “monad” for its order or series. It is therefore worth returning briefly to Proposition 21, where Proclus characterizes the role of the monad in the universal hierarchy:

> *Every order has its beginning in a monad and proceeds to a manifold coordinate therewith; and the manifold in any order may be carried back to a single monad*

[115] *ET* Prop. 23: Πᾶν τὸ ἀμέθεκτον ὑφίστεσιν ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τὰ μετεχόμενα, καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ μετεχόμεναι ὑποστάσεις εἰς ἀμεθέκτους ὑπάρξεις ἀνατείνονται.

τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀμέθτεκτον, μόναδος ἔχον λόγον ὡς ἑαυτοῦ ὂν καὶ οὐκ ἄλλου καὶ ὡς ἐχῃρημένον τῶν μετεχόντων, ἀπογεννᾷ τὰ μετέχεσθαι δύναμενα. ἢ γὰρ ἄγονον ἐστήξεται καθ’ αὑτό, καὶ οὐδὲν ἂν ἔχοι τίμιον· ἢ δώσει τι ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ τὸ μὲν λαβὸν μετέσχε, τὸ δὲ δοθὲν ὑπέστη μετεχομένως.

τὸ δὲ μετεχόμενον πᾶν, τινὸς γενόμενον ὑφ’ οὗ μετέχεται, δεύτερόν ἐστι τοῦ πᾶσιν ὁμοίως παρόντος καὶ πάντα ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ πληρώσαντος. τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἑνὶ ὂν ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐκ ἔστιν· τὸ δὲ πᾶσιν ὡσαύτως παρόν, ἵνα πᾶσιν ἐλλάμπῃ, οὐκ ἐν ἑνί ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ πρὸ τῶν πάντων. ἢ γὰρ ἐν πᾶσίν ἐστιν ἢ ἐν ἑνὶ τῶν πάντων ἢ πρὸ τῶν πάντων. ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἐν πᾶσιν ὄν, μερισθὲν εἰς πάντα, πάλιν ἄλλου ἂν δέοιτο τοῦ τὸ μερισθὲν ἑνίζοντος· καὶ οὐκέτ’ ἂν τοῦ αὐτοῦ μετέχοι πάντα, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἄλλου, τὸ δὲ ἄλλου, τοῦ ἑνὸς μερισθέντος. εἰ δὲ ἐν ἑνὶ τῶν πάντων, οὐκέτι τῶν πάντων ἔσται, ἀλλ’ ἑνός. εἰ οὖν καὶ κοινὸν τῶν μετέχειν δυναμένων καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πάντων, πρὸ τῶν πάντων ἔσται· τοῦτο δὲ ἀμέθεκτον.

I have altered the translation in this case because Dodds’ own translation here involves too much quick, unspoken interpretive work. Most important is that Dodds chooses to translate the phrase “τινὸς γενόμενον ὑφ’ οὗ μετέχεται” as “becoming a property of that particular by which it is participated.” (Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 27.) By calling the participated term a property, Dodds implies the participated term in this proposition is among the *incomplete* participated terms, those participated terms that depend on a substrate for their existence. He thus rules out that the difficulty Proclus has in mind might be one involving the self-complete participated terms as well as their incomplete counterparts.

> For the monad, being a principle, generates the appropriate manifold. Hence a series or order is a unity in that the entire sequence derives from the monad its declension into plurality.
>
> And in the reverse direction the manifold may be carried back to a single common cause … For that which is identical in every member … did not proceed from any of the members … Since … in every order there is a certain commonality, continuity, and identity (τις καὶ κοινωνία καὶ συνέχεια καὶ ταυτότης), due to which things are said to be coordinate or not, is it clear that the identical element is derived by the whole order from a single originative principle. Thus in each order or causal chain there exists a single monad prior to the manifold.[116]

The monad explains why all the members belonging to a given order or series share the common element characteristic of that order: why all souls are souls, why all healthy things are healthy, why all ducks are ducks.

I take it that Proposition 23 is intended to continue the thought from Proposition 21. Although it uses the term "unparticipated," it is still referring to the monad heading a series. The difference is that, in Proposition 23, Proclus is considering the monad under a particular guise: in order to function as a monad in relation to its order, the monad must also be "the unparticipated." That is, it must not stand in a participation relationship with the participants that derive their character from it.

Proclus cannot leave the matter there. For one thing, he holds that sensible particulars (and particulars belonging to lower rungs in the hypostatic hierarchy) receive their character through participation, so there must still be some entity or entities to stand in that relation to the

[116] *ET* Prop. 21: Πᾶσα τάξις ἀπὸ μονάδος ἀρχομένη εἰς πλῆθος τῇ μονάδι σύστοιχον, καὶ πάσης τάξεως τὸ πλῆθος εἰς μίαν ἀνάγεται μονάδα.

ἡ μὲν γὰρ μονάς, ἀρχῆς ἔχουσα λόγον, ἀππογεννᾷ τὸ οἰκεῖον ἑαυτῇ πλῆθος· διὸ καὶ μία σειρὰ καὶ μία τάξις, ἣ ὅλη παρὰ τῆς μονάδος ἔχει τὴν εἰς τὸ πλῆθος ὑπόβασιν· οὐ γὰρ ἔτι τάξις οὐδὲ σειρά, τῆς μονάδος ἀγόνου μενούσης καθ’ αὑτήν.

τὸ δὲ πλῆθος ἀνάγεται πάλιν εἰς μίαν τὴν κοινὴν τῶν ὁμοταγῶν πάντων αἰτίαν. τὸ γὰρ ἐν παντὶ τῷ πλήθει ταὐτὸν οὐκ ἀφ’ ἑνὸς τῶν ἐν τῳ πλήθει τὴεν πρόοδον ἔσχε· … ἐπεὶ οὖν καθ’ ἑκάστην τάξιν ἐστί τις καὶ κοινωνία καὶ συνέχεια καὶ ταυτότης, δι’ ἣν καὶ τάδε μὲν ὁμοταγῆ λέγεται, τάδε δὲ ἑτεροταγῆ, δῆλον ὡς ἀπὸ μιᾶς ἀρχῆς ἥκει πάσῃ τῇ τάξει τὸ ταὐτόν. ἔστιν ἄρα μονὰς μία πρὸ τοῦ πλήθους.

participants. Further, because he is committed to the idea that the monad/unparticipated *does* somehow explain the common character seen in a particular order or series, Proclus must find a way to explain how it provides for that order or series without a direct participation relationship with the participants.

That is the reason that Proclus posits the "participated" cause. These entities are produced or generated by the unparticipated term, have the same character as the unparticipated term, and stand in participation relationships with the individual participants belonging to the relevant order.[117]

Proclus spends considerable time in this passage explaining the reason for positing this distinction, though it is, at first, less than perspicuous. If, he says, the form were present merely "in" all the different participants, it would somehow be "divided" so as to have only one "part" in each participant. And if that were the case, then either there would be nothing *actually* in common among the participants—since each would have a *different* element explaining its character—or there would be a new commonality, some feature held in common by the cause and its participants, that would need explaining.

On its own, this proposition is not as clear as it could be about what problem the distinction is intended to solve. One can easily see that the distinction is supposed to distance the unparticipated, transcendent form—that which is actually common to all participants in a given order—from the participants, but why that should be necessary is not immediately clear. Why

[117] It should be noted that the language in this passage provides further evidence against reading the participated and the unparticipated form as merely the same entity viewed from different "perspectives," as Radek Chlup has suggested: the monad "generates" (ἀπογεννᾷ) the participated term. In other passages, such as Proposition 27, it is clear that, when one principle produces another, its product "stands alongside it as something other than it." It is reasonable to assume that what holds for relations between principles belonging to different orders holds for relations between principles belonging to the same order. See Radek Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 100–104. Eric Perl holds a view similar view to Chlup's on this topic. See Perl, *Theophany*, 22–25.

assume that, in order to be present in all its participants or effects, the cause must be "divided" among them? Further, in what sense would it be divided?

2.2.2 — *The sail cloth problem*

My suggestion is that the problem is related in the various references that Proclus makes to the manner in which a cause, when it is present in a participant, becomes "related to" its participant. What Proclus is attempting to avoid is an "immanence" in which the cause becomes correlative with its effect. He needs the cause from which all the participants derive their common character to be "the same for all" (τὸ αὐτὸ πάντων), and this capacity to be the same with respect to all is somehow compromised if the cause turns out to be correlative with its effect.[118] In the coming section, I shall explain why, I take it, Proclus thinks as he does on this matter. First, however, I must consider some alternative readings. Previous commentators have noted that the problem discussed in Proposition 23 bears some resemblance to the "sail cloth" problem from the *Parmenides*. Indeed, some have identified the two.[119] Before arguing for my own reading, therefore, I shall briefly argue that, whatever the problem is that Proclus wants to avoid in Proposition 23, it is *not* simply the "sail cloth" problem, at least not in a naïve form. In doing so, I hope to support my own interpretation and head off potential objections.

In the relevant passage in the *Parmenides*, Socrates, wanting to say that a form can be present in all its participants at the same time, likens it to a day: just as the same day can be present to all things under it, so too can the same form be present to different participants. Parmenides objects. To say that one and the same form is present to all its participants as a day is

[118] That is not to say there are not *other* concerns involved. For instance, in the *In Parmenidem* IV, Proclus seems to be concerned that the form must not be essentially tied to its instances lest they exhaust its power. (Luna/Segonds 78 (88729–34)) Perhaps the idea is that, by connecting the cause's power with determinate potential effects, one would render its potency finite in some way.
[119] A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, 69; E.R. Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 210–211.

present to all the things on which its light falls, he thinks, is like saying that one and the same sail cloth is "shared" by all the different objects that have been placed under it. The sail may be present to each thing in some sense, but each thing is not in contact with the cloth as a whole. Rather, it is in contact with only one *part*. Similarly, the day is not present to all its objects as a whole but only in part: different daylight falls on this leaf, that bird on the windowsill, and the blind mole. As such, the day is present in a different way to each. If either the day or the cloth image is taken as a strong analogy for the way in which the form is present to all its participants, it turns out that the form, too, is present only "in part" and "in a different way" to each participant. Socrates is confounded and moves on to a different metaphor for participation.[120]

As certain scholars have noted, the sail cloth problem "arises only when participation … is taken to be a relation between material bodies, like a single sail cloth covering many people."[121] If one keeps in mind that the form is immaterial, one can say that the form is "immanent" in as many different, spatially-separate instances as one likes without implying that *it* is located in space. Proclus would have known this response was available to him. Plotinus makes it in his *Enneads,*[122] and, in fact, Proclus himself makes the same response in the *In Parmenidem*.[123] As long as one keeps in mind that one is using the term "in" in a non-spatial sense, Proclus is perfectly happy to say, as he does in the *In Parmenidem* IV and *Elements* Proposition 98, that there is some sense in which the form is *both* present in its participants *and* not present in them.[124] Given these considerations, it is peculiar that Proclus should bring up and even give ground to what *appears* to be a similar problem in *Elements* Proposition 23. Why

[120] Plato, *Parmenides*. I follow the Loeb: *Plato: Cratylus. Parmenides. Greater Hippias. Lesser Hippias*, trans. Harold North Fowler. Loeb Classical Library 167 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 213–217 (130e–131e).
[121] Pieter d'Hoine, "Platonic Forms and Being–Life–Intellect," 115.
[122] For instance, *Ennead* V.2.2.20.
[123] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds 43–45 (864,12–866,23).
[124] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds 63–72 (878–883). See also *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds 33–34 (859,7–21).

introduce a new distinction between the participated and the unparticipated?[125] My suggestion is that the problem concerning Proclus in Proposition 23 is different from the sail cloth problem from the *Parmenides*—at least if the latter is understood as a challenge having to do with how forms can be at multiple spatial locations without ceasing to be one. His apparent acceptance, in the *Elements*, that the sail cloth problem presents a genuine issue would make little sense given his conclusion in the *In Parmenidem*.

2.2.3 — *My reading of Proposition 23*

I am now in a position to begin laying out my own reading. First, let us return to Proposition 23:

> Every participated term … becoming related to a certain thing, by which it is participated, is secondary to that which is present to all in the same fashion and has filled them all from itself. For that which is in one is not in the others, while what which is present to all in the same fashion, that it might illuminate all, is not in any one but is prior to all. For either it is in all, or is in one from them all, or is before all. But a principle that is in all is divided amongst all, and there would need to be yet another [principle] to unite the divided; nor will all the participants participate in the same principle any longer, but this one would participate in this principle and that one in that, the unity being divided. And if it be in one from among all, it will no longer belong to all but to one. If, then, it is both common to all those able to participate in it and the same in relation to all, it will be before them all…[126]

The relevant distinction is between that which becomes relative to a certain thing, by which it is participated (τινὸς γενόμενον ὑφ’ οὗ μετέχεται) and that which is present in the same way to all the things that are filled with its character (τοῦ πᾶσιν ὁμοίως παρόντος καὶ πάντα ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ πληρώσαντος). If it is to be “common to all that can participate in it” (κοινὸν τῶν μετέχειν δυναμένων) and “the same for each” (αὐτὸ πάντων), it must be “before all” (πρὸ τῶν πάντων).

[125] For this reason, I doubt Jonathan Greig (*The First Principle*, 102–103) is correct in thinking the distinction indicates that Proclus implicitly accepts the sail-cloth challenge—at least if the challenge is understood to consist in the apparent difficulty with having a single form present at different locations in space.
[126] *ET* Prop. 23.

In Proposition 24, Proclus draws the distinction in slightly different terms. In this proposition, the unparticipated "is relative to all and not to a certain one" (τοῦ πάντων ὄντος καὶ οὐ τινὸς), while the participated "is relative to a certain one and not to all" (τινὸς ὄν καὶ οὐ πάντων). Finally, Proclus expresses the distinction in yet a third, slightly different way later in Proposition 24: the unparticipated is "the one before the many" (ἕν πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν), while the participated term is the one "in the many" (τὸ δὲ μετεχόμενον ἐν τοὶς πολλοῖς).

In these passages, Proclus seems to use the genitive to suggest relation in a broad sense. It is in this broad sense that Proclus is perfectly happy to allow that the unparticipated can be "related to" the participants in its order. The prepositions "ἐν" and "πρό," on the other hand, connote relation in more specific senses. To say that a constitutive cause is "ἐν" another entity in this sense is to say that it is correlative with it. That is, they are in some regard mutually defining; hence, *qua relata*, they are, as it were, on the same footing. Some illustrations might help. Take Grendel's dame. She is only a mother because she stands in relation to another individual: Grendel. Thus, her motherhood—or at least her being Grendel's mother—is explained by a property that *Grendel* has, namely being her son. She thus has her being *qua* Grendel's mother "in" Grendel.

If I am correct about how Proclus uses the term "ἐν," some other things that he says begin to make more sense. For instance, it begins to make sense why he would want to avoid saying that the monad is "in" the participants belonging to its order. Let us return to Grendel's dame for a moment. The fact that she is Grendel's mother has no logical priority over the fact that Grendel is her son; indeed, the former fact presupposes the latter. Consequently, her being his mother cannot *explain* his being her son. Or take another illustration: a knower is only a knower insofar as the thing he knows is known. His status as knower is logically dependent upon or

simultaneous with the object. Thus, it is *logically*, at least, dependent upon the object *qua* known and does not explain, in any constitutive sense, its character as known.[127] Proclus cannot accept that the relationship holding between the monad and the participants in its order is a correlation as in these two illustrations, for the whole point behind positing a monad is that it has logical priority over the participants so as to be able to provide an explanation of the kind that a mere correlative of the participants cannot.

In addition, it begins to make sense that, if the unparticipated term were to be "in all" (ἐν πᾶσιν ὄν), it would somehow become "parcelled out amongst all" (μερισθὲν εἰς πάντα). If to be "in" a participant is to be correlative with that participant, to say that the unparticipated is "in all" means that it is correlative with *each* participant severally. And, insofar as it is correlative with each participant, its character is also exclusive to that participant. Consider another illustration. King Lear has three daughters: Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. King Lear also has a relation property corresponding to each. Call these properties "being-Goneril's-father," "being-Regan's-father," and "being-Cordelia's-father." There is a sense in which Lear's being Goneril's father presupposes Goneril and her being his daughter. Because Goneril's own character as "being-Lear's-daughter" explains, in part, Lear's "being-Goneril's-father," the relation necessarily involves—logically presupposes in fact—Goneril and her character. Consequently, it cannot be the same as Lear's relation to any other individual. In being dependent upon their respective

[127] Proclus is ambivalent towards the idea that the knower and the known are distinct. He ostensibly follows Plotinus in claiming that the knower *qua* knowing and the known *qua* being known are, in some sense, identical. This commitment presumably helps him to avoid skepticism. On the other hand, he thinks each level knows only itself by strict identity. Each thing knows things on other levels by possessing an answer to them. For instance, the Demiurge knows the intelligibles by containing, or possessing, his own forms; and the soul knows the demiurgic λόγοι by containing soulish λόγοι. Even within a particular rung, the knowing and known elements are distinct, as Being knows itself *qua* intelligible only through its intellective aspect. On the whole, then, Proclus' system seems more inclined to distinction between the knower and the known. See Pieter d'Hoine, "Platonic Forms and the Triad of Being, Life, and Intellect," in *All from One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin, 98–121 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 103. It is perhaps because this distinction remains present in Proclus that his successor, Damascius, feels compelled to draw the distinction even between the thing known and the knowledge's content in the knower: Sebastian Gertz, "Knowledge, Intellect and Being in Damascius' *Doubts and Solutions Concerning First Principles*," *Ancient Philosophy* 36 (2016): 479–494.

relata, the properties/relations by which Lear is father to his three daughters are also incompatible with the other *relata*.

As with the property "being-Grendel's-mother," these properties presuppose their respective *relata*. But notice something else now: King Lear's being Goneril's father cannot explain his relation to Cordelia not only because it presupposes its *relatum* but also because it is necessarily a relation that Lear *cannot* have with Cordelia. King Lear's being a father then turns out not to be a single relational property, in which respect he is the same in relation to each daughter; rather, it is *multiple* properties, each "colored" by its association with a different daughter and hence inapplicable to the others.

If King Lear is to explain *why* he is father to Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, he must have some character that does not presuppose them. He must have some character that explains (a) how his daughters are dependent upon him for their character *qua* daughters (b) without his character *qua* cause being dependent upon their character *qua* daughters. Additionally, with respect to this character, he must be the same in relation to each daughter. Otherwise, his providential act would, again, be affected by the objects—at least insofar as it is sensitive to the fact *that* they are distinct objects—and so cease to be genuinely logically prior and hence explanatory.

It is at this point that I return to how Proclus uses "πρό" in Propositions 23 and 24. Once it has been established that "ἐν" is used to connote a correlation, it is natural to read "πρό" as connoting a relation in which one term has priority over the other: to say that the unparticipated term is "before" the participants is to say that its character is logically prior to theirs in some way. It is independent, not needing them for its own character as Grendel's mother's character *qua* mother is dependent upon Grendel's own character and existence. And because it is

independent, it is *the same* in relation to each effect because, *qua* that character, the cause is a cause simply by being itself. Or, to bring the discussion back to something closer to Proclus' own terms, consider how the hypostasis "Life" relates to its participants. One cannot define living things without at least implicit reference to Life, but the reverse is not true. One can readily define Life without being able to "read off" from it the various individual living things or lives. Or take the form "Humanity." One cannot explain individual humans such as Socrates and Aristotle without reference to Humanity, but the individuals Socrates and Aristotle are not, in the same way, immediately implied by Humanity.

2.2.4 — *Participation involves correlation*

Now, there would be an apparently simple solution for Proclus if this were the whole picture. He could simply say that the monad possesses a certain character, which it then "transfers," as it were, to the participant. Its possessing that character would then be logically prior to its participant's possessing the same character. It would still be a correlative so far as its character as *participated* went, but it would not have the property that it donates due to its correlation with the participant.

The difficulty is that participation, for Proclus, is not a "donation" in the sense that a cause, possessing some character, "transfers" that character to a participant.[128] As Proclus makes clear in his *Elements* Proposition 27, the producer is not parcelled out or reduced even in

[128] This rules out, I think, the reading suggested by Lloyd Gerson in his article "Proclus and the Third Man," *Études platoniciennes* 8 (2011): 105–118, according to which the form has an οὐσία that it shares in common with the things on which it bestows that character.

"physical generation or generative causes."[129] Further, as he says in both the *In Parmenidem* and the *Elements*, the character in the cause and the character in the participant are distinct. Whatever character the participants receive is not the same as the character the cause possesses. Both these textual considerations rule out reading participation as a transfer. Though one can talk about the effect on the subject as a gift, it is not a gift that passes from one hand to the other. When one gives a gift in the everyday sense, the giver by necessity does not keep what he gives; that is *not* the case with the character given by the cause to its products, which "remains" in the cause.

Nor does the cause "produce" a character in its participant so that the latter simply "possesses" the character in its own right. If the form somehow came to be "lodged" in or "transferred to" the subject, the latter would no longer need the former in order to be what it is. That is how certain causes function—namely, those within the same rank: a human receives its human form from another human; but once the gift is given, the new human no longer needs to the former in order to continue to be human. It has its own human form now, a form that belongs to *this* human and not to the parent. In contrast, the character given by the constitutive cause, in Proclus, functions differently: the character belonging to the participant is *always* and by very nature derivative.

Proclus himself gives the answer in the *In Parmenidem*. "[T]he common element in the many instances," he says, "is [their] being derived from the same term," the "same term" referring to the monad.[130] Proclus suggests that the common feature belonging to all the members in a manifold is a relation to a single *relatum*. To have a property derivatively (κατὰ μέθεξιν) is

[129] *ET* Prop. 27. One can find an analogous idea in Christian thought, where it appears as the "doctrine of the undiminished giver," for which see Lewis Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver': Didymus the Blind's *De spiritu sancto* and the Development of Nicene Pneumatology," in *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church: The Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2008*, eds. D. Vincent Twomey SVD and Janet E. Rutherford, 57–72 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010). For more on the undiminished giver in non-Christian Platonic thought, see R.E. Witt, "Plotinus and Posidonius," *Classical Quarterly* 24, no. 3/4 (1930): 198–207, especially 206–207.
[130] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds (880,10–11; see 880,3–12 for necessary context).

to stand in a certain relation to something that has that same property in its nature (καθ’ ὑπάρξιν). To have the property “blue,” in the everyday sense, is to stand in a participation relationship with something that simply *is* blue. Thus, when one looks at a blueberry and a blue jay and sees that both are blue, the common thing one sees is their standing in a certain relation of derivation to something that has blue as its own, non-derivative character.

A final note: all this is not to say that there is no character that the cause genuinely bestows on its participants. Through the participated term, the unparticipated “implants” a power, a certain property or character, in the participant. These are genuine powers: things like ensoulment in bodies for instance. But they are *not* numerically the same in each instance, nor are they the same character as what belongs to the participated or unparticipated terms—though there may well be a genuine *resemblance* to that character.

2.2.5 — *What the “πρό” relationship must involve*

It is now time to consider, with a little more care, what it means for the unparticipated term to stand “before” rather than “in” the participants. In the discussion in the previous sections, I have suggested what the relationship must involve in order to fill its argumentative role for Proclus: the unparticipated term must

a) relate to *all* the relevant participants in such a way as to anticipate them with respect to their common character and

b) relate to the participants in a way that avoids making it *correlative* with them so in any way that would compromise its logical priority. That is, it must stand in an asymmetrical relation with them.

If one manages to secure b) without a), one ends up explaining only *some* desiderata. If one secures a) but not b), on the other hand, one has gotten the right elements on the table—the cause

and *all* its effects—but has lost the explanatory power. In making the cause correlative with its effects, one has made it logically simultaneous with them. It now derives its character from them as much as they their character from it. It cannot, therefore, serve as their source or origin; for they would already need to exist to give it its character, which is what must already *be* there if it is to explain them. Neither, then, can the unparticipated term or its character serve as the "grip" by which the cause knows its effects before the effects come to be.

In what way is the unparticipated related to the participants by being "before" them? I would make two suggestions. First, the participants are related to it as its (indirect) derivatives. In that (again indirect) sense, the unparticipated is related to the participants, namely as that to which they are all related as its derivatives. Although the unparticipated term does not directly cause its participants to possess their character, it *does* give its character to the participated terms, which is what enables them to "pass on," to the extent possible, that character to the participants. Thus, it is possible to attribute their character, ultimately, to the unparticipated form even though It does not have any direct efficient causal relation with them. Second, the unparticipated term relates to the participants by being what they ultimately resemble. An illustration might help. Suppose you are sitting in the Ashmolean Museum and are rather taken by John Everett Millais' *Mariana*. Being a somewhat skilled painter, you decide to try your hand at copying it.[131] The copy turns out beautifully, and you hang it in your parlor. A few weeks later, your friend visits you and sees the copy. She is inspired to try her own hand at painting. Because she is less skilled, though, she decides that an attempt to copy *Mariana* itself is beyond her. Your own copy, however, is cruder, with more obvious brushstrokes and unsubtle shadowing, so your friend decides that she should copy *it* instead. Her hope is that, in approximating your work, she will

[131] This is obviously purely hypothetical: the author makes no claims to any skill whatever in painting or the other visual arts.

also approximate the original *Mariana*. Suppose that she does this multiple times, ending up with several copies based on your copy. These ultimate copies resemble, in some sense, the *Mariana*, though they have no direct paradigm–copy relationship with it. They resemble it by standing in a paradigm–copy relationship with *your* copy, which in turn allows them to resemble *Mariana*. Yet there *is* a peculiar relationship between the ultimate copies and the original: the whole "chain" along which the resemblance "travels" is made possible by the fact that the first painting exists and has a certain, resemblable character in its own right. Similarly, the unparticipated is resembled by the participants simply by being itself. It does not stand in a paradigm–copy relation to them, which would make it a paradigm for them. There is no difference between the unparticipated-being-resembled-by-*x* and the unparticipated-being-itself. If it gives them something, it is by giving them something to resemble, which they are then directly enabled to resemble by the participated terms.

The main disanalogy here obviously arises from the fact that, with the paintings, the analogues for the participated terms—your first copy—is itself a copy. In contrast, the participated terms are not copies. They are somehow identical in character to the unparticipated term, the only difference being that they *do* stand in paradigm–copy relationship with participants. In this respect, another illustration is perhaps nearer the mark. Consider a blueprint. It has a character in its own right. That character is not dependent upon its being a blueprint *for* anything. Now, suppose that one were to make two copies of the blueprint. Now there are three blueprints: one original and two derivative ones. All possess the same character, which enables them to serve as blueprints of things. Next, suppose that the two replica blueprints are used as the blueprint for a house each. Now, it is true that the two replica blueprints have become correlative with the houses for which they serve as blueprints; in fact, they now function as blueprints

precisely in that they *are* correlative with the houses in this way. Meanwhile, the original blueprint is not the blueprint for those houses; it is not correlative with them. Even so, it is in some sense *responsible* for them insofar as they are based on the character found in the two replica blueprints, which are derived from *its* own, original character. Despite the fact that the houses were not directly based on the same blueprint, they *were* based on blueprints whose own character they received first from the original blueprint.

The replica blueprints are linked to the original blueprint by an identity relationship: they are formally the same. The things built according to the replica blueprints need not have the same character; they stand in a "copied–from" relationship to their respective replica blueprints and thereby *resemble* the original blueprint. And resemblance, as Proclus and other Platonists from his era hold, is an asymmetrical relation. The replica blueprints *can* be resembled by their copies, but they cannot do so without also standing in the original–copy relation, in respect of which relation they do not have logical priority. But the copies *can* stand in a resemblance relation to the original blueprint without its standing in a reciprocal relation to them.

2.2.6 — *What the participated–unparticipated distinction does*

Proclus employs the unparticipated–participated form distinction in order to enable himself to make both the claims he wants to make about the divine ideas and their role in divine productive foreknowledge. He can say that the copy is anticipated by the unparticipated form in that the latter possesses, in advance, the content that will later make an appearance in the participant; this is a bit like saying that one knows the portrait in advance because one knows the likeness that will appear in it. As the same time, he knows that to know the participant (and the effect/irradiation that takes up lodging in it) *as* effect/participant means to know its cause not *qua*

substance but *qua* cause/participated—that is, as in relation to the effect. So, he introduces the *participated* form, whose content *does* involve its belonging to that recipient. For instance, Socrates was known *qua* man in advance by the form Man. But he is also known *qua* concrete, actual effect and individual by the participated cause, which knows him as its direct effect because it knows itself as his cause.

I wish to put forward one final point as evidence for my claims. In setting out his own philosophical system, Proclus engages in polemics against other philosophical schools; and certain among these polemics make best sense if one grants the claims I have been making so far and, in turn, support my claim that Proclus was concerned with the relationships among the divine ideas, productive foreknowledge, and simultaneous referentiality and transcendence. In his commentary on the *Parmenides*, Proclus has a lengthy passage contrasting the Neoplatonic position on providence with the positions taken by its rivals. He mentions two groups. The first "is concerned to preserve" divine providence and "its relation to matter."[132] The second instead emphasizes providence's "unrelatedness" (τὸ ἄσχετον), compromising its providential and creative power.[133] In contrast, Plato "preserves [both] on a non-relational level [its] providential aspect … and [its] transcendental aspect as knowing and providing for … secondary entities."[134]

> Preserving as he does, then, both these aspects simultaneously, it is natural that he should have demonstrated, [in] raising difficulties, that it is absurd to allow a relationship between the patterns and their participants; and in the present argument, that if one preserves the Forms themselves completely without relativity, without adding in what way they are both transcendent and yet penetrate through all things, and are everywhere as regards their providential aspect, while being nowhere [as regards] their essence, then … they [cannot] have causal and transcendental intellection [concerning] our affairs.[135]

[132] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds 130–131 (921,12–14): οἱ μὲν τὸ προνοητικὸν τῆς θείας αἰτίας μετὰ σχέσεως ἐνύλου φιλάττοντες.
[133] Luna/Segonds 131 (921,15–22).
[134] Luna 131 (921,22–26): Ἀλλ' ὅ γε Πλάτωνος λόγος καὶ τὸ προνοητικὸν τῶν εἰδῶν τῶν θείων … ἄσχετον τηρεῖ, καὶ τὸ ἐξῃρημένον γνωστικὸν τῶν δευτέρων καὶ προνοητικόν.
[135] *In Parmenidem* IV, Luna/Segonds 131 (921,28–922,1).

Proclus never names his targets in this passage, but it seems likely that they are the Stoics and the Peripatetics respectively.[136] That is not remarkable in its own right. One would expect him to engage in what is, by the time he is writing, a longstanding debate over providence.[137] What is interesting is that, in this passage, Proclus hints at why, in attempting to establish the most satisfactory position on providence, he feels the need to strike the proper balance between transcendence and immanence. In particular, it is notable that he thinks a successful account, like Plato's, will secure divine knowledge as both providential (and cognizant) and non-relative to its objects. Both the Peripatetic and the Stoic fail to provide satisfactory accounts because, in different ways, they fail to secure one aspect or the other.

My suggestion is, though Proclus never quite says this, that one main problem with the Stoic and the Peripatetic accounts is that they fail to secure, respectively, divine *fore*knowledge and divine fore*knowledge*. This fact is more obvious with the Peripatetics: Proclus explicitly says that, by failing to maintain *some* relation between the causes and their effects, also surrender the ability to say that the causes know their effects. And that he thinks so makes sense. For the Aristotelian, God is thought thinking itself. God takes no thought for other things and receives nothing from them. So, while things are ordered by providence in a sense—they circle around God, desiring him and attempting to become like him as far as their own natures will permit—there is no divine plan according to which things unfold. Things within the world are left to their own devices.

For the Stoic, in contrast, the world unfolds with divine involvement at each step. More specifically, it unfolds according to the immanent principles, or λόγοι, found in all things. These

[136] See Introduction from Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, "Introduction," in Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, trans., *Proclus: Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, 2.
[137] Robert W. Sharples, "Threefold Providence: The History and Background of a Doctrine," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Supplement* 78 (2003): 107–127.

principles, however, are inseparable from the very processes they are to explain.[138] They are, as it were, along for the ride. Consider, for instance, the enmattered redness in some particular apple. In one sense, its presence does explain why the apple is red. But because it has no existence except *as* the redness belonging to that apple, it is every bit as dependent on the apple as the apple is on it. There is little room for oversight, as it were. As with the Aristotelian, it is difficult to see how the Stoic (at least on such a picture) could say that there is anything like a divine plan for the world. Because there is so little distance between the λόγοι and their supposed effects, how things unfold seems to be an inexplicable brute fact more than something that can be attributed to beneficent oversight—at least if one thinks, like Proclus and his predecessors do, that providence involves something like forethought.

This reading clarifies certain things in the Proclan corpus. Proclus often talks about the need for the forms and other true causes to be both immanent and transcendent, but the reasons he gives in such passages can be hazy.[139] But it becomes much clearer on this reading. If (a) Proclus thinks providence requires productive foreknowledge, which (b) is secured for him by something like the divine ideas, and (c) the divine ideas need to be both related to their effects to be referentially useful and unrelated to their effects to explain how the divine knows its products *before* they come to be, then it would make perfect sense for him to conclude that (d) the Stoics and the Aristotelians, by failing to secure the necessary transcendence and immanence for the divine ideas, also fail to secure divine foreknowledge and hence divine providence. This reading helps to clarify what is at stake in these passages from the commentary on the *Parmenides*; the

[138] *In Parm.* IV, Luna/Segonds 78 (888,5–9).

[139] Consequently, the explanations made by commentators likewise tend to be hazy. Take, for instance, E.R. Dodds' comment on Props. 23 and 98: Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, 210–211 and 251–252. Dodds says, in his commentary on Prop. 23, "If participation is to be real, the Form must be immanent, and therefore divided; if it to be participation of undivided principle, the Form must be transcendent, and therefore not directly participated." He does not explain *why*, once Proclus has done away with the idea that a form is spatially located, he cannot have one and the same form equally present to all its instances.

passages from the *Parmenides*, in turn, show that Proclus certainly does connect divine productive foreknowledge (and hence providence) with his concern with transcendence and immanence.

A second reason can be supplied. This one is perhaps more intuitive and has to do with Proclus' and other Neoplatonists' desire to attribute something like real forethought and knowledge to providence. The reason is that, if there is nothing like a blueprint in the artisan's mind, anticipating the product, it seems difficult to say that the artist really intended to produce the art or that she can be held responsible for the product. One can say that an artist intends to produce a sculpture because, before there is any trace of a sculpture in the block of marble on which she works, she already has in mind the form of the statue that she will produce. If, on the other hand, the form of the statue came into her head only *as* she was going along, as if the marble were giving her the idea as much as she was imparting the form to the marble, her preconception would serve no such role. So too with the gods in Proclus.

3 — Divine ideas and the concern with immanence–transcendence

So far, my argument in the last chapter and this has shown that Proclus is concerned with holding two different commitments that seem to stand in tension. He wants to say that all things in the universe are contained in advance by their causes. All things must therefore be, in some way, anticipated by providence. On the other hand, he wants to avoid concluding that, because the cause anticipates its effect, it is therefore, *qua* cause, related to its effect in a way that would compromise its explanatory priority.

This tension is interesting in its own right, but it takes on additional significance when one considers that Proclus wants to say that providence knows what it is going to make.

Providence must be able to *intend* its effects. When that is kept in mind, it becomes clear that the problem has to do not merely with whether the cause contains a certain potency for producing the thing that it does in fact produce but with whether that potency can be understood to "refer" to the effect in advance. Like the κόσμος νοητός in Philo or the ideas in Alcinous, the effect-as-precontained-in-the-cause, the cause-*qua*-imitable, functions as proxy for the effect, allowing the cause an intentional "grip" on the effect without presupposing its existence.

If one rereads the problem in this way, it sounds more like this: Proclus wants to say, on the one hand, that there exists some idea in the divine mind that "refers" to the object so that, by intending to make something in accordance with that idea, the divine mind intends to make *that* very copy or object. On the other hand, Proclus wants to avoid making the cause *qua* cause relative to its effect, which would presuppose the effect and so render the cause without much use in explaining it.

His concern is, in other words, with something very much like the CFP. If that is correct, then Proclus is in fact advancing the divine ideas tradition in a very important way. His predecessors posited the divine ideas in order to explain how God knows what he will make before he makes it, but they did not do much work to explain *how* such a system works. In contrast, Proclus *does* set out to provide such an explanation by fleshing out the manner in which the "divine ideas" are not mere, particular blueprints but a character precontained in the divine itself—and imitable by various possible participants.

Proclus also parts ways with his predecessors in wrestling more clearly than they did with the proper logical relationship between the "divine ideas" and their effects. He, unlike them, sees the possible problems in trying to get the "proxy" for the intended object to "hook up to" the effect in the right way. On the one hand, Proclus wants the self-knowledge in question to be

logically prior to its being directed towards certain effects or products. Hence his interest in stating that God creates things because he knows them rather than knows them because he will create them—that is, the explanation runs from the "idea" or "blueprint" to the thing made according to it rather than the reverse. On the other hand, he thinks that causal self-knowledge requires a precontained correspondent to the effect. These two desires stand in tension since the latter might be taken to imply that the cause, in order to know its effect, must stand in an antecedent relation to something, either the effect itself or something, like the divine idea, that can stand in for the effect, serving as a "proxy."

4 — A problem and would-be solutions: the henads and the One

In brief, the problem is as follows: participants must derive their character *as* distinct from somewhere, but they cannot derive their character from that in which they participate. The reason they cannot get their character from the things in which they participate is that, on the Platonic framework, the participant only receives what is the *same* from that in which it participates, so that, for instance, Socrates receives his humanity but not his pallor from the Human—and even if he had no other characteristics than being human, he would still be different from the Human insofar as he is a copy and not the original, an effect and not the cause; and that difference cannot be explained by the fact that he is caused by the Human, which only causes in him what, in him, is identical with it—namely, his humanity. Besides, even if it were possible for a Platonic cause to precontains the participant as such, the result would be that the participant contains nothing distinct from the form—a fact that would collapse the distinction

that was implied in the first place. To put it in other words, Proclus wants to but cannot explain difference.[140]

In general, this problem does not come into the foreground because Proclus can defer the problem further and further up (or down) his system. The fact that Life requires a substratum on which to operate is not a problem because that substratum is supplied by the Forms, whose work in the subject make it suitable for operation by Life. But, as I shall attempt to show, the problem eventually arises when one tries to ask how the subject as such is established—that is, when Proclus is forced to ask how the cause produces the very individuality presupposed by all causal operation.

What I am referring to as "individuality," though not answering to a single term used by Proclus, does pick out a concept in his work. My suggestion is that he comes closest to the concept when using the term "unity." To establish that he uses "unity" to gesture at something like what my term "individuality" picks out, I turn to his *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*. There, in a passage in which he explains how it is that providence knows and arranges all things, he says the following:

> Just as of all perceptible things there must be some … criterion and likewise of the Forms prior to the perceptible things there must be some other criterion which discerns them—for if one part were to discern one object, another part another, it would be similar, as someone says, to "me perceiving this thing and you another"—thus there must be something prior to the Forms, having a unitary knowledge of both universals and individuals. For how could it otherwise order some things as participants, others as participated?[141]

[140] And that is the case even though Proclus did think about the need for causes to explain difference, unlikeness, likenss, sameness, and so forth. See, just for one example, Pieter d'Hoine, "The Forms of Likeness and Unlikeness in Proclus," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy* 29 (2014): 1–37.
[141] *TP* I, §4,25–33, p. 57: *Et enim, sicut sensibilium omnium oportet esse impartibile aliquid iudicatorium, et specierum que ante sensibilia aliud et has discernens—si enim alio aliud, dicit aliquis, simile ac si hoc quidem ego, illud autem tu sentias—sic oportet esse aliquid ante species, unam habens cognitionem universaliumque et individuorum; aut qualiter ordinabit hec quidem ut participantia, hec autem ut participata?*

Proclus thinks that, in order for providence to establish the κόσμος, it must possess a character that is more universal and hence extends to both particulars and universals, both forms and perceptibles, both participants and their participated terms. And the only thing that these have in common, he says, are their "being one."[142] Although Proclus does not extend his move here to things beyond ἄτομα and universals, it seems clear from the *Elements* that all things, up to and including the hypostases, are dependent upon unity from the One. It seems reasonable, then, to think that he holds that each thing is, logically speaking, first a unity and only *then* established as belonging to a particular τάξις or standing in participatory relations with other things.

That unity is supposed to function as the prerequisite for entry into participation relation already suggests that unity functions as something *somewhat* like individuality in the sense I have been using the term. But it is another passage that makes the connection clearest. In the seventh problem concerning providence, Proclus considers whether one might ask "why one thing has come to be in this particular rank in the universe and that thing in another." Again, he is allowing that there might be a distinction to draw between a thing and its particular character, its rank, its role as participated or participant, and so forth. His initial reply is simply to say that there can be no further investigation into the matter, for "to ask this question is to ask for a principle for a principle. The only principle for such things is the universal order. One should not look for a principle prior to it in cases involving things that have nothing prior, for there is nothing [prior] at all.[143] He seems to be rejecting the question entirely, though he recognizes that one *can* ask it.

[142] Steel and Opsomer, *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, "Introduction," 18–22; Steel, "Providence and Evil," in *All from One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin, 240–257 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[143] *TP* VII, §48,1–10, p. 111: Et non querendum iterum propter quid hoc quidem in hoc ordine factum est universi, hoc autem in alio, et hoc quidem delectatur, hoc autem tristatur propter principium sui ipsius consistentie aut id quod preter naturam superducens aut quod secundum naturam consistenti secundum ipsum: nam hoc querere est querere principium principii. Principium enim solummodo talium est universi ordo, quo non oportet prius querere in non habentibus aliquid prius neque totaliter entibus.

Nonetheless, it soon becomes clear that Proclus *does* recognize that the question can be asked. It might not be appropriate, but it is conceivable and sufficiently intelligible to warrant a reply:

> If … something from elsewhere and having a prior existence comes into this order … it is necessary to ask in [that thing's] case … about its merit and about its being in agreement with its rank and about what connects it with its rank—otherwise the one would be connected in vain with the other. Everything that does not enter into a rank, however, but originates in it, is in unison with its order, even if there is nothing which brings them together. And therein consists the principle of merit for that thing, namely to be bound up with the order from which it has taken its origin. For the fact of having originated it receives no merit. For everything that is in accordance with merit is attributed to something pre-existing, but this thing did not exist at all before its coming into being in such a way as to make it possible for us to ask about the merit of its coming into being. Therefore … for those who exist prior to their order [in the universe] their order is in accordance with merit; for those who originate from a certain order [their order] is not in accordance with merit, but is the principles of what is [for them] in accordance with merit. For what is in accordance with merit is posterior and not first.[144]

Proclus is not only aware that there might be a distinction between the individual and its rank in the universe; he even admits that there is a certain (purely hypothetical) sense in which one might ask how one came to be placed in one τάξις rather than another. He admits that, *if* one somehow existed before one came to be in a given cosmic rank, there might be legitimate concerns about whether one deserves to belong to that rank rather than another. His response takes the issue seriously. If one originates within a certain rank, he says, one can have no claim on where one is put because one does not, in actual fact, have an existence prior to existing in

[144] *TP* VII, §48,12–31, pp. 111–112: Si autem aliquid aliunde et prius ens venit in ordinem, in isto quod secundum dignitatem et quod ad ordinem consonum inquirere necessarium et complicans ambo, non frustra aliud alii complecti. Omne autem quodcumque non in ordinem intrat, sed ab ordine fit, concordat ordini, et si nichil sit conducens; et hoc est ipsi le secundum dignitatem: ordini colligari a quo gentium est; ipsius autem quod est factum fuisse dignitatem non suscipit: omne enim le secundum dignitatem attribuitur preexistenti; hoc autem non erat totaliter ante generationem, ut utique et eam que secundum dignitatem quereremus generationem. Quare … entibus quidem ante ordinem ordo secundum dignitatem; hiis autem qui ab ordine non secundum dignitatem, sed ordo principium eius quod secundum dignitatem: nam le secundum dignitatem posterius, sed non primum.

that rank.[145] Notice that, even though Proclus does not consider the question to be appropriate to ask in the end, he never denies that it is, in some sense at least, a sensible question.[146] His response is to say that, in actual fact, there are not cases in which the individual "first" came to be in one rank and then came to be in another rank so that one might ask about whether the assignment was merited. But that does not preclude the *conceptual* possibility, which suggests that Proclus is willing to entertain that, notionally at least, there is a distinction to draw between the individual that stands in participation-relations, possesses certain characters, and so forth, and the particular rank and relations that it possesses. Each thing, at least logically speaking, possesses some individuality or self that is able to enter into relations, bear properties, and so forth. I take it that this something is filling the same logical role as my "individuality."

Although Proclus himself does not state that the unity that all things possess is the same as the individuality that they must possess in order to enter into certain ranks and relations, it seems plausible: in the very same treatise where he entertains the latter concept, he also holds that it is the former that enables providence to assign things to and arrange things in their respective ranks and roles. Given that identification is plausible, it also becomes plausible to see Proclus as attempting, in his *Ten Problems*, to fold even the individuality presupposed by participation relationships under providence. And the manner in which he attempts to do so is by appealing, as one might expect, to participation. He claims that providence knows all things through its being one, namely its existing as *an* individual thing in the universal hierarchy:

[145] In an unexpected way, this argument anticipates the non-identity theodicy proposed by Robert Merrihew Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," *Synthese* 49, no. 1 (1981): 9–10 and Vince R. Vitale, *Non-identity Theodicy: A Grace-Based Response to the Problem of Evil*. Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 179–180, 190–191.

[146] I suspect that Proclus is responding to the Stoics here. For the Stoics, the world repeats in endless cycles. In that context, questions may arise as to whether the same individual, being numerically the same across different cycles, might end up in a different rank in different cosmic epochs. Proclus certainly knew of the Stoics, and his own tradition allows that souls might migrate into higher or lower animals, so it would not be unnatural to ask this sort of question.

> Beyond all [other knowledges], however, is providence's knowledge. It exists above intellect, having established itself in an activity prior to thinking [i.e. pronoia] due to the One alone, according to which every god is said both to exist and to exercise providence over all things. By this One, according to which all exists, providence knows all things … If, then, it is according to its being one that providence is that which is said to be and imparts what is good to all things, and if this [good] is the same as the One, it is due to the way that it exists as providence for all that it also knows the things for which it provides. It is therefore by being one that providence can know all things, i.e. by the fact that it does not pertain to wholes more than parts, not more to which is according to nature than to what is contrary to nature, not more to forms than to the formless.[147]

To know them as "one" is to know them not according to their properties nor even according to their rank or kind in the hierarchy but simply as what bears some "unity" or "identity" from the One. The problem is that even the implanted unity arising from the henads is only a ὑποκείμενον–1 and must still take up its residence in a ὑποκείμενον–2 unless one is willing to collapse the distinction between the subject and the effect produced in it. (I shall consider that latter possibility later.) From these passages, we can learn the following three things:

a) There is a "thisness" to things
b) A thing's "thisness" is established by providence
c) The henads supply a "unity" that does double duty as "thisness"

I am now going to show that Proclus attributes providence to the henads, or gods, and that they exercise providence by irradiating things with their own characteristic: unity. In order to do so, I shall first need briefly to characterize the henads. The gods, or henads, are the One's

[147] *TP* I, §4,1–25, pp. 56–57: Ultra autem has omnes est providentie cognition, super intellectum existens et uno solo, secundum quod et est unusquisque deus et providere omnium dicitur, in ea que ante intelligere operatione sistens se ipsum. Hoc itaque uno, secundum quod et consistit, cognoscit omnia … Si igitur secundum le unum providentia hoc est quod dicitur et dat omnibus bonum, hoc autem idem et le unum, a qua existentia providet omnium, in hac et cognoscit que providentur: uno ergo habet cognoscere omnia; hoc autem idem huic: nichil magis esse totorum quam partium, eorumque que secundum naturam quam eorum que preter naturam, specierumque et eorum que sine specie.

answer to participated forms, particular souls, and so forth. Like their counterparts in the lower ranks, the henads fill two different roles: first, they pass the One's character down to the lower monads, which are their direct participants. Secondly, they irradiate unity-states upon the various concrete particulars that require unity in order for Being to be able to operate upon them.

As discussed earlier, each monad generates participated terms that are the same in quality though not in scope. So, all particular souls, for instance," originate "from one primal Soul," while "to intellective essence belongs an intellective monad," the particular "intelligences proceeding from a single Intelligence and reverting thither." Finally, "for the One which is prior to all things[,] there [are] the henads, and[,] for the henads[,] the upward tension linking them with the One."[148] If the henads function like the other particular hypostases, then they are responsible for implanting the unity that their participants enjoy. It would not be unreasonable to think that Proclus is attempting to say that the very individuality that things have, logically presupposed by their possessing any character or place in the cosmos at all, is attributable to the gods.

One can perhaps see how such a view comes out most clearly in Proclus' views on theurgy. It must be noted that I am not being entirely original here. I am echoing Radek Chlup and Edward Butler, who have likewise noted that, in theurgy, Proclus attempts to connect the highest levels—the henads—with the lowest—individualities—through providence.

What, exactly, theurgy is depends on which accounts one believes. By some accounts, such as that found in Porphyry, theurgy consists in the methods by which one attains union with the gods. It is decidedly non-manipulative. On the other hand, some practitioners seem to have considered theurgy from a more instrumental angle, using its rites to perform various miraculous

[148] *ET* Prop. 21. … καὶ τῇ τάξει τῶν ψυχῶν πάρεστιν ἐκ μιᾶς τε ἄρχεσθαι ψυχῆς τῆς πρώτης καὶ εἰς πλῆθος ψυχῶν ὑποβαίνειν καὶ τὸ πλῆθος εἰς τῆν μίαν ἀνάγειν, καὶ τῇ νοερᾷ οὐσίᾳ μονάδα τε εἶναι νοερὰν καὶ νόων πλῆθος ἐξ ἑνὸς νοῦ προελθὸν καὶ εἰς ἐκείνην ἐπιστρέφον, καὶ ταῖς ἑνάσι τὲν εἰς τὸ ἓν ἀνάτασιν.

feats. Julian, for example, is supposed to have employed it to bring rain in drought.[149] On either picture, the same basic picture is present: the world is crisscrossed with sympathetic connections linking individuals back to the gods, whose character flows through these connections as channels.[150] In some ways, this system functions just like participation in general does. Each god has a unique character, or ἰδιότης, which it bestows on certain beings; the creature receives an immanent answer to that character (σύνθημα, σύμβολον); and the creature must, as in standard participation, be prepared and receptive in order to participate (directly or indirectly) in its god.[151] However, there are also some very important differences from standard participation. Perhaps the most important is that, while participation generally involves some characterizable likeness between the participant and the participated, the connection between a god and its "series" is not so easily pinned down. In a treatise on theurgic rites, Proclus says this.

> Why do heliotropes move together with the sun, selenotropes with the moon, moving around as far as able with the luminaries of the cosmos? All things pray according to their own station and sing hymns, either intellectively or rationally or naturally or sensibly, to the heads of universal chains. And since the heliotrope is also moved toward that which it readily opens, if anyone hears it striking the air as it moves about, he perceives in the sound that it offers to the King [i.e. the sun, or the sun god, Helios] the kind of hymn that a plant can sing.[152]

Similarly:

> The lotus also shows such a sympathy. Before the sun's rays appear, it is closed, but as the sun first rises, it is slowly unfolded, and the higher the light goes, the more it is expanded, and then it is contracted again as the sun goes down … One can also see that

[149] See Stang, *"No Longer I"*, 125.

[150] Hence the sympathy (συμπαθῆ) among all things mentioned in *ET* Prop. 140.

[151] *ET* Props. 140, 142–143.

[152] Proclus, *Sur l'art hiératique*, in Joseph Bidez, ed., *Michel Psellus: Épître sur la Chrysopée: Opuscules et extraits sur l'alchimie lat météorologie et la démonologie*, 139–151. Vol. 6. in *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*, edited by J. Bidez, F. Cumont, A. Delatte, O. Lagercrantz, and J. Ruska (Bruxelles: Maurice Lamertin, 1928), 148,10–18: Ἢ πόθεν ἡλιοτρόπια μὲν ἡλίῳ, σεληνοτρόπια δὲ σελήνῃ συγκινεῖται συμπεριπολοῦντα ἐς δύναμιν τοῖς τοῦ κόσμου φωστῆρσιν; Εὔχεται γὰρ πάντα κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν τάξιν καὶ ὑμνεῖ τοὺς ἡγεμόνας τῶν σειρῶν ὅλων ἢ νοερῶς ἢ λογικῶς ἢ φυσικῶς ἢ αἰσθητῶς· καὶ τὸ ἡλιοτρόπιον ᾧ ἔστιν εὔλυτον, τούτῳ κινεῖται και, εἰ δή τις αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν περιστροφὴν ἀκούειν τὸν ἀέρα πλήσσοντος οἷός τε ἦν, ὕμνον ἄν τινα διὰ τοῦ ἔχου τούτου συνῄστθετο τῷ Βασιλεῖ προσάγοντος, ὃν δύναται φυτὸν ὑμνεῖν. I follow Radek Chlup's translation on *Proclus: An Introduction*, 130.

> stones inhale the influences of the luminaries, as we see the sunstone with its golden rays imitating the rays of the sun; and the stone called Bel's eye (which should be called the sun's eye, they say) resembling the pupil of the eye and emitting a glittering light from the center of its pupil.[153]

There is something different about the participation involved in cases like this. Participation as outlined earlier makes a certain "logical" sense. Humans can all trace their humanity to the form Human, and all beings can trace their being back to the hypostasis Being. But it is far less clear what common character the sun god bestows on the lotus, the lion, the sunflower, and certain precious stones. I adduce two points to clarify what is going on. First, is must be reiterated that Proclus is a practicing theurge. He believes that the gods had revealed certain rites at which reason would never have arrived.[154] He is thus committed to the idea that certain natural substances, for instance, have inscrutable links to the divine and, through the divine, to one another. Second, as he puts it in the *Elements*, "Every god is a beneficent henad or unifying excellence" (Πᾶς μὲν θεὸς ἑνάς ἐστιν ἀγαθουργὸς ἤ ἀγαθότης ἑνοποιός), meaning that it possesses a peculiar goodness (τι τῆς ἀγαθότητος ἰδίωμα) that it bestows on different participants in different ways.[155] For instance, certain gods are associated with purgation or purification, and one can therefore expect to see purgative tendencies "in souls, animals, vegetables, and minerals."[156] Both these points together suggest that Proclus is interested in explaining how and why different beings can be united by a single theurgic, sympathetic character that cuts across

[153] Proclus, *Sur l'art hiératique*, 149,12–25: Καὶ ὁ λωτὸς δὲ παρίστησι τὴν συμπάθειαν, μεμυκὼς μὲν πρὸ τῶν ἡλιακῶν αὐγῶν, διαπτυσσόμενος δε πως ἠρέμα τοῦ ἡλίου πρῶτον φανέντος, καὶ ὅσον ὑψοῦται τὸ φῶς, ἐξαπλούμενος, καὶ αὖθις συναγόμενος, ἐπὶ δύσιν ἰόντος … Ἀλλὰ καὶ λίθους ἔστιν ἰδεῖν ταῖς τῶν φωστήρων ἀπορροίαις ἐμπνέοντας, ὡς τὸν μὲν ἡλίτην ταῖς χρυσοειδέσιν ἀκτῖσιν ὁρῶμεν τὰς ἡλιακὰς ἀκτῖνας μιμούμενον, τὸν δὲ Βήλου προσαγρεόμενον ὀφθαλμὸν καὶ σχῆμα παραβλήσιον ἔχοντα κόραις ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἐκ μέσης τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ κόρης στιλπνὸν ἀφιέντα φῶς, ὅν φασιν ἡλίου χρῆναι καλεῖν ὀφθαλμόν. Radek Chlup's translation, *Proclus: An Introduction*, 131.

[154] For the same reason, humans cannot think their way all the way up to the highest gods. Instead, the gods themselves must help one. Rebecca Coughlin, "Theurgy, Prayer, Participation, and Divinization in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Dionysius* 24 (2006): 152–157.

[155] *ET* Prop. 133

[156] *ET* Prop. 145: ἐν ψυχαῖς ἐστι κάθαρσις καὶ ἐν ζῴοις καὶ ἐν φυτοῖς καὶ ἐν λίθοις…

any apparent ontological categories.[157] This is consonant with the idea that the Good stands above hypostatic Being in the cosmic hierarchy; the gods, being particular goodnesses and so being hyperessential, can bestow a character that is hypo-essential and so wholly unaccountable in ontological terms.

Radek Chlup takes the συνθήματα that the gods implant in creatures to be analogous to "the immanent 'forms in matter' (or *logoi*)," reflecting "the gods themselves."[158] I take it that Chlup is basically correct. One can draw a further conclusion. Given that the gods are hyperessential unities, what they possess by nature and pass on to creatures through participation is their own, unique character—their being *that* very god and no other, by which they are distinct from other gods without being different from them in any intelligible way. One possible implication to draw from this fact, as suggested by both Chlup and Edward Butler, would be that it is this σύνθημα that constitutes each thing as that very thing. If they are correct, then the συνθήματα might seem to offer the conceptual resources Proclus needs. He can now say that the gods explain even the very fact that things occupy a certain place in the cosmic hierarchy—participated or participating, particular or universal, and so forth.

The difficulty with such a view is that whatever pure individuality the gods may have would seem not to be something they can pass on to their participants. To be sure, if there is a special character that each god possesses and that it can pass on to creatures, then one has an answer to how there might be a subject "underneath" the properties, as it were—one that, moreover, would fit the bill for a pure, (ontologically) characterless ὑποκείμενον. However, the character thus given would still be something that (logically) needs a subject that can receive it.

[157] Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, 131–133 says something similar. For this reason, Butler claims that theurgy presents the necessary "empirical" element in Proclus' otherwise empty logical system. "The Gods and Being," 94–96. One may not be able to say just what the similarity is between a sunflower and the sun, but one knows that there *is* some such connection.
[158] Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, 131.

As Proclus admits, even the gods cannot act upon a thing without its cooperation,[159] meaning that it must have a certain receptivity to or fitness for the divine illuminations. Whatever individuality the συνθήματα manage to secure, therefore, is not the ὑποκείμενον–2 that would be needed.

And, indeed, if Proclus *does* see the fact that things are ordered individually as explained by the gods and their illuminations, he is not entirely settled on that solution. In the *Elements* and the *Parmenides*, as mentioned earlier, he ultimately attributes things' basic passivity, receptivity, and, perhaps, numerical identity to prime matter—at least for material things. (How individual souls or intelligences are to be understood as individual when their whole self is seemingly nothing *but* the character produced by the unparticipated cause, or monad, is not at all clear since Proclus rejects Plotinus' solution of positing intelligible matter; but that is a different problem.[160]) Prime matter stems from no other source than the One—not even the gods produce it.[161] Unlike all other causes, the One somehow produces that its participated terms, the gods, need in order to have something on which to operate.[162] It alone produces its own participant—indeed, the most basic participant, the ultimate ὑποκείμενον for all characters, including Being and the hypo-essential συνθήματα. To put it another way, the One somehow produces its own other. Note how difficult it is to fit such a productive activity into the general participatory frame on which Proclus relies. His scheme generally involves four terms, each numerically distinct from the others:

[159] *TP* IV, §§22–25. Vanderkwaak notes passages in Proclus' commentary on the *Timaeus* where Proclus seems to maintain more explicitly than elsewhere that prime matter remains outside the gods' sway, presumably because it serves as the basic substrate for their activity: "A Shrine for the Everlasting Gods," 111–113.
[160] Riggs, "On the Absence of the Henads."
[161] *ET* Prop 72, Cor.; Prop, 59, where he admittedly describes matter as "last of beings" but probably means it is first among things that in some very broad sense are even if they do not participate Being; for if it *did* participate in Being, it would not be produced *only* by the first, i.e. the One. Certainly, he cannot mean to say that any actually existing substance is simple: even body has form after its fashion. Finally, see the *Commentary on the Timaeus* I 226.15–22, where it is said explicitly that the gods do not produce the first and most primal matter. This is noted by Matthew Vanderkwaak, "A Shrine for the Everlasting Gods," Dionysius 37 (2019): 87–113. *In Parm.* VI, Luna/Segonds 39 (1064,7–12).
[162] For further discussion, see Greig, *The First Principle*, 181–186.

a) the unparticipated term,

b) the participated term,

c) the participant, and

d) the character implanted in the participant by the participated term.

In keeping with this scheme, Proclus assumes (a) that the cause in a participation relation operates on a participant that is distinct from itself and (b) that the cause can bestow on its participant only a character that it itself possesses. If the One produces matter "below" the unity irradiated by the henads, then it seems clear that matter is not characterized by unity. Its only "character," if it can be called that, is its basic identity as distinct from the One (and from the other terms in the hierarchy)—an identity that, as *its* identity, presumably cannot be in the One. And even were such a thing possible within the participatory frame, it would necessitate smuggling difference into the One, which Proclus is loath to do.

Here is where the entire system might seem to teeter. At each level, Proclus has been able to defer the problem to another level. But once it reaches the One and its ultimate participant, prime matter, the problem becomes stark: how can a thing's very identity as distinct from its cause be anticipated *in* that cause? For, presumably, its being *other* than its cause, if that otherness has any content at all, must not simply be the same as what is found in the cause. It might be that Proclus envisions the One as simply producing matter without presupposing a recipient, or participant, to operate upon. But it would then be obvious that the production *does* fall outside the usual participatory scheme. For the One would not then be producing simply by

offering its own character to a participant; it would be producing the very difference from itself that must be presupposed in order for the participatory scheme to work.[163]

5 — Evaluating Proclus

I have attempted to make plausible the case (a) that Proclus was aware that there is something like individuality, (b) that he wishes to bring that individuality under divine providence as something that it can foreknow and hence arrange, and (c) that the closest he comes to suggestion a solution is in suggesting that there is something like an immanent unity, or σύνθημα, that the gods bestow on each thing prior to its various intelligible characters or assignment to a particular τάξις. Now, I wish briefly to consider some difficulties with this solution. There are two in particular worth mentioning. First, Proclus is committed to the idea that the character found in a hypostatic cause and the character seen in material particulars (or in any other individual on which a cause bestows its character) are distinct. There is no single property in which both the cause and the effect share. As he puts it in Proposition 18, "The character as it pre-exists in the original giver has a higher reality than the character bestowed: it is what the bestowed character is, but is not identical with it, since it exists primitively and the other only by derivation."[164] His reasoning is as follows: "If [the property in the giver and participant] had a common definition, the one could not be, as we have assumed, cause and the

[163] It is worth noting that matter is described as the "substratum of all things," which *could* be taken to suggest that, like the One, it is not included in the inventory of all things: "ἡ μὲν γὰρ ὕλη, ὑποκείμενον οὖσα πάντων, ἐκ τοῦ πάντων αἰτίου προῆλθε…" One ought not to read too much into this line, but it is worth noting that Proclus seems occasionally to be tempted to fall into the sort of language that would seem to make matter an opposite number to the One, existing outside along with it outside of all things. One can see the temptation: neither the One nor matter has any intelligible content; they present themselves as logically necessary posits without any content. If there is any difference between them, it lies not in their positive character but in what Emile Bréhier calls "la notion de direction." Emile Bréhier, "L'idée du néant et le problème de l'origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 26, no. 4 (1919): 461. It is far from clear whether such a notion is enough to distinguish the nothing above being from the nothing below being.

[164] *ET* Prop. 18: τοῦ δοθέντος ἄρα τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ δεδωκότι προυπάρχον κρειττόνως ἔστι· καὶ ὅπερ ἐκεῖνο μέν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ταὐτὸν ἐκείνῳ· πρώτως γὰρ ἔστι, τὸ δὲ δευτέρως.

other resultant; the one could not be in itself and the other in the participant…"[165] Further, it is only by saying that the cause's and the effect's characters are actually distinct that Proclus avoids the Third Man Problem. That is not to say that a given term is applied *equivocally* to the cause and its effects. It is applied, rather, ἀφ' ἑνός," or "πρὸς ἕν."[166] That is, one can use the term for both cause and effect because it names, from two different angles, the same relation: that between the cause and the effects to which it gives rise. But it is to say that there is not a single character shared among the effects *qua* members in the same series or between the effects and their cause. Given that fact, one might ask whether Proclus accomplishes what he sets out to accomplish in his attempt to explain providential knowledge via precontainment—that is, if I am correct and the explanation depends on the cause's possessing in itself a property that gives it a "grip" on the property in its effect rather than on the mere fact that it, as cause, stands in a relation to an actual effect. But Proclus might reply that there is one sense in which the character in the effect *is* simply the character in the cause reduced in some way. It has no additional content, meaning that, if one considers it "quantitatively," as it were, there is nothing in it that is not already present in the cause. There thus remains a sense in which the creaturely character is already present and could be foreknown by reference to the character found in the cause.

Even if Proclus manages to avoid the first problem successfully, there is a second problem. Even if the character belonging to each individual is fully contained in its cause, the individual itself, as the very subject on whom the character is bestowed, is not so readily explained. A constitutive cause can only bestow what it already is, or possesses, and it is difficult

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[165] *ET* Prop. 18: ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, οὐκ ἂν ἔτι τὸ μὲν αἴτιον εἴη, τὸ δὲ ἀποτέλεσμα· οὐδ' ἂν τὸ μὲν καθ' αὐτό, τὸ δ' ἐν τῷ μετασχόντι.

[166] For a helpful discussion of this form of predication in Proclus, see Pieter d'Hoine, "The Forms of Likeness," 1–37 and "Proclus and Self-Predication," *Epoché* 23, no. 2 (2019): 461–470; and, for a general overview of the use of ἀφ' ἑνὸς καὶ πρὸς ἕν predication in late Neoplatonism in general, see Jan Opsomer, "Syrianus on Homonymy and the Forms," in *Platonic Ideas and Concept Formation in Ancient and Medieval Thought*, edited by Gerd Van Riel and Caroline Macé, 31–50 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004).

to see how it can contain the very otherness, or identity, by which its product is posited as distinct from it and hence able to enter a participation relationship with it.

At this point, I should mention an important possible objection. I have been operating on the assumption that the forms—and, by extension, true causes in general—relate to their objects as numerically distinct things. They give their participants “being” in that they give their participants their determinate characteristics, but the participants themselves are already there, distinct objects ready and receptive to the informing act.

But an objector might point to passages in which Proclus seems to suggest that the form produces the very participant on which it operates. If the participant has no existence prior to the effect produced in it, it would be natural enough to assume, as do scholars such as L.M. de Rijk, that the participant is nothing *other* than the irradiation the form bestows upon it. In that case, the picture would shift. Rather than merely bestowing a character on an already-constituted subject, the form would be constituting its participant altogether. Such an objector might note passages such as the following:

> And let us not separate … the pattern and the creative principle (τὸ ποιοῦν), but rather combine them in one and contemplate both together; for the paradigm by … its very essence brings into being that which is modelled upon it (ὑφίστημι τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸ γιγνόμενον), and the creative principle, in creating by … its very existence and in making like to itself whatever comes into being, and providing to it secondarily whatever is within itself primally, also establishes itself [as a] paradigm.[167]

Such passages need not, I think, be taken as evidence against the reading I have defended in this chapter. Even when Proclus says the form (or any other cause) produces its participant, it is clear that what he means is that the form *informs* the participant. Consider an amazon river dolphin: among its essential characteristics are life and movement. Without them, it is no dolphin at all; it

[167] In Parm. IV, Luna/Segonds 114 (910,23–33).

is, at most, dolphin-shaped stuff. However, as soon as the body is prepared by participating in Life (and perhaps in Soul), it becomes receptive to the form "Dolphin," which immediately begins to operate upon it. In that instant, what was once mere delphiform stuff becomes a living dolphin. Insofar as one can say the form brings about a dolphin where there was no dolphin before, one can say the form does indeed "produce" the dolphin. But what the form does *not* do is produce the ὑποκείμενον (–1 *or* –2) on which it operates—nor does it produce the dolphin *qua* living thing, *qua* being, and so forth. So, the objection fails, and the problem remains.

To conclude this chapter, I wish to point out, once more, how much further than his predecessors Proclus goes in wrestling with just *how* the divine ideas—in his case, the antecedent in providence to its effects, namely its own unity—fill their role in divine foreknowledge. Perhaps most important, though, is that, in doing so, he sets the stage for those who come after him. Philoponus and Dionysius receive the impetus to think through very clearly how to characterize the divine ideas in connection with their own positions on divine foreknowledge. More than that, they are given a departing point. Proclus has shown that to wrestle with the divine ideas is to wrestle with how to ensure that they are both prior to (and hence unrelated to) their effects and about (and hence related to) their effects, and the thinkers who respond to him take up, I take it, the same concern.

Chapter 4: Philoponus

1 — Introduction

John Philoponus was a grammarian, philosopher, and Christian theologian who lived in the fifth to sixth centuries A.D. He was trained in Neoplatonist thought in Alexandria, where he studied under Ammonius.[168] In keeping with his training there, his earliest philosophical works are mostly Aristotelian commentaries. Later in his career, whether because he became Christian or because he felt it was now demanded by his prior Christian commitments, he wrote strongly polemic texts against Proclus and Aristotle: *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* (*Against Proclus on the World's Everlastingness*) and *De aeternitate mundi contra Aristotelem* (*Against Aristotle on the World's Everlastingness*).[169] Still later, Philoponus moved on from polemics against pagans and began to engage in debates within Christianity—in particular, siding with the miaphysites against the Chalcedonians in his *Arbiter* and writing apparently divisive works on the Trinity and the resurrection.[170]

Despite his wide and apparently shifting interests, there are certain threads that run through his thought. One such thread is divine productive or providential foreknowledge, and it is on this thread that I intend to focus in this chapter. In many ways, Philoponus is wrestling with the same concerns and difficulties as the figures discussed in the last chapter. Like them,

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[168] Richard Sorabji, "John Philoponus," in *John Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, edited by Richard Sorabji, 1–40 (London: Duckworth, 1987), 1.

[169] The Greek term is αἰδιότης, which is, in Proclus and, to an extent, Philoponus, used to refer to things that exist temporally but without any beginning or end. See Michael Share's introduction to his translation, page 7. I have therefore opted to translate it as "everlastingness" rather than "eternity," as has been common.

[170] Sorabji, "John Philoponus," 5; *John Philoponus and the Controversies over Chalcedon in the Sixth Century: A Study and Translation of the Arbiter*, trans. Uwe Michael Lang. Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 1–7.

Philoponus is committed to the idea that providence cares for, intends, and arranges all that there is. And like those figures, Philoponus thinks that God can provide for creatures because he foreknows them and that he foreknows them because he possesses the λόγοι, or divine ideas, according to which he makes them. Finally, much like Proclus, Philoponus is aware that there are difficulties involved in such a picture. He is concerned, in particular, with how the ideas on which creatures are modelled both anticipate and remain fully transcendent in relation to their products. In some ways, the concern may be even more central for him than for Proclus. If he is Christian by the time he writes the *CP*, he may see himself as committed to the idea that God creates all things from nothing and that God, in some strong sense, *knows* what he will make.[171]

My claim in this chapter is that his philosophical system, to the extent that he has one, is constructed to meet those demands. In particular, it is constructed so as to identify the creature with its intelligible, formal content so that any need for an additional individuality is obviated. There is nothing "left over," nothing that God does not already know by knowing the creature's intelligible content. There is also, therefore, nothing to the creature that is left unexplained by God's will that a creature with its intelligible content exist at a certain time.

I take the second argument from the *CP* as a starting point. In that argument, Philoponus wishes to maintain that the divine ideas, which he calls "λόγοι" or "νοήσεις," are logically prior to the creatures made according to them. He wishes to maintain their logical priority in part from a desire to avoid making God dependent upon his creative activities: to make God dependent upon those activities would also be to make God dependent upon his creatures, and such a suggestion would be impious. But he has another motive as well: Philoponus wants the divine ideas to be logically prior to creatures because he needs them to fill a certain role in providence,

[171] While I *do* tend to assume Philoponus is a Christian from early on, my analysis does not depend on that assumption. His arguments against Proclus in the *CP* could have been made by a pagan Platonist with "personalist" sympathies as well as by a Christian; his views on universals seem to remain quite consistent even into his later, more theological works; and, except in the *Arbiter*, Philoponus seems not to rely on theological authority.

namely as proxies whose possession constitutes divine productive foreknowledge. By knowing the divine ideas, God knows what he will make; and this thought is open to Philoponus because the divine ideas do not depend for their being on the very things they are invoked to explain.[172] Having shown that Philoponus is interested both in maintaining the divine ideas as logically prior to creatures and in holding that the ideas have some power to "refer" to creatures, I conclude that it is reasonable to think Philoponus is interested in the CFP: how to allow God's ideas to refer to things without presupposing those very things and compromising the ideas' priority.

Having established that claim, I can move on to explore the way in which Philoponus constructs his system to address the problem. What enables the divine ideas to function as proxies for creatures is the "intelligible content" they share with those creatures. Just as it is the intelligible content that makes the form in a human craftsman's mind formally identical with the forms in his products, so too is it the intelligible content that makes the form in God's mind (formally) identical with the forms immanent in his creatures. He knows his products in advance by possessing concepts (νοήσεις) whose intelligible content matches up perfectly with what he ends up producing. This case can be made using passages from the CP, the *Arbiter*, and certain passages from the commentaries.

In order to strengthen this case and, secondarily, to suggest that Philoponus might be formulating his solution at least in part as a response to Proclus, I finally turn to an important way in which Philoponus, in proposing his solution, stakes a claim with respect to divine providence and its scope; namely, by drawing a strong analogy between divine foreknowledge and providence and human craftsmanship, he makes it necessary to show that each and every

[172] One might say, with Matthew Levering, that the divine ideas are not that "by which" God knows but simply are "God's knowing." But such a solution hardly works for Philoponus, for whom the divine ideas must ground God's knowledge whether or not he ever creates them. For Matthew Levering's discussion of this conception of divine foreknowledge, see his *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), especially Chapter 1.

thing falls within “the intelligible.” For if God is an intellect and foreknows creatures by containing concepts that somehow “answer” to them, it seems that his providence can only extend to what can be known, without remainder, through its intelligible content. Therefore, in order to maintain his view with any plausibility, Philoponus must find a way to show that creatures are constituted so as to be entirely intelligible. And, as I attempt to show, Philoponus makes certain conceptual moves that enable him to do just that: he replaces prime matter with extendedness, corporeality, or three-dimensionality, enabling him to claim that things comprise nothing but their essential properties taken in sum.

Finally, I draw some conclusions. First, I note that there is a *plausible* case to be made that Philoponus is formulating his thoughts around this problem at least in part as a response to Proclus. Secondly, I consider whether Philoponus ends up succeeding in his endeavors. I argue that he does not: while the intelligible content may be the same in the divine idea and a given creature, Philoponus still recognizes an inexplicable numerical distinction between the two. Not even when he introduces the concept of *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις) does he provide an analysis of the concrete reality or actuality of each thing, how its numerical distinction is to be explained, and how it could be anticipated (and hence intended) in the divine ideas.

Before proceeding, I should mention how my argument relates to current scholarship. My purpose is constructive and exploratory. I therefore hope to build upon or add to rather than correct other scholars. I shall mention them where their scholarship is relevant, but it is worth mentioning the most important ones from the outset.[173] Frans De Haas has written an excellent book on the milieu in which Philoponus develops his argument that prime matter is best

[173] A few other scholars whose work is connected with mine but who do not come up directly in my argument are Greig, “Proclus’ Reception in Maximus,” 117–167; Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, “Proclus, Philoponus, and Maximus: The Paradigm of the World and Temporal Beginning,” in *Platonism and Christian Thought in Late Antiquity*, eds. Panagiotis G. Pavlos, Lars Fredrik Janby, Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, and Torstein Theodor Tollefsen (London: Routledge, 2019), 100–114.

understood as extension.[174] I have found his work helpful, and what I argue here should be compatible with his claims. Christophe Erismann and Dirk Krausmüller have both made the argument that Philoponus is a bundle theorist at least with respect to sensible substances.[175] I take them to be essentially correct, though I do make a slightly different argument for the same conclusion. Riin Sirkel and Owen Goldin have explored the role that "forms" play for Philoponus, and I owe to them the insight that Philoponus never denies that there exist demiurgic λόγοι prior to sensible particulars.[176] Finally, there is some resemblance between what I suggest—that Philoponus conceives God as something akin to a demiurgic intellect—and a suggestion that Koenraad Verrycken makes in his thesis.[177] Verrycken suggests that Philoponus is operating on a theology on which God is not "beyond being" but is himself the first being. One reason Neoplatonists might have wanted to preserve propertyless prime matter is that the One is meant to have a wider scope than Being, but such a consideration drops away if the first principle *is* Being. My work is compatible with and could be seen as further support for his suggestion.[178]

[174] Frans A.J. De Haas, *John Philoponus' New Definition of Prime Matter: Aspects of Its Background in Neoplatonism and the Ancient Commentary Tradition* (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1997). Sorabji, also offers useful comments. Sorabji, "John Philoponus," 18–23.

[175] See Christophe Erismann, "John Philoponus on Individuality and Particularity," in *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, eds. Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zachhuber (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014): 143–159; Dirk Krausmüller, "A Conceptualist Turn: The Ontological Status of Created Species in Late Greek Patristic Theology," *Scrinium* 16 (2020): 242; and Krausmüller, "*Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae*: Plotinus' Definition of Sensible Substance and Its Adaptation in John Philoponus' *Arbiter*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 73 (2019): 153–156.

[176] Owen Goldin, "Philoponus and Forms," in *Contextualizing Premodern Philosophy*, eds Katja Karuse, Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, and Nicholas A. Oschman, 56–73 (New York: Routledge, 2023); Riin Sirkel, "Philoponus on the Priority of Substances," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 54, no. 3 (2016): 351–372.

[177] See *Philoponus' New Definition*, 290–291; Koenraad Verrycken, *God en wereld in de wijsbegeerte van Ioannes Philoponus: De overgang van een Alexandrijns-Neoplatonische naar een christelijk schepingsleer*, I–III. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Louvain, 1985.

[178] I found his suggestion only after my argument was mostly in place. I cannot say my idea *arose* from his work, though it is certainly consonant with it.

2 — Rehearsing the argument of CP *II*

In *CP* II, Philoponus recounts the following argument by Proclus:

> If the world's pattern (παράδειγμα τοῦ κόσμου) is eternal (αἰώνιον), and if its essence is to be a pattern … then, since it exists eternally, it is eternally a pattern. And if being a pattern is present to it eternally (εἰ δὲ τὸ παραδείγματι αὐτῷ εἶναι αἰωνίως), there must necessarily always (ἀεί) be a copy (εἰκὼν) too; for pattern is relative to copy (πρὸς γὰρ εἰκόνα τὸ παράδειγμα). But if the copy did not exist, when it did not exist, neither would the pattern exist … for neither of a pair of things described as correlative exists if the other does not. If, then, the pattern is eternally a pattern (τὸ παράδειγμα αἰωνίως παράδειγμά ἐστιν), the world always is (ἀεί ἐστιν ὁ κόσμος), being the copy of an eternally existing pattern.[179]

While the argument as stated does not mention forms or their everlastingness, Philoponus makes it clear that Proclus' argument also assumes (a) that the pattern according to which the world is made is a form and (b) that the forms are eternal.[180]

With those additions in mind, Proclus' argument (as Philoponus presents it) can be stated more formally as follows.

1) Forms are eternal.
2) It is essential to forms to be patterns.
3) Therefore, forms are eternally patterns.

[179] John Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, ed. Hugo Rabe (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899), 24,2–24,15: εἰ ἔστιν τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ κόσμου αἰώνιον καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι αὐτῷ τὸ παράδειγμα καὶ οὐ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ἀλλὰ καθ' αὑτὸ ταύτην ἔχει τὴν δύμανιν αὐτῷ εἶναι παράδειγμα ὄν, διότι αἰώνιόν ἐστιν τῷ εἶναι, αἰωνίως ἄν εἴη δήπου παράδειγμα. εἰ δὲ τὸ παραδείγματι αὐτῷ εἶναι αἰωνίως πάρεστιν, εἴη ἂν ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ εἰκὼν ἀεί· πρὸς γὰρ εἰκόνα τὸ παράδειγμα. εἰ δὲ ἡ εἰκὼν οὐκ ἦν, ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, οὐδὲ ἔσται, ὅτε οὐκ ἔσται εἰκών, ἵνα μὴ καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα ᾖ μὴ εἰκόνος παράδειγμα· τῶν γοῦν πρὸς ἄλληλα λεγομένων οὐδὲν θάτερον ἐστιν θατέρου μὴ ὄντος. εἰ ἄρα τὸ παράδειγμα αἰωνίως παράδειγμά ἐστιν, ἀεί ἐστιν ὁ κόσμος, εἰκὼν τοῦ αἰωνίως ὄντος ὢν παραδείγματος. Two points should be made about my citations. First, I am mostly following Share's translation. Second, when citing the *Contra Proclum*, I generally include the argument and section from Share's work followed by the page and line numbers from Rabe. I will refer to the work simply as "*CP*."

[180] *CP* II.1, 25,20–26,18: Τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἰδέας εἶναι τῶν ὄντων καὶ παραδείγματα ὑποθεμένου…

4) Further, a pattern is a relative, and relatives always logically presuppose each other's existence; in this case, the relatives are pattern and copy.
5) If a form is eternally a pattern, then, its copy is eternally presupposed to exist.
6) The world's pattern is a form.
7) Therefore, the world is eternally presupposed to exist.
8) Since the world is eternally logically presupposed to exist, it must *everlastingly* exist.

Or, more simply: if to be a form is to be a pattern and a pattern always logically presupposes its copy, one cannot say that the form exists without also saying that its copy exists. Granting that there is such a pattern for the world, then, the world must always exist.

There are obviously problems with such an argument if one makes the distinction, as Proclus himself does elsewhere, between what is eternal, or timeless (αἰώνιος), and what is merely everlasting (ἀεί or ἀΐδιος). That a cause is timeless need not mean that its effect is without temporal beginning or end. However, Philoponus elects not to raise that point against Proclus. Instead, he makes an argument to the effect that the forms are either substances or "certain principles or concepts" and that, on either construal, they are not *essentially* patterns and hence do not, *qua* forms, logically presuppose their copies.

Philoponus first considers what follows if the forms are substances (οὐσίας). He makes three sub-arguments in connection with this hypothesis, all variations on the same idea: it simply follows from the fact that the forms are substances that they are not essentially patterns; for, if they are substances, "it is clear that they do not have their being in relation to something else; for a substance is something self-subsistent, needing nothing else for its existence."[181]

[181] *CP* II.3, 33,15–33,17: Εἰ τοίνυν οὐσίαι εἶεν τὰ εἴδη, δῆλον, ὡς οὐκ ἐν σχέσει τῇ πρὸς ἄλλου δεόμενον εἰς ὕπαρξιν τὸ εἶναι ἔχει· αὐθυπόστατον γάρ τι χρῆμα ἡ οὐσία καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄλλου.

“[I]f the Forms do *not* have their being and existence in being patterns,” it follows that “there is no necessity that … the world … should always (ἀεί) exist” merely “because the Form in relation to which the world came to be is eternal.”[182] The form can exist first as a substance and secondarily and accidentally as a pattern. “If there is a copy, a pattern must exist,” true; “but, even if a pattern exists,” as long as it is “not merely as a pattern but … also a substance, there is no necessity for a copy to exist as well.”[183] Philoponus provides the following illustration:

> The king himself is the royal portrait’s subject, but this does not mean that as soon as the king exists [the portrait] must also exist. It is one thing for the king … to be a man, another for him to be the portrait’s subject. Whenever he *is* a subject, then in every case there is also a portrait, just as whenever he becomes a father, a son is always implied ... But there is not immediately … a [royal portrait’s subject] as soon as a king exists, just as someone is not immediately a father and a master… as soon as he is a man.[184]

The thought seems to be that a substance such as a human is only ever accidentally or inessentially a relative. That makes sense: plausibly, a thing must exist in order for one to say that *it* has entered into this or that relation. It should be noted that, while Philoponus talks about substantial priority in temporal terms, the relevant priority is ontological or logical. It is because a man is essentially a man and only inessentially the portrait’s subject, say, that even a man who happens to be a subject is still essentially a man “before” he is a subject. The fact that he can preexist his own portrait temporally only serves to illustrate the point.

Having argued from the Platonic assumption that the forms are substances, Philoponus considers another hypothesis. Perhaps one might “claim that [the forms] are not substances but

[182] *CP* II.4, 35,14–35,17: εἰ δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι παραδείγματα τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἔχουσιν τὰ εἴδη, οὐκ ἄρα ἀνάγκη τῆς ἰδέας, πρὸς ἣν ὁ κόσμος γέγονεν, αἰωνίου οὔσης καὶ τὸν κόσμον ἀεὶ εἶναι…

[183] *CP* II.4, 36,1–36,4: οὔσης γὰρ τῆς εἰκόνος ἀνάγκη εἶναι καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα, οὐ μήν, εἰ καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα εἴη, μὴ ὡς παράδειγμα δέ, ἀλλ’ ὅτι καὶ οὐσία, καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα εἶναι ἀνάγκη…

[184] *CP* II.4, 36,4–36,15: ἐπει καὶ τῆς βασιλικῆς εἰκόνος αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεύς ἐστιν παράδειγμα, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀνάγκη ἅμα τῷ εἶναι τὸν βασιλέα καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ εἶναι, ἐπεὶ κατ’ ἄλλο τί ἐστιν τῷ βασιλεῖ ᾗ βασιλεῖ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι, κατ’ ἄλλο δέ τι τὸ εἶναι εἰκόνος παραδείγματι· ὅταν γὰρ ᾖ παράδειγμα, τότε σύνεστιν πάντως καὶ ἡ εἰκών· ὥσπερ, ὅταν πατὴρ γένηται, συνεπινοεῖται πάντως καὶ ὁ υἱός, οὐ μὴν ἅμα τῷ εἶναι βασιλεὺς εὐθύς ἐστιν εἰκόνος παράδειγμα, ὥσπερ οὐδ’ ἅμα τῷ εἶναί τις ἄνθρωπος εὐθύς ἐστιν καὶ πατὴρ καὶ δεσπότης ἢ δεξιὸς ἤ τι τῶν ὑπὸ τὰ πρός τι.

certain creative principles and concepts (τινας δημιουργικοὺς λόγους καὶ νοήσεις) in accord with which the creator frames things (καθ' ἃς ὁ δημιουργὸς τὰ ὄντα συνίστησιν)—for what else could they be if they are not substances (οὐσίαι)?"[185] His reply is largely the same as the previous one. "If [the] products exist, the principles in accordance with which they came into existence must in every case exist as well, but things will not in every case follow upon the principles."[186] To support this claim, he turns to everyday examples: "A shipwright or a builder," he notes, "may possess the principles for building a ship or a house but not yet be creating based on them. The principles' being (εἶναι) consists in their being concepts (νοήσεις) … but when the creator acts in accord with them, it follows for them to be paradigms."[187] As with the human artisan, so with God: he may possess the principles according to which he makes things without logically presupposing the things themselves.

At this point, Philoponus takes himself to have shown that the divine ideas, whether understood as substances or principles in the divine mind, need not be essentially related to or in any other way logically simultaneous with their products. But he goes further. There is reason, he thinks, to hold that the ideas are *prior* to their products.[188] He starts from what he considers an uncontroversial claim: that God foreknows all things.[189] In characterizing foreknowledge, he follows Plotinus, citing this passage: "if … the future is already present [to God], it is necessary that it be present as having been thought out beforehand in preparation for later."[190] Philoponus

[185] *CP* II.5, 36,17–36,20: Εἰ δὲ οὐκ οὐσίας αὐτὰς εἶναι φήσουσιν ἀλλά τινας δημιουργικοὺς λόγους καὶ νοήσεις, καθ' ἃς ὁ δημιουργὸς τὰ ὄντα συνίστησιν (τί γὰρ ἂν καὶ εἶεν ἄλλο, εἰ μὴ οὐσίαι εἶεν;)…

[186] *CP* II.5, 36,24–36,27: τῶν γὰρ ἀποτελεστμάτων ὄντων ἀνάγκη πάντως καὶ τοὺς λόγους εἶναι, καθ' οὓς ταῦτα γέγονεν, οὐ μὴν τοῖς λόγοις τὰ πράγματα πάντως ἕψεται…

[187] *CP* II.5, 36,27–37,4. ἐπεὶ καὶ ναυπηγὸν καὶ οἰκοδόμον ἐνδέχεται νεώς τινος ἢ οἰκίας τοὺς λόγους ἔχοντα μήπω δημιουργεῖν κατ' αὐτοὺς· τὸ μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τοῖς τοιούτοις λόγοις ἐν τῷ νοήσεις τινὰς αὐτοὺς εἶναι ὑφέστηκεν, παρακολουθεῖ δὲ αὐτοῖς τὸ παραδείγμασιν εἶναι, ὅταν κατ' αὐτοὺς ὁ δημιουργὸς ἐνεργήσῃ.

[188] They not only need not "exist alongside" (συνϋπάρχειν) the things made according to them (τὰ πράγματα); they must actually "preexist" (προϋπάρχειν) their products.

[189] The word for "foreknowledge" here is "πρόγνωσις."

[190] *CP* II.5, 39,11–39,13: εἰ οὖν ἤδη πάρεστιν τὸ μέλλον, ἀνάγκη οὕτως παρεῖναι ὡς προνενοημένον εἰς τὸ ὕστερον...

takes Plotinus to mean that "what is future is present to God" (τὸ μέλλον θεῷ πάρεστιν) in that God "[thinks] even things that do not yet exist (ὅτι τῷ νοεῖν καὶ τὰ μήπω ὄντα)."[191] While he does not spell out in detail what he means by this claim, Philoponus is likely returning to the analogy with artisanal knowledge: God possesses certain concepts, which he "thinks over" and then implements making creatures. God can know the creature before making it because its intelligible content is already present in the corresponding "concept."[192] Finally, Philoponus concludes that, since foreknowledge amounts to a knowledge before a thing comes to be, it must also be the case that "the principles … should be foreknown and preexist" the things made according to them.[193] To put the argument more succinctly: (a) God foreknows all things; (b) he foreknows them by possessing their principles; (c) and if God foreknows things by possessing their principles, then their principles must preexist them. At very least, this priority must be temporal. But given that Philoponus holds God to be eternal (and hence timeless), it makes little sense to read to him as meaning that God or his thought is *temporally* prior to the creature. Further, because the foreknowledge at issue is *productive* foreknowledge and Philoponus does not want God to be dependent upon creatures for his foreknowledge, it seems likely that, once again, the priority is ontological, logical, or causal.

3 — What we learn from the argument of CP *II*

There are a few implications to be drawn from *CP* II. I first want to draw out the implications for Philoponus' views on God, divine productive foreknowledge, and divine

[191] *CP* II.5, 39,25.
[192] Philoponus cannot mean that God has foreknowledge from within time, for he, like his interlocutors, is committed to God's being eternal. (It is for that very reason that he has to argue that a transition from second potentiality to second actuality is not a temporal change.) Nor can he mean that God sees all things at once in an eternal present, for the manner in which things are present to him is "as provided for with an eye to later." This foreknowledge takes temporal location into account in a way that Boethian foreknowledge does not, and it is also tied to God's practical knowledge, putting it in contrast with Boethius' God's purely speculative foreknowledge.
[193] *CP* II.5, 41,8–41,11: ἀνάγκη … τῶν μελλόντων ἔσεσθαι προεγνῶσθαί τε καὶ προϋπάρχειν τοὺς λόγους…

providence. I shall then be in a position to begin drawing out the implications for Philoponus' interest in the relationship between the λόγοι and their products.

3.1 — God, productive foreknowledge, and providence

Notice that Philoponus actually makes *two* arguments in *CP* II. The first—that the divine ideas do not entail their products—assumes that one can draw a legitimate distinction between (second) potentiality and (second) actuality in God. Whether he makes things in accordance with the forms or with "certain principles or concepts," God must be understood to "transition" from merely having the capacity to produce things according to the divine ideas to actually doing so. (Philoponus makes this commitment explicit in *CP* IV, where he chides Proclus for failing to make this distinction with respect to God and makes an elaborate argument to the effect that divine perfection can be maintained even if God has certain second potentialities.[194])

The stronger argument—that the divine ideas must *precede* their products as the principles by which God foreknows what he will make—relies on the assumption that God's productive foreknowledge can be rightly understood as strongly analogous to a human artisan's.[195] God foreknows and produces things by possessing their principles, and those principles can be understood as "concepts" (νοήσεις). Like the forms in the artisan's mind, they

[194] *CP* IV. In contrast, Proclus identifies the act by which the One produces all things with "activity by being," or essential activity. For the idea that Philoponus was specifically attempting to avoid such a picture by making God out to be an intellect which could then implement its concepts or not, see Orna Harari, "John Philoponus," in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy*, ed. Mark Edwards (Abingdon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 604–605.

[195] E.M. Macierowski and R.F. Hassing, "John Philoponus on Aristotle's Definition of Nature: A Translation from the Greek with Introduction and Notes," *Ancient Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (1988): 73–100. If Macierowski and Hassing are correct in their suggestion that Philoponus intentionally replaces Aristotle's definition of nature (φύσις) with one that implies the existence of an external producer, then then it seems that Philoponus has a general interest in defending a picture of God as artisan and in redefining philosophical terms in such a way as to comport with that picture of God. See especially 85–87. See also Seymour W. Feldman, "Philoponus on the Metaphysics of Creation," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, eds. Ruth Link-Salinger (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 78–79, who likewise sees, in Philoponus, a tendency to portray God as a divine artist or artisan. Though Feldman's case is slightly more intuitive than textual, it is nonetheless worth noting because it is likely tracking something in the text.

can be implemented or not as God wills. This commitment to a strong analogy between divine and human productive knowledge impels Philoponus to characterize God as something like an intellect—more specifically an intellect that can contain concepts or principles without immediately implementing them. At very least, he must characterize God as *having* an intellect.

This second argument has important implications when combined with another assumption that Philoponus seems to make, namely that God, in order to exercise providence over things, must have them present to his productive foreknowledge. He never makes this claim directly, but it seems implicit in several passages. In *CP* II, when he argues for the claim that the productive principles or concepts must precede the corresponding creatures, Philoponus cites as evidence the fact that God foreknows all things and the fact that "all things benefit from the providence that flows from" him.[196] From that point on, he treats the two claims as if they were one and the same. Perhaps most notably, when he sums up his position, despite the fact that his topic has apparently been, for the most part, the manner in which things are present to God's foreknowledge, Philoponus says that his topic has been "common doctrine about providence."[197] For Philoponus, then, God's foreknowledge and his providence are closely linked if not identified. This makes sense: at very least, to exercise providence, God must know what he is doing. That is an assumption he shares with his interlocutors. And his own craftsman model suggests it: it is *through* his foreknowledge that the sculptor "provides for" the marble as he forms it into a statue.

That the foreknowledge at issue is productive rather than merely speculative is supported by three considerations: (a) Philoponus is talking about *providential* knowledge, which would be the providence involved in guiding and arranging the world, not merely knowledge about what

[196] *CP* II.5, 37,16–37,20.
[197] *CP* II.5, 10.

will happen in the future. On this point, he agrees with Proclus and Plotinus. (b) Philoponus appeals to specifically productive images: shipwrights and builders. (c) Providence consists at least in part in creating things from nothing.[198] All these considerations suggest that Philoponus considers God's providential ability necessarily to involve a productive foreknowledge. And he is certainly not interested in what is sometimes called "simple foreknowledge," through which God knows things by receiving from them their intelligible content, which would put his knowledge logically posterior to the thing known.[199]

3.2 — Concern with the logical priority of the λόγοι

I now turn to the implications that can be drawn from *CP* II about Philoponus' interest in the logical relationship between the divine ideas and creatures.

First, Philoponus clearly wants to maintain that the λόγοι have logical priority over creatures. While his examples—the king and his portrait, the man who becomes a father—all involve temporal priority relations, mere temporal priority is clearly not what Philoponus hopes to secure for the λόγοι. For one thing, the λόγοι are eternal. They cannot, therefore, *have* temporal priority; to attempt to give them such priority would be to mistakenly treat them as temporal. Further, Philoponus says that what matters to him is that the λόγοι not necessarily be παραδείγματα as well and, hence, that they need not entail products made according to them.[200] Temporal priority is largely beside the point for him—or secondary at any rate.

[198] *CP* IV.9–VI.10.

[199] As mentioned in my introductory chapter, this term is mostly used in Anglophone philosophy of religion. See, for example, Robinson's paper, "Divine Providence, Simple Foreknowledge."

[200] One can see a similar thought already in his earlier work. For instance, he distinguishes between what he calls "temporal" and "natural" priority in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. See *Philoponi (Olim Ammonii) In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, ed. Adolfus Busse. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca XIII/1 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 1962), 117,16–118,4. (All citations of the commentary on the *Categories* will be from Busse's edition.) By showing, in the *CP*, that ideas are not *only* paradigms, he shows that they have a natural priority. I take natural priority to be functioning in tandem with logical priority, seeing that, for Philoponus, nature and λόγος (τῆς οὐσίας/φύσεως) are closely linked.

Secondly, Philoponus seems to be interested in the logical relationship between the λόγοι and creatures beyond its immediate usefulness for his argument against Proclus. Philoponus could easily have taken a simpler argumentative route than he does. As mentioned earlier, for Proclus, what is eternal is atemporal, meaning that it need not—indeed, cannot—be temporally present alongside its effect. That may be how a *temporal* cause works—the kettle is being heated only so long as the fire is doing the heating—but it is not how an eternal cause functions, at least on the assumption that eternal causes exist and can have temporal effects. If he were merely interested in refuting Proclus, Philoponus could easily have chosen to point out this logical slip on Proclus' part and move on to his next refutation. He would not even have to commit himself to the distinction to do so; it would be enough to show that the argument is unsound based on Proclus' own commitments.[201] Instead, he chooses to focus on whether the paradigms are essentially paradigms. That he opts for this approach suggests that Philoponus is concerned with the broader issues brought up by the argument; he has some reason to go well out of his argumentative way to think about the logical relation of the divine idea to the creature. And that fact, in turn, suggests that establishing the logical priority of the λόγοι over their products is itself of some importance to him.

Now, I turn to *why* Philoponus wants to maintain that the divine ideas have such priority. In *CP* II, the λόγοι are supposed to serve as the means by which God knows and provides for things. However, to fill that role, they must be logically prior to their products. Were they logically *simultaneous* with creatures—were they relatives—they would presuppose the creatures. God would then be dependent upon creatures for his knowledge about them. Worse still, creatures would become essential to God: for if the divine ideas were relative to creatures, and the divine ideas themselves are essential to God, then God himself would be relative to

[201] That said, Philoponus *does* seem to think that the eternal is atemporal. *CP* V.4, 114,20–115,13; *CP* V.4, 116,1–23.

creatures.[202] Finally, if God were made relative to creatures in this way, he would no longer be able to serve as their creator in at least one important sense: he would no longer be God without his creatures, meaning that he would no longer be logically prior to them either. How he could then serve as the one who preexists them and explains *their* existence is unclear.

That something like these worries exercise Philoponus can be seen by looking at other places in the *CP*. In *CP* IV, Philoponus makes it clear that, in possessing the λόγοι, God has a knowledge that derives nothing from the creatures he makes according to those λόγοι.[203] In *CP* I, he gives a clear reason for wanting to maintain such a position. There, he says that, were God to derive his character from his creatures, he would not in fact be their creator; he would not explain them more than they explain him.[204] He does not make an explicit connection, in these sections, to divine foreknowledge, but there is a plausible conceptual link: Philoponus wants to avoid any sense in which God derives his creative knowledge from something outside himself because it is that foreknowledge that allows him to function as a providential carer for all things. Again, an analogy can be made with human artisanry: on a broadly Aristotelian picture like the one with which Philoponus is working, the human artisan derives nothing from his product. If he is its maker, he and his ideas for it must preexist it, explaining it rather than the reverse. Similarly, if God is to be creator, God must derive nothing from his creatures.

3.3 — That and why Philoponus cares about making the forms referential

Given his strong commitment to a picture on which God is to be understood as akin to a craftsman, knowing his products in advance to the extent that he possesses their λόγοι, Philoponus is also committed to something like a referential power in the divine ideas. They

[202] *CP* I.6; IV.12, 85,27–86,13; IV.12, 87,3–88,6.
[203] *CP* IV.15, 102,9–102,15.
[204] *CP* I.6.

serve as the means by which God knows what he will make—though without presupposing the very thing to be made. They must be such that, by referring to and knowing them, God also knows the things that he will make in accordance with them.

3.4 — Philoponus cares about the CFP

So, it turns out that Philoponus wants to hold both (a) that the divine ideas in no way logically presuppose creatures and (b) that they have a referential power, enabling them to serve as the means by which God knows creatures even without presupposing their existence. Further, the difficulty in maintaining both theses at the same time is due to the fact that the creature has its own numerical identity, which cannot be easily represented by or subsumed under the divine idea involved in its making. It is reasonable to conclude that Philoponus cares about something like the CFP. Further, whether or not he clearly sees himself as responding to Proclus on this particular problem, his wrestling with the difficulties involved is certainly refined as he sets himself against Proclus, suggesting that his thinking on the matter is potentially *occasioned* by an engagement with the tradition Proclus represents.

At this juncture, I wish to present one more reason for thinking Philoponus cares about the proper logical relationship between God's productive knowledge and the creatures known thereby. I present it second because it is weaker evidence on its own but can serve as support for the evidence from the *CP*. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, Philoponus says that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is a relative (πρός τι): it logically presupposes the thing known (τὸ ἐπιστητόν). Considered as relatives, therefore, knowledge and the known are logically simultaneous—though not when considered as distinct entities.[205] Philoponus admits that there might be exceptions. For instance, an artisan who thinks about making a door must, in some

[205] Philoponus, *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, 122,25–123,10.

sense, know the door before it exists.[206] However, he does not expand on the thought, and it remains unclear how he reconciles this claim with his broader claim that knowledge is a relative.

The fact that Philoponus is already considering the relationship between knower and known—and indeed connecting the matter with productive knowledge, as evidenced by his bringing up artisanship in this passage—suggests that he is very much aware that there are potential difficulties involved in explaining how one can have knowledge about things that do not logically (or temporally) exist yet.[207] It is plausible that Philoponus would have had these considerations in mind later on, in the *CP*, when putting forward his views on how God foreknows what he will make. I take it that, if Philoponus had these difficulties in mind later on, it becomes that much more plausible to read him as interested in those difficulties in themselves and not merely as elements in his argument against Proclus on the world's everlastingness.

One might point out that the knowledge under consideration in the *Categories* is ἐπιστήμη rather than νοῦς, or another term more fitting for divine knowledge, and therefore ask whether I am making a legitimate connection here. In response, I would note that Philoponus seems not to be using the term "ἐπιστήμη" in a technical sense. Rather, he seems to be using it to refer to knowledge broadly, so broadly as to include the knowledge a craftsman has about his soon-to-be products. But even assuming he *is* reserving the term ἐπιστήμη for use in a narrower sense, he still clearly considers a discussion of productive knowledge relevant to his discussion of the ἐπιστήμη–ἐπιστητόν relation. So, even if he were keeping the two discussions technically distinct, he would still be drawing a clear association between the two. It still seems plausible,

[206] Philoponus, *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, 119,3–119,15. The discussion goes on till 119,25, with some interesting concessions to those who might object that one does not *know* what one will make till one is actually making it.

[207] It also helps my case that Philoponus seems not to be using the term "ἐπιστήμη" in a technical way. He is happy to talk about ἐπιστήμη with respect to a craftsman's thinking about an artwork before making it, and it is fairly clear that the craftsman does not have demonstrative knowledge about an artwork that he has only conceived in his mind through visualization (φαντασία: Philoponus, *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, 119,19).

therefore, that Philoponus has these connections in mind when he discusses the relationship between God’s νοήσεις and the things thus known and produced.

4 — Philoponus’ answer: how the divine mind knows

As discussed already, Philoponus holds that the divine ideas are what enable God to foreknow things without presupposing them. In order to support this conception, Philoponus draws a strong analogy between God’s productive foreknowledge and a human craftsman’s knowledge. Just as the craftsman knows things in advance by possessing the right concepts, so too does God know what creatures he will make by possessing the right concepts. (One key difference is that the human craftsman cannot produce the matter on which he works. But otherwise, the two cases are structurally the same.) In both cases, what Philoponus seems to suggest is that productive forms can in some way serve as “answers to” the things made according to them. What that something might be is not, however, immediately clear.

Philoponus provides the best clue in his *Arbiter*. Although the *Arbiter* is written later than the *CP*, there is little reason to think that, on this point, much has changed between the *CP* and the later text. Philoponus’ views on creaturely constitution remain basically the same, and his views on Aristotelian abstraction seem to remain more or less the same as well. And the likelihood is even higher given that he refers to God’s creative principles (δημιουργικοί λόγοι) even in his Aristotelian commentaries.[208] In *Arbiter* §16, in a passage dealing with the principles

[208] See, for instance, *Ioannis Philoponi in Aristotelis De anima libros commentaria*, ed. Michael Hayduck (Berlin: Reimer, 1897), 307,34–308,1. One can see a similar idea already present in his master, Ammonius, who, in turn, considers the idea to go back at least to Porphyry: “ὁ γὰρ δημιουργὸς πάντα ἔχει παρ’ ἑαυτῷ τὰ πάντων παραδείγματα, οἷον ποιῶν ἄνθρωπον ἔχει παρ’ ἑαυτῷ τὸ εἶδος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, πρὸς ὃ ἀφορῶν πάντας ποιεῖ” (41,20–23). Note that, although he talks of the paradigms being “alongside” the demiurge, he seems to mean nothing more than that the ideas are “in” the demiurge: Ammonius immediately switches to asking whether “the forms are in the demiurge” (εἰσὶν ἐν τῷ δημιουργῷ τὰ εἴδη). *Ammonius in Porphyrii Isagogen sive V Voces*, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, ed. Adolfus Busse (Berlin: Reimer, 1891), 41,24–25. It is also worth noting that Ammonius wants to say that the demiurge produces in accordance with reason—in fact, in accordance with a “rational disposition” (καθ’ ἕξιν λογικὴν ποιεῖ: 42,3). On that point, there is some apparent similarity with Philoponus.

according to which things are made, he says this about the relationship between the artisan's mental blueprint and the artifact:

> the common and universal intelligible content … when realised in many subjects, becomes many, existing in each completely and partially, as the intelligible content … in a ship-builder, being one, becomes many … when it is realised in many subjects. Thus also the doctrine in a teacher … when it is realised in those who are taught, is multiplied in them, becoming inherent as a whole in each one.[209]

Given the discussion from earlier in this chapter, it is natural to read the form in the artisan's mind as analogous to God's νοήσεις. The form in the artisan's mind is numerically distinct from the form that the artist brings about in the artifact. However, they share a common "intelligible content."[210] Assuming that Lang is correct in taking this "intelligible content" to be a thing's λόγος τῆς οὐσίας/φύσεως, the content or λόγος is both God's plan for a thing and the account abstractable from it.[211]

One can find the same principle in the *Contra Proclum*. In the ninth argument, Philoponus considers whether a form can ever survive its substrate, moving, for instance, from one substrate to another. In the conclusion to that thread, he says,

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Finally, it should be noted that Ammonius seems to *deny* that the forms before the many are to be identified with God's thoughts simply: "οὐδὲ γὰρ ἁπλῶς νοήσεις αὐτὰ εἶναι τοὺ δημιουργοῦ βούλεται, ἀλλὰ πάντως οὐσίας νοητάς, πρὸς ἃς ἀφορῶντα τὸν δημιουργὸν ὡς πρὸς ἀρχετύπους εἰκόνας τὰ τῇδε ποιεῖν" (42,16–19). Whether this constitutes a genuine difference from what Philoponus means when he says that God's paradigms for things are his νοήσεις is unclear, but it may suggest that Philoponus is wanting to do away with the idea of something higher than the demiurge.

[209] *Arbiter* §16, p. 187. See also the following Greek fragment of the *Arbiter* preserved in John of Damascus: Ὁ γὰρ κοινὸς καὶ καθόλου … οὖν ἐν πολλοῖς ὑποκιμένοις γινόμενος πολλὰ γίνεται, ὁλόκηερος ἐν ἑκάστῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀπὸ μέρους ὑπάρχων, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ ἐν τῷ ναυπηγῷ τοῦ πλοίου λόγος εἷς ὢν πληθύνεται ἐν πολλοῖς ὑποκειμένοις γινόμενος. Οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐν τῷ διδασκάλῳ θεώρημα ἓν ὂν τῷ ἰδίῳ λόγῳ, ὅταν ἐν τοῖς διδασκομένοις γίνεται, συμπληθύνεται αὐτοῖς ὅλον ἐν ἑκάστῳ γινόμενον. *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Vol. IV, ed. Bonifatius Kotter. Patristische Texte und Studien 22 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1981), 50,5–10.

[210] Greek fragments surviving in some manuscripts of John of Damascus' *Liber de haeresibus* have the phrase "τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου φύσεως λόγος," leading Lang to believe that the Syriac phrase that he translates as "common intelligible content of nature" (§16, p. 187) is itself a translation of the Greek phrase "ὁ κοινὸς λόγος τῆς φύσεως." He takes the latter phrase to mean the same as "λόγος τῆς οὐσίας," deriving ultimately from Aristotle. See Lang, *John Philoponus and the Controversies*, 55–57. For his brief discussion of the fragments, see Lang, *John Philoponus and the Controversies*, 21.

[211] Ibid.

> [T]he heat in the fire, being active and naturally equipped to heat its surroundings, generates other heat in the surrounding air; and, just as a theorem is formally the same (τὸ αὐτὸ μέν ἐστιν κατ’ εἶδος θεώρημα) in the teacher and the pupil, but not, for all that, numerically the same (οὐ μὴν κατ’ ἀριθμὸν τὸ αὐτό), and the one in the teacher is the efficient cause of the one in the pupil, and [the one in the pupil] is caused [by it], so too is the heat in the fire, which is numerically different from the heat in the air, its efficient cause.[212]

What is interesting in this passage, for present purposes, is not the claim it argues for but the evidence it appeals to. Philoponus thinks that, when one immanent form gives rise to another, the two are numerically distinct but formally identical. Note that, despite the slightly different terms, this is the same principle Philoponus evokes in the *Arbiter*. While this passage is not sufficient on its own to suggest what Philoponus has in mind, it gives a pretty clear picture if considered together with the *Arbiter* passage. Likewise, the *Arbiter* passage becomes plausible support for reading what Philoponus is doing in the *CP* because, despite its being a later work, it can easily be seen to say much the same thing as this passage from the older text.

We can conclude that what the craftsman’s form and the form in the product have in common is their “formal identity.” But since they are numerically distinct forms, what Philoponus means by “formal identity” is best understood as “having in common an intelligible content, which can be abstracted from them.” Finally, because Philoponus draws a strong analogy between divine and human concept use and craftsmanship, it seems likely that he thinks that what the divine ideas share with creatures is, likewise, a certain intelligible content. When God thinks up what he will make, even “before” he determines *that* he will make something, he has the intelligible content already present to him. When he finally determines to make

[212] *CP* IX.11:353,9–16: ἡ ἐν τῷ πυρὶ θερμότης δραστήριος οὖσα καὶ θερμαίνειν πεφυκυῖα τὰ παρακείμενα ἄλλην ἐν τῷ παρακειμένῳ ἀέρι γεννᾷ θερμότητα· καὶ ὡς ἐν τῷ διδασκάλῳ τε καὶ τῷ μαθητῇ τὸ αὐτὸ μέν ἐστιν κατ’ εἶδος θεώρημα, οὐ μὴν κατ’ ἀριθμὸν τὸ αὐτό, καὶ ἔστιν τὸ μὲν ἐν τῷ διδασκάλῳ ποιητικὸν αἴτιον τοῦ ἐν τῷ μαθητῇ, αἰτιατὸν δὲ ἐκεῖνο, οὕτω καὶ ἡ ἐν τῷ πυρὶ θερμότης διάφορος οὖσα κατ’ ἀριθμὸν τῆς ἐν τῷ ἀέρι θερμότητος ποιητικόν ἐστιν αὐτῆς αἴτιον.

something according to those ideas, it seems fairly natural to think that he has gotten what he was after, that his actions have at least not gone amiss, if the product ends up "looking like" what he thought up. That seems especially true if there be no "remainder," no content in the product that is not already there in the divine idea.

5 — A difficulty for this answer

At this point, I take myself already to have established that Philoponus cares about something like the CFP. I have also sketched his solution. But the case can be further strengthened by showing that these commitments are woven into Philoponus' broader thinking. To make that case, I am now going to mention some difficulties that Philoponus faces by modelling God on a craftsman and the solutions he proposes to those difficulties.

First, I wish to return to the assumptions Philoponus makes in *CP* II. I have mentioned a few already. I now add another. If providence requires productive foreknowledge and things are present to God's productive foreknowledge insofar as he possesses certain principles or concepts, it seems to follow that, if God does *not* possess the concepts or principles for something, he cannot foreknow it and cannot, therefore, exercise providence over it. That fact suggests, though Philoponus never makes the claim in so many words, that God's providential activity—at least his creative providential activity—can only extend to those things for which God possesses the principles or concepts.

In making these claims about providence's nature, Philoponus also makes an implicit commitment to certain claims about providence's scope. If (a) God is an intellect, (b) his productive foreknowledge consists in his possessing certain concepts, or intelligible principles, and (c) he must productively foreknow his creatures in order to exercise providence over them,

then it seems to follow (d) that his providence can only extend to things with intelligible contents. Anything else would fall outside divine foreknowledge, meaning that God could not intend to produce it and that its creation would fall outside his care.

This view gives rise to a problem if combined with assumptions that at least some Neoplatonists held: namely that certain positions in the cosmic hierarchy are occupied by non-intelligible "entities."[213] Foremost among these are particulars and prime matter, the latter serving as the former's basic numerical identity. If God's providential foreknowledge and intention extend only to the intelligible, God cannot be said to intend prime matter or, by extension, the individual. Obviously, Philoponus would be unhappy with that implication: he is clear in *CP* II that God "brings into existence" "even the most individual things and extends its providence to all things."[214] In *CP* IV, he says much the same.[215] So too *CP* XVI.[216] He says directly in *CP* XII that God creates matter;[217] and he would certainly *not* want to say that God does not know the matter he is making. His model is, after all, that of a skilled craftsman who knows even the matter of his making.[218] It is doubtful that he would have missed the implication of his own views on this point; so, presumably, he has in mind some way to avoid the implication despite his decision to reduce providence's scope to the intelligible. Perhaps the most natural way would be to claim that creatures are wholly intelligible, with no remainder that an intellective providence might miss. In the next section, I shall attempt to show that, elsewhere in the *Contra Proclum*, he shows that he has commitments that supply precisely the conceptual resources to accomplish such a task.

[213] Note: when it comes to the gods and individuals, Proclus says one must have πίστις, not ἐπιστήμη.
[214] CP II.5, 38,1–39,1: καὶ αὐτὰ τῶν ὄντων τὰ ἀτομώτατα παράγει τε καὶ γινώσκει καὶ ἐπὶ πάντα τὴν αὐτοῦ διατείνει πρόνοιαν. He is citing Proclus and Plotinus here, but he clearly agrees with it, having introduced their conceptions as "common."
[215] *CP* IV.13, 90,1–91,25.
[216] *CP* XVI.3, 573,15–573,20.
[217] *CP* IX.9; XII.1, 468,1–468,7.
[218] *CP* IX.9.

Before doing so, however, I must first consider a potential concern with my argument so far: Philoponus, one might rightly point out, never *directly* says that he wants to suggest a picture on which God is a demiurgic intellect. Rather, he frames his argument as working from within the assumptions that *Plato* might make. That is true enough. But it is clear that Philoponus favors the idea that God knows things in this artisanal fashion. In the passage in *CP* II, he moves past making his (purely negative) case from within what he takes to be Plato's options. He takes his view on foreknowledge to be a "common" one, which he seems to endorse; and he considers that view to be directly tied to the idea that the divine ideas are "concepts" (νοήσεις) in the divine mind. If he is remaining within what he takes to be Plato's position, he has little reason to make the positive argument at all; that he does so, in combination with the fact that he seems to endorse the conception he puts forward, suggests that, at this juncture, Philoponus is moving into something closer to his own views. Further, he is selective when it comes to choosing passages from Proclus and Plotinus. He tends to cites passages in which the two pagans make providence sound more personalistic, with foreknowledge involving a divine *knowledge*, even if one that is "above intellect."[219] Philoponus is likely propping up his own argument by appealing to points at which his opponents appear to be closer to his own position. Further, elsewhere in the *Contra Proclum*, especially *CP* IV,[220] Philoponus is clearly committed to the idea that God contains secondary potentialities. Finally, he makes the same claims about divine ideas, sometimes using slightly different language, in both his earlier work (e.g. the Aristotelian commentaries) and his later work (e.g. the *Arbiter*), suggesting an enduring interest in and commitment to such a providential picture.

[219] *CP* II.5, 37,22–38,20; 39,2–39,19.

[220] At *CP* IV.9, 79,4–79,6, he says explicitly that the creative principles of things are always within God.

6 — An attempted solution

Having argued that Philoponus' response to Proclus in *CP* II depends for its plausibility on his success in folding all things into the intelligible, I am now ready to discuss one way in which he does so: by changing how "prime matter" is understood. More specifically, Philoponus redefines prime matter so that it becomes merely one more form among many—namely, a substantial quantity (οὐσιῶδες ποσὸν) that he refers to variously as "body *simpliciter*" (ἁπλῶς σῶμα),[221] "unqualified body" (τὸ ἄποιον σῶμα),[222] "body in general" (ὅλως τὸ σῶμα), "corporeality,"[223] and "three-dimensional extension," or "three-dimensionality" (τὸ τριχῇ διαστατὸν).[224]

Before laying out the argument Philoponus makes for this redefinition, it will be helpful to explain the historical background in brief.[225] In doing so, I hope to foreground the reason for the belief that prime matter, as commonly understood, is something other than form and hence not intelligible.

6.1 — Matter in the forerunners

Arguably, a belief in prime matter can be traced to Aristotle, though it is far from uncontentious that he himself holds that there is such a "stuff."[226] To understand how the view

[221] *CP* XI.3, 413,23; 414,4.
[222] *CP* XI.3, 414,19.
[223] Philoponus, *Arbiter*, §41, p. 209
[224] *CP* XI.3, 412,16.
[225] For a much fuller account, see De Haas, *John Philoponus' New Definition*.
[226] Just to name a few scholars involved in the debate over whether Aristotle holds there is such a thing as prime matter, see William Charlton, "Prime Matter: A Rejoinder," *Phronesis* 28, no. 2 (1983): 197–211; Sheldon Cohen, "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Material Substrate," *Philosophical Review* 93, no. 2 (1984): 171–194; Russell Dancy, "On Some of Aristotle's Second Thoughts about Substances: Matter," *Philosophical Review* 87 (1978): 372–413; Daniel Graham, "The Paradox of Prime Matter," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (1987): 475–490; Barrington Jones, "Aristotle's Introduction of Matter," *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 474–500; Hugh R. King, "Aristotle without *Prima Materia*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1956): 370–389; H.M. Robinson, "Prime Matter in Aristotle," *Phronesis* 19 (1974): 168–188; and Friedrich Solmsen, "Aristotle and Prime Matter: A Reply to Hugh R. King." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19, no. 2 (1958): 243–252. Charlton, Jones, and King challenge the "traditional view" in different ways, while Cohen, Graham, Robinson, and Solmsen defend the traditional (though Graham thinks it ultimately results in an incoherence in Aristotle).

arises, one must first recall why Aristotle introduces the terms “form” (εἶδος, μορφή) and “matter” (ὕλη). Aristotle initially introduces the distinction between matter and form to explain change. Broadly, in each change, there must be two elements: something that is gained or lost within a certain category, such a quality or quantity, and something that persists through the change. When I cook eggs, the eggs lose one quality, coldness, while gaining another quality, heat. The eggs themselves remain substantially the same. In fact, it is because there is something that undergoes the change—in this case the eggs—that one can call it a change at all.[227]

A similar logic applies to changes from one substance to another. Suppose one beats a sword into a plowshare. Just as in the case of the eggs, something is lost and something gained. What is lost is one form: the sword’s form; what is gained is another form: the plowshare’s form; and what persists through the change is the bronze. In the change, one composite substance—the sword—perishes while another substance—the plowshare—comes to be.[228] In cases like this, where the change is from one substance to another rather than an alteration occurring within the same substance, Aristotle refers to the thing undergoing the change as “matter.”

Matter is relative to the change in question. Relative to the change from sword to plowshare, the bronze is matter. But the bronze is also the form for what composes it. On the Aristotelian picture, all things ultimately comprise the four elements (i.e. air, earth, fire, water). So, bronze is form relative to the elements but matter relative to plowshares beaten from swords.

Later commentators notice a potential puzzle in Aristotle. On the one hand, Aristotle makes matter out to be a something that persists through change. That means that, in general, matter will be a substance with its own character. On the other hand, Aristotle also says that the elements change into one another. If he posited that they never underwent substantial change but

[227] Two important passages in which Aristotle discusses the need for matter in order to explain change are his *Physics* I 7 and I 9. Aristotle, *Physica*, ed. and trans. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

[228] I am aware that it is contentious whether Aristotle thinks artifacts *are* substances in the proper sense. I opt for artifacts because they make for an easier illustration, not because I wish to make a commitment in the debate.

were simply arranged in different ways or changed in their relations to one another, there would be no issue. But since he claims that they do indeed change into one another, there must be some matter that persists through their changes into one another. This consideration leads some commentators to posit a characterless "stuff" that underlies all changes, serving as the necessary logical "other" to all forms. This "stuff" they call "prime matter."[229]

By the time Philoponus is writing, the assumption that there is something like prime matter has become common, showing up in the ways different philosophical schools characterize providence. In particular, it makes it impossible to attribute fully exhaustive providence to the divine intellect, or *νοῦς*. Knowledge pertains to the (intelligible) forms, so prime matter, having no intelligible features, cannot be known even by intellect, even the divine intellect.[230] Since particulars are constituted in part by their matter and the *νοῦς* cannot know or produce matter, the *νοῦς* cannot know or produce particulars either. At most, it can extend its providence to the forms that *also* have a part in constituting the particular.[231]

Different philosophical schools react differently to this implication. The Peripatetics simply accept that divine providence extends only to the universal or formal level, not to the particular. Neoplatonists like Proclus, in contrast, attempt to salvage providence for particulars by attributing providence to a cause superior to νοῦς. Proclus in particular does so by attributing matter to the One, the first principle.[232] But for Philoponus, who wants to identify God as (or as possessing) an intellect, there must be another solution.

[229] Richard Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (London: Duckworth, 1988), chapters 1–7; De Haas, *Philoponus' New Definition*, 20–45; Miira Tuominen, *The Ancient Commentators on Plato and Aristotle* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 121, 148.
[230] At least not *qua* intellect. Proclus would say that the Intellect (meaning the hypostasis from which particular intellects arise) knows things outside the intelligible insofar as it is *divine*, participating in the henads.
[231] It is also for this reason that he must say that, while individuals and their matter have *causes*, they have no paradigms.
[232] Proclus, *ET* Prop. 59.

6.2 — Replacing characterless prime matter with extension

In *CP* XI, Philoponus makes three-dimensional extension replace bodiless, characterless prime matter as the ultimate "stuff" that underlies all other properties and that persists through all changes in sensible particulars. The precise route by which Philoponus arrives at his conclusion is not essential here. What matters are two clarifications he makes. First, he says that extension falls under the Aristotelian category "substance," being a constitutive "part," or "element," in the substance rather than something that is added to it.[233] This move allows him to avoid characterizing extension as an accidental quantity, which would have to inhere in something more fundamental than itself—something like the characterless prime matter in which some of his predecessors and contemporaries believe. Secondly, Philoponus holds that, even when it serves as prime matter, extension is a form.[234] To call it matter is not to set it in a strictly separate category from other forms but merely to say that it stands as a substratum relative to them.[235] Making this move opens new possibilities for Philoponus. For instance, it becomes possible for him to construe the form–matter composite (and hence the individual) as comprising nothing but forms. Philoponus can thus extend divine providence to the individual without having to worry

[233] *CP* XI.5–6, especially but not only 423,12–424,10. In doing so, he is following the Commentators, among whom it had, by this time, it has become common to consider certain properties, in particular those that "complete" or "constitute" the substance, as belonging to substance. A common example was the whiteness in snow. See Simplicius, *Simplicii in Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, ed. Carolus Kalbfleisch. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 8 (Berlin: Reimer, 1907), 48.33–49.9, cited in De Haas, *Philoponus' New Definition*, 207.
[234] He spends several paragraphs arguing for the conclusion that there is nothing incoherent about the idea that forms can underlie other forms as their ὑποκείμενα. See *CP* XI.7. At 427,9, he goes so far as to suggest that it "is a certain form" (εἶδός τί ἐστιν); and, while he sometimes says that the three-dimensional is "informed," he makes it perfectly clear that, in calling it so, he does not mean to say that it is composite but is, rather, something like a "simple bulk" (ἁπλοῦς τίς … ὄγκος: 428,5–428,10). For a fuller discussion, see also De Haas, *Philoponus' New Definition*, 254–279.
[235] *CP* XI.7, 427,5–427.9. Note: Philoponus also considers the objection that to make prime matter into three-dimensionality is to make one form that on which other forms are "founded." He spends several paragraphs arguing that this is an acceptable claim. See *CP* XI.7. In the end, though, he simply says that this upshot is acceptable to him. See, relatedly, Marina Schwark, "Simplicius on the Individuation of Material Substances," *Elenchos* 40, no. 2 (2019), 401–429. According to Schwark, Simplicius agrees with Philoponus. That Simplicius and Philoponus should both come to this idea suggests that it may be a relatively important idea descending to them from their shared master, Ammonius. (416) See also Krausmüller, "*Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae*," 157.

about introducing some unintelligible “stuff” that might end up troublingly falling outside divine providence’s reach.[236]

It is now time to consider what construing prime matter as extension enables Philoponus to do. At various points in the *CP*, Philoponus commits himself, sometimes more explicitly and sometimes less so, to the idea that things are constituted by their forms, which are in turn understood to be their *essential* properties. It is his claim that prime matter is extension that enables him to do so. For, once prime matter is just another form, it becomes possible to construe the particular form–matter composite as exhaustively constituted by forms.

I shall take a little space now to consider the evidence that things are constituted by their forms and that those forms are their essential properties. In an aside in *CP* I, Philoponus considers an argument by certain unnamed interlocutors to the effect that the relationship between God and world is like that between the sun and the light found in the solar sphere. (That is as opposed to the solar rays.) In his reply, Philoponus says the following:

> [T]he substantial light that coexists with the sun … is what informs (εἰδοποιόν … ἐστιν) and completes (συμπληρωτικὸν) the sun’s nature (φύσεως) … But each thing’s essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι) and substance (οὐσία) is governed by its form (κατὰ τὸ εἶδός ἐστιν). And nothing is its own creative cause. Neither … does the sun create its own light, since it is informed and has existence thanks to it.[237]

If the sun is not explicitly equated with its essence and nature in this passage, it is *nearly* so. Philoponus seems to take the claims (a) that the sun’s light informs and completes its *nature* and (b) that the sun’s light informs and completes *it* as functionally the same in meaning.[238] And its

[236] As Maria Varlamova notes, Philoponus thus makes matter into a “something,” with its own λόγος. “Philoponus’ Dispute Against the Eternity of the World and Its Influence on the Byzantine Philosophy,” *Scrinium* 13 (2017): 389.
[237] *CP* I.6, 16,25–17,4: Πρὸς δὲ τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου ὑπόδειγμα φαμεν· ἐπειδὴ τὸ φῶς διττόν ἐστιν, τὸ μὲν ἐν αὐτῇ συνυποστὰν τῇ τοῦ ἡλίου σφαίρᾳ οὐσιωμένον φῶς εἰδοποιόν τέ ἐστιν καὶ συμπληρωτικὸν τῆς τοῦ ἡλίου φύσεως, <ὡς> παντί τῳ δῆλον· ἑκάστου δὲ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι καὶ ἡ οὐσία κατὰ τὸ εἶδός ἐστιν· οὐδὲν δὲ αὐτὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἐστιν δημιουργικὸν αἴτιον· οὐδ’ ὁ ἥλιος ἄρα δημιουργός ἐστιν τοῦ ἰδίου φωτὸς κατ’ αὐτὸ εἰδοποιούμενος καὶ τὸ εἶναι ἔχων.
[238] Here, I am echoing an argument from Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 155.

essence or nature, in turn, is pretty clearly being constituted by, at very least, what would be called its completive forms, such as its light.[239]

Similarly, in *CP* XI, Philoponus describes fire (and its essence) as comprising at least heat and lightness, water (and its essence) as comprising wetness and coolness—in each case combined with three-dimensionality or corporeity.[240] (It should be noted here, also, that while Philoponus does talk about the sun as the substratum for the forms elsewhere in this passage, it is clear that it is constituted by them; it seems more natural to read them as its parts or elements, which exist "in it" only in the sense that it is only in the bundle that the individual properties have existence.)

Now for the passages in which the forms in question are equated with properties. Elsewhere in *CP* I, Philoponus says, "[T]he sun, inasmuch as it is informed by it, naturally possesses its light inseparably; for forms are inseparable from their substrata."[241] Here, the sun is serving as the subject in which the forms inhere, suggesting that the forms under discussion are *immanent* forms. Philoponus makes clear elsewhere that such immanent, inseparable forms include things like the particular whiteness in a swan's plumes, suggesting that the forms under

[239] That Philoponus uses the term "completive" (συμπληρωτικός) to mean those properties that are "parts of" and so constitute a substance is likely on the basis of his familiarity with the distinction in Plotinus and the Aristotelian commentary tradition, especially as represented by figures such as Simplicius and Ammonius. For discussion of this distinction in Plotinus, see Riccardo Chiaradonna, "Plotinus on Sensible Particulars and Individual Essences," in *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, eds. Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zachhuber, 47–62 (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the 'We'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38–40, 68–72. For the same distinction the commentators and the Cappadocians, see Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 162–169 and Francesco Ademollo, "The Anatomy of Primary Substance in Aristotle's *Categories*," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, Volume 60*, ed. Victor Caston, 145–202 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 177–183. As the citations in the secondary literature show, the thinkers who talk about "completive" properties disagree over what all is included in the set of completive properties. Some seem to think it includes only definitional, or essential, properties, while others seem to think it includes necessary but non-definitional properties. What is consistent is that, if a property is completive, it is a part of and constitutive of the substance. Thanks to Brendan Harris for pressing this point.

[240] *CP* XI.6, 425,17–425,22.

[241] *CP* I.8, 20,28–21,30: ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἥλιος ἅτε εἰδοποιούμενος ἐξ αὐτοῦ εἰκότως ἀχώριστον ἔχει τὸ φῶς· ἀχώριστα γὰρ τὰ εἴδη τῶν ὑποκειμένων…

consideration are properties.[242] Further, Philoponus says, “No substratum [causes] the form that informs it … nor … its own … affection (πάθους) or accident (συμβεβηκότος).”[243] In this quote, Philoponus seems to put the “forms,” in this case, in the same general bag as accidental properties. That fits well with what we know already, cementing the idea that, here, Philoponus has in mind essential properties.

Taken together, the fact that things are constituted wholly by their forms and the fact that the forms under discussion are properties suggest that things are wholly constituted by their essential properties. One last clarification must be made, however. In the last citation less one, Philoponus says that the *sun* is the subject in which the properties inhere. That might seem to suggest it is a logical subject somehow *prior* to rather than constituted by them. It seems to me the best way to read this passage so that it coheres with his commitments elsewhere is to interpret “sun” to mean the concrete property bundle. The immanent properties cannot stand on their own; they can only ever appear in connection with concrete clusters comprising various other properties, all ultimately founded on extension.

I would like to use one more passage as evidence for the idea that things are wholly constituted by their properties, including, when it comes to sensible things, their extension. The following is from *CP* XI.

> [J]ust as the [differentiae] ‘irrational’ or ‘mortal’ do not exist on their own but it is [only] coupled with ‘living creature’, that is, with ‘ensouled, sentient [creature]’, that they achieve existence—by ‘living creature’, I do not mean the genus but the one that actually exists and that becomes part of the composite [organism]—just so do the heat or lightness in fire and everything else that makes up the substance of fire—and similarly the wetness and coldness that are constitutive of water and, [in the case] of earth and air, the

[242] *CP* 9.11, 347,19–23 and 352,13–17.

[243] *CP* I.8, 21,3–21,6: οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν ὑποκειμένων δημιουργικὸν αἴτιον ἐστιν τοῦ εἰδοποιοῦντος αὐτὸ εἴδους, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τοῦ ἰδίου πάθους τε καὶ συμβεβηκότος ποιητικὸν αἴτιόν ἐστιν τῶν ἐχόντων οὐδέν.

> characteristics which are differentiae of *their* body—also take their existence in body plain and simple, [or] the three-dimensional.[244]

This passage makes clear the role extension plays in any concrete thing. All the other properties that constitute fire's essence inhere in extension as in a substratum, and it is in such a bundle that fire's essential properties form the concrete fire.

Some care should be taken here. Strictly, what Philoponus says is that "everything that makes up fire's substance … takes its existence in … the three-dimensional." He does not explicitly say the three-dimensional is among the properties making up fire's substance, or essence, but it seems a natural interpretation. There are two reasons for thinking so. First is that, when Philoponus talks about the substance "rational animal" in the passage cited above, the distinction he draws is not between properties included in the definition and those not included but between more or less basic properties. "Irrational" and "mortal" can only assume existence in a living creature, but anything that is by definition an "irrational, mortal animal" will also have to be *living*. If fire's heat and lightness are analogous to "irrational" and "mortal," its extension is the corresponding analogue for "living thing." It thus seems likely that Philoponus' point is simply that extension serves as the basis for the other properties constituting fire's substance, not that it is something *other* than a substantial property.[245]

Secondly and more positively, Philoponus appears to consider fire's heat and lightness and water's coldness and wetness analogues to the "characteristics which are *differentiae* of the

[244] *CP* XI.6, 425,13–425,22: ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ ἄλογον ἢ τὸ θνητὸν καθ' ἑαυτὸ μὲν οὐχ ὑφίσταται, συνδυαζόμενα δὲ τῷ ζῴῳ, τουτέστιν τῷ ἐμψύχῳ αἰσθητικῷ, τὴν ὕπαρξιν λαμβάνει (λέγω δὲ ζῴῳ οὐ τῷ γένει, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἐν ὑπάρξει ἤδη, ὃ καὶ μέρος τοῦ συνθέτου γίνεται), οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὸ ἐν πυρὶ θερμὸν ἢ κοῦφον καὶ ὅσ' ἂν τὴν τοῦ πυρὸς συμπληρωοῦσιν οὐσίαν, ὁμοίως καὶ τὸ ὑγρὸν καὶ τὸ ψυχρόν, ἅπερ συμπληρωτικά ἐστιν τοῦ ὕδατος, καὶ γῆς καὶ ἀέρος τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ τούτων διαφοραὶ ὑπάρχοντα σώματος <u>ἐν τῷ ἁπλῶς σώματι τῷ τριχῇ διαστατῷ</u> τὴν ὑπόστασιν λαμβάνει.

[245] One can find further support from John Philoponus, *John Philoponus and the Controversies*, §30, Lang 199, where Philoponus says that body and soul belong to different genera, namely the bodily and the incorporeal. I follow Lang's translation. From this point, I will cite it simply as "*Arbiter*," with the section and page number from Lang.

body” of earth and air. The language here suggests that extension is analogous to the properties associated with the genus, which would still be included in the definition. As he says in the *Arbiter* (and likely holds in the *CP*), man is not merely rational and mortal. Man is a rational, mortal *animal*.[246] Assuming that, as in the passage from *CP* XI, “animal” is taken to mean a composite of soul and the body, corporeality must enter into the human definition even if only implicitly. So, too, it seems probable that fire’s essence is to be hot, light *body*.[247] These two considerations supply sufficient reason to think that any apparent distinction being drawn between “everything that makes up fire’s substance” and the fire’s extension is due to looseness in Philoponus’ language rather than to his intending to exclude extension from fire’s substance. There is one sense in which the fire’s bodiliness may not belong to its definition. One might think that, properly, a definition includes only a thing’s most characteristic properties, or ἰδιότητες. For fire, those properties are lightness, heat, and most especially brightness.[248] In this sense, animality, which is common to multiple natures and so cannot serve as an essential differentiating characteristic, would not be an especially good ἰδιότης.[249] But it is also clear that, in another sense, animality *does* come into what it is to be a particular animal such as a human. So it would be reasonable to assume, too, that fire’s bodiliness enters into its definition in at least this looser sense—even if its bodiliness is not an especially distinctive characteristic.

Additional support for my claim can be drawn from the *Arbiter*, where Philoponus makes it clearer that he considers a thing to be its nature or substance and the nature, or substance, to be the thing’s essential properties taken in sum. A brief note on method: although the *Arbiter* was likely written later than the *CP*, it can play a supporting role here. I have already noted the

[246] *Arbiter* §12, p. 183.

[247] It is certainly the case that Philoponus sees the elements as body. For instance, In *CP* XI.3, he talks about the change of one element into another as the change of bodies into one another.

[248] *Arbiter* §41, p. 208.

[249] Hence why things are not usually named by their matter, which everything else has too, but by their forms (in the relative sense). See *CP* IX, 371,3–371,8.

passages in the *CP* in which Philoponus seems to hold that things are nothing but their bundled properties. That should be sufficient for my purposes. However, seeing that he uses rather similar language and even examples in his later work may lend some small additional plausibility to my interpretation—especially when taken in combination with the very similar understanding of three-dimensionality as the basic substratum of the internal, formal structure of things.

In the *Arbiter*, §12, Philoponus asks whether an individual is identical with its nature. He answers in the affirmative, making the following, very brief argument:

> [N]othing which exists is other than its nature (or substance). For if the nature (or substance) of man is rational and mortal living being—for the definitions of things are indicative of their substance—but man is other than his own substance, then man will be other than rational and mortal living being. But man is nothing else than rational and mortal living being. And how should man thus be other than himself?[250]

Strictly speaking, what this passage claims is only that a thing is not to be understood as other than its nature. Philoponus takes it as a given that a thing is nothing other than its essential properties. He then reasons that, since a thing's definition indicates what its nature is and definitions consist in certain essential properties, a thing's nature must *be* its essential properties. Finally, since a thing is nothing other than its essential properties and its nature is its essential properties, a thing cannot be "other than" its nature.

[250] *Arbiter* §12, p. 183. Note that Lang's translation leaves off articles, meaning that it could sound as though Philoponus is talking about "man" in general, in the abstract, or in the universal. Unfortunately, I am not versed in Syriac and cannot check the original language myself. But I think context is enough to rule out that reading. Philoponus is clearly talking about whether things that exist are other than their natures, and he is a particularist, as I shall discuss later on; and his examples include the sun and Christ, which are both particulars or indivisibles. Both points mean that he is almost definitely *not* talking about universals here. Many thanks to Brendan Harris for noting that one could read the passage as about "man" in general.

Based on this reasoning, Philoponus takes a further step. “Man,” he says, is the same as “man’s nature.”[251] Likewise, the sun is its nature, and Christ is his nature.[252] And so on for any other thing (“each existent”) one might care to name.[253]

In *Arbiter* §13, one can find further evidence for the idea that a nature or substance consists in its essential forms or properties, taken in sum (rather than severally):

> If multiple … natural faculties are seen in the sun, such as, e.g., its brightness and heat and[,] again[,] its three-dimensional extension and spherical shape, its circular motion and whatever else of the kind, even then there is no need to say that there are multiple natures of the sun. For nothing of the kind by itself makes the nature of the sun. Brightness is also in fire, and spherical shape in many others, and again circular motion in the whole sky, and three-dimensional extension in each body, but the sun is none of those. But what is a joint product of all that has been mentioned[—]this is the sun’s nature (or substance), which is not to be seen in anything else and makes the one sun and its one nature.[254]

Finally, I present *Arbiter* §41. This passage is necessary to bring up because it may be taken either to present a challenge to my reading or to support it, depending on how it is read.

> [T]he compound of all the constituents of the subject, this we call “nature and substance.” For example, we say that brightness is a property of fire … but not the nature of fire; lightness is even more specifically a property of fire, but not the nature of fire. Rather[,] that which is made up of all these together, of which fire is constituted, along with the corporeality underlying them[—]this is the substance and nature of fire.[255]

Here, as in *CP* XI, there is some clarificatory work to be done. It might appear that he is saying a thing’s essential properties are *added* to the corporeality, or three-dimensional extension, to make up its substance, or nature. Such a reading would count against my interpretation. But, as with *CP* XI, the better reading is that corporeality is functioning as an essential property, even if one

[251] *Arbiter* §12, p. 183. I have very slightly altered Lang’s translation purely for euphony. There should be no change in meaning.
[252] *Arbiter* §12, p. 183.
[253] *Arbiter* §12, p. 183.
[254] *Arbiter* §13, pp. 183–184.
[255] *Arbiter* §41, p. 209.

that differs from the others in functioning as a substratum for the rest. I present two reasons for thinking so. First, the passage from *Arbiter* §13 clearly shows that "three-dimensional extension" is among the forms making up the sun's nature. Secondly, as with *CP* XI, it seems clear that Philoponus is simply using terms in slightly different ways in different passages. He sometimes talks as though natures were wholly constituted by their substantial differences (the properties that are most properly called their ἰδιόητες); but he makes it clear that three-dimensionality belongs to each body's nature and that the sun (as, presumably, also with the elements) is body.[256]

In conclusion, Philoponus has taken steps towards making his ontology consist entirely in intelligible entities: individuals are nothing but their essential properties, and their properties have an intelligible content—just the moves that Philoponus would need to make in order to fold all things under God's intellective providence. This conclusion achieves two things for my argument in this chapter. (a) It strengthens the case for my claim that, for Philoponus, God knows creatures in advance simply by knowing their intelligible contents. Secondly, it suggests that Philoponus' arguments in the *CP* are more systematic than they might at first appear: in his argument with Proclus, he is intentionally reworking concepts such as individuation as supports for a picture on which providence can be ascribed, without remainder, to a creative intellect. There is thus an undercurrent to his argument about whether the world is everlasting: he is suggesting his preferred position on providence as a viable alternative to that held by Proclus. That Philoponus is being more systematic than it might at first seem matters for my argument in one last way: it matters because it suggests that the other sections in the *CP* where Philoponus supplies the resources to support his argument in *CP* II are linked with his aim, in *CP* II, to show how the λόγοι secure divine productive foreknowledge. If that be true, it renders more plausible

[256] For the former, *Arbiter* §41, p. 208; for the latter, see the previous cited passage: the sun's nature includes its "three-dimensional extension," which is a property it shares with other bodies.

my contention that what Philoponus is doing in *CP* II is, among other things, working through how to deal with the difficulties involved in establishing a relationship between the λόγοι and creatures, enabling the λόγοι to do the work he wants to assign them.

I should pause to consider an objection here. One might still think I have overstepped my evidence. And it must be admitted that it is impossible to say with *certainty* that Philoponus is intentionally deploying concepts such as three-dimensionality in order to support his arguments against Proclus in places like *CP* II, much less whether he is intending to deploy them to set his own providential picture over against Proclus'. However, I take it that the case is legitimate—and that for the following reasons. It is unlikely the connections among individuation, providence, and his arguments in *CP* II and elsewhere would have escaped Philoponus. And there are reasons to think he *would* intentionally deploy the concepts in such a way. For instance, while Philoponus himself never says, in the *CP*, that he has divine knowledge or providence in mind when he subscribes to the idea that prime matter is merely another form, it would certainly be *natural* for the thought to have crossed his mind. Other philosophers, including Proclus himself, had already been wrestling with the difficulty, and Philoponus almost certainly would have been aware. And it certainly *seems* that Philoponus connects providential foreknowledge with the intelligible in a way that suggests he himself sees the further connection between his views on prime matter and providence. Certainly, it is more than coincidence that he happens to argue for concepts that happen to serve exactly the conceptual role demanded in order to make his views on providence work. It is therefore at least plausible to think that the view on which prime matter is a form would have commended itself to Philoponus for its usefulness in this connection, which he happens to have deployed more directly in his argument in *CP* XI.

7 — Evaluating Philoponus

I take myself to have shown that, plausibly, Philoponus cares about the CFP and that he builds his ontology with an eye to dissolving it. The next task is to ask to what degree he is successful. In this section, I claim that Philoponus, despite his best efforts, never manages to avoid certain difficulties. In order to make this evaluative claim, I need to introduce the distinction Philoponus draws between common natures and particular natures. And that distinction, in turn, will be easier to draw after noting that Philoponus is an ontological particularist. To that lattermost task I turn now.

7.1 — Particularism

Philoponus holds that all substances, properly speaking, are particular. Apparently common things like "humanity," if they can be said to exist at all, exist only "in the mind," as concepts that have been abstracted from particular substances.[257] One can find Philoponus expressing this position most clearly in his later, theological treatises. Consider, for example, the following fragment, purportedly from a treatise written by Philoponus in a treatise on the Trinity:

> [S]pecies and genera are posterior to particular individuals, and … each common thing is constructed by our intellect from particulars. For this reason, the ancients called such things posterior and intellectual beings. For, correctly speaking, Peter, John, and every individual man are animal and substance, and the same goes for this horse and that ox. However, these names [i.e. "animal" and "substance"] passed from these … to … genera and species, that is, from things which subsist in substance to those which are inferred by our intellect. That is why … Aristotle … says: the universal either is nothing or is posterior. Nothing, because no universal is a proper existence, as our idea about them is not, correctly speaking, a substance. Particulars are called principle and first substances, whereas that which is said of many, i.e., genera and species, is called substance only in a

[257] See Philoponus, *In Aristotelis de anima commentaria*, I.1, Hayduck 37,17–38–17 and II.5, Hayduck 307,20–308,2; *Arbiter* §23, pp. 191–192; Erismann, "John Philoponus on Individuality"; and Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, chapter 6, especially 163–166. For brief discussion of whether Philoponus is to be read as holding that universal concepts are formed in the soul by abstraction, see Sirkel, "Philoponus on the Priority," 366.

> secondary way. And this is why, when we speak not metaphorically, but properly, we call hypostases ‘substances’.[258]

One can find much the same thought already present in Philoponus’ earlier work, though he is generally less committed to the claim that universals are genuinely “nothing.” For instance, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*, he says, “For since nature, in making each particular thing (for it makes, as we have said, not one among the things universal), has brought certain … principles into each thing’s coming to be and has brought the same principles into all things likewise, it is plain … that the common and universal is posterior and takes its substance from the particular things’ coming to be.”[259] Here, “nature” means something like “the natural order,” or the cosmos.[260] Philoponus thus seems to mean that, in the natural world, there are only particulars. It is for that reason that what is common must also be “posterior.” One can find similar examples in his other commentaries.[261]

Notice that, even when he calls universals “nothing,” as in the fragment above, Philoponus does not completely rule out common natures: he simply denies that, if they do exist, they are “proper substances.” Elsewhere in his corpus, he seems inclined to think there are two broad categories into which things fall. One is “substance,” which includes both substances proper and the elements, or parts, constituting substances proper. The other is “accident.”[262] It

[258] Translation by Christophe Erismann, “John Philoponus on Individuality,” 148. He is citing Albert Van Roey, “Les fragments trithéites de Jean Philopon,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 11 (1980): 135–163. Erismann does not mention whether he is translating from Van Roey’s Latin or directly from the Syriac.

[259] John Philoponus, *Ioannis Philoponi in Aristotelis Physicorum libros tres priores commentaria*, ed. Hieronymus Vitelli. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca XVI (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyer, 1887), 15,20–24: ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἡ φύσις ἕκαστον τῶν κατὰ μέρος ποιοῦσα (οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν καθόλου ποιεῖ, ὥσπερ εἴπομεν), παρέλαβε τοσάσδε τινὰς ἀρχὰς εἰς τὴν ἑκάστου γένεσιν, καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων τὰς αὐτὰς ἀρχὰς ὁμοίως παρέλαβε, τὸ κοινὸν δηλονότι τοῦτο καὶ καθόλου ὕστερόν ἐστι καὶ ἐκ τῆς τῶν κατὰ μέρος πραγμάτων γενέσεως ὑφέστη. Found in Erismann, “Philoponus on Individuality,” 151. I have tweaked Erismann’s translation.

[260] See *CP* III.7, where Philoponus denies that there is a “universal nature” but allows that one might use the term “nature” to mean the harmony among all the elements making up the world.

[261] For which see, e.g., Erismann, “Philoponus on Individuality.” Also *CP* III.7, where he makes it clear that he thinks universals exist “only in thought.”

[262] *Arbiter* §§8–10, pp. 179–182. Such a division likely arises from Philoponus’ reading of Aristotle, whom he also takes to divide things into substances and accidents, the latter category including all the non-substance categories.

would be perfectly natural for Philoponus to assign universals to the latter category. Indeed, in places like his *CP*, he seems inclined to just that tack, suggesting that the universal may exist “in being thought,” presumably as a concept (ἔννοια) that can be abstracted from particulars and, in turn, related to those particulars.[263] Insofar as they exist only in being thought, they are relatives or the like, not substances.

It is finally time to turn to the distinction between common and particular natures. Philoponus famously introduces this distinction in the *Arbiter*, chapter four and elaborates on it in chapter seven. “[E]ach nature,” he says, “is called … what it is, not in a single … but in a twofold manner.”[264] First, the term “nature” can refer to the “common nature,” meaning the “intelligible content (λόγος τῆς οὐσίας) common to participants in the same substance, as every man is a rational and mortal living being.”[265] Secondly, it can refer to the “same common nature [as it] exists in the individuals and assumes a particular existence in each … and does not fit with anything else but this [thing] alone.”[266] This he calls the “particular nature.”[267] Some immediate clarifications are in order. While Philoponus still talks about a “common nature in each individual,” I take it to be fairly clear that he is not merely talking about the same, abstract intelligible content under a certain aspect—namely as considered in association with one concrete individual, say. Rather, he is talking about the concrete substance, or οὐσία, in which the universal nature is “instantiated.” That he is doing so is supported by a few considerations. First, Philoponus makes it clear that “nature,” in his second sense, means the same thing as

See Sirkel, “Philoponus on the Priority,” 353–354. The passages on which Sirkel draws include *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* 49,10–16 and 49,19–22.

[263] Philoponus, *In Aristotelis de anima commentaria* 38,3–4: ἐννοηματικόν ἐστιν· ἔχει γὰρ τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἐν τῷ νοεῖσθαι, ὡς μέντοι καθ’ αὑτὸ ὑφεστηκὸς οὐδέν ἐστι. A little later on (38,15–16), he says that what we express when we give a universal definition is nothing but our concept of things (τὴν γὰρ ἔννοιαν ἣν ἔχομεν περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ὁριζόμεθα). In his commentary on the *Categories*, he clarifies that what we *predicate* of things is also our concept of their substance: *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* 58,13–59,1.

[264] *Arbiter* §22, p. 191.

[265] *Arbiter* §21, p. 190.

[266] *Arbiter* §22, p. 191.

[267] See, for example, *Arbiter* §§23–25, pp. 192–193.

"hypostasis," except that it considers the particular nature "in itself," not in connection with its accidents; and since hypostases are concrete entities, such as Christ, Peter, and Paul, the particularized common nature must also be a concrete entity.[268] To the extent that there is a notional distinction to make between hypostases and particular natures, it is not with regard to their relation to the common nature: Philoponus describes *both* the particular nature and the hypostasis as the "existence proper to," or "particular" to, "each individual" and as that in which the common nature takes it existence.[269] It makes little sense to talk about a more particular intelligible content as that in which another intelligible content exists—and, more positively, it seems that an intelligible content *needs* a concrete particularity in which to have its existence—, so the fact that the common nature takes its existence in the particular nature suggests the particular nature is a concrete entity. Thirdly, one can come at the matter through the passages I cited earlier: Philoponus explicitly says that individuals such as Christ and the sun *are* their natures. He cannot mean that the individual is the *common* nature. That, he says, is simply a common λόγος, which, given his particularism, is either a mental concept or nothing at all. So, it is most natural to read the passages in which Christ, "man," and the sun are identified with their natures as claiming that those individuals are their natures in the second sense, again suggesting that particular nature is concrete—and, indeed, that the particular nature *is* the concrete individual. And finally, there is the following, rather curious argument made by Philoponus when introducing the distinction in the first place:

> [T]he … common nature, such as … man, by which no man is distinguished from another, when it exists in each individual, is then proper to [that individual] and not

[268] *Arbiter* §§21–23, pp. 190–192.
[269] *Arbiter* §23, p. 192 for hypostasis; *Arbiter* §23, p. 192 for particular nature. In this reading, I differ from Zachhuber, who wants to read the hypostasis as more distinct from the particular nature. My sense is that Zachhuber thinks the term "particular nature" picks out something different from "hypostasis," whereas I think the two terms refer to the same entity, the difference being only that the term "hypostasis" has a different *sense*, or connotation. *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 152–154.

> common to anyone else … For the rational and mortal living being in me is not common to anyone else. [It is for this reason that], when a certain man suffers … it is possible for individuals [belonging to] the same species to remain without suffering. When Paul dies, it is possible that no other man dies with him.[270]

The argument seems to be something like this. The humanity found in, say, St. Stephen is destroyed when he is martyred. If the humanity found in him were *universal* humanity—humanity as found in each and every human—then that would mean the universal humanity would die along with St. Stephen. Obviously, though, there are still other humans around after he and his humanity are extinguished. So, whatever "humanity" is destroyed when St. Stephen is killed, it must not be the universal humanity. Instead, Philoponus suggests, it is a *particular* humanity. He makes a similar argument with respect to Christ: if the common divinity became enfleshed when the Son became enfleshed, then the Father and the Spirit would have been enfleshed along with him.[271] While it is *possible* to read this argument as being about a particular concept—ideas about St. Stephen being in some way unable to exist in his absence—,[272] it seems far more natural to read the claim that, "when Paul dies, it is possible that no other man die with him" as about a concrete substance, Paul, who can genuinely undergo death, than about a particular intelligible content linked with him.

In sum, Philoponus uses the term "particular nature" as one among various ways to refer to the particular, concrete substances one encounters in daily life: Paul, the maidenhair fern drooping on my bookshelf, the seagull stealing chips from the kebab stands on St. Giles', and so forth. It is also worth noting that one must therefore be especially careful when reading Philoponus on this topic: when he talks about natures, he may be talking about either the nature

[270] *Arbiter* §22, p. 191.
[271] Arbiter §23.
[272] Such a reading is certainly possible. Philoponus talks about concepts as reliant on their referents' existence in various passages. For discussion, see Erismann, "John Philoponus on Individuality," 153–155 and Riin Sirkel, "Philoponus on the Priority," 363–371.

in the abstract, as the common nature found only in concept, or in the concrete, as comprising the tropes that together constitute the individual.

One final point should be mentioned before I move on. Philoponus' particularism extends to properties in general. Just as humanity only exists in particular humans, so whiteness exists only in particular white things: the moon, that snowflake on the windowsill, the swaddling clothes in the nativity set the church down the road breaks out every December.[273] To use contemporary philosophical terms, Philoponus holds that concrete properties are tropes.[274] While he does not so clearly outline it as he does with other universals, such as species and genera, Philoponus most likely holds that there are "merely conceptual" universals for properties such as "white" as well as for natural kinds.

7.2 — Problems for the account

Let us now turn to the evaluation proper. Philoponus' basic response to the CFP is to reduce, as far as possible, the distance between the creature and its own intelligible content. In doing so, he makes the traditional divine ideas approach look much more plausible. After all, there is no articulable character by which the individual created differs in content from the corresponding λόγος. What, exactly, one might ask, is missing from the λόγος? What unexpected *element* in the concrete individual is unaccounted for? Presumably, nothing at all. Having produced a creature, God would find nothing in the creature that was unexpected.

Even so, some difficulties remain. For one thing, if the individual is identical with a particular nature, the λόγος alone is not enough to allow God to know and intend *this* particular

[273] Note, for instance, the references in footnote 245 of this thesis.

[274] For one of the first figures to introduce the concept in contemporary anglophone philosophy, see D.C. Williams, "On the Elements of Being I." *Review of Metaphysics* 7, no. 1 (1953): 3–18; and "On the Elements of Being II." *Review of Metaphysics* 7, no. 2 (1953): 601–625.

nature. After all, Philoponus holds that particular natures that “share” in the same common nature cannot be distinguished by their intelligible content. Even if one takes Philoponus to use the term “particular nature” to refer to the common nature considered *as* in connection with the concrete individual, the problem would remain; for it is only *as* associated with that individual that it becomes possible to think the common nature as in connection with it. Philoponus could not simply say that the individual can be known as particular because God knows the additional properties that distinguish a given particular nature from other, formally identical particular natures: at least in the treatises discussed in this chapter, he makes it clear that the particular nature *is* the individual substance; any other properties that happen to tag along with it are accidents, not the substance itself. They would therefore not give a grip on the substance, not unless they could already be associated with it.

All these worries, are relatively minor, however. Philoponus could simply say that God has a *particular* λόγος for each thing. He certainly flirts with that idea in his later writings.[275] Having already argued that there is no need for non-formal stuff such as matter, if Philoponus were to take this tweak onboard, he would have a very potent position indeed.

Even so, the CFP would remain. For all he attempts to reduce the difference between the creature and its intelligible content (and hence between it and its creative λόγος), the fact remains that he still has to admit that the λόγος is not the creature itself. It can explain and include reference to all the intelligible characters found in the thing, down to any peculiar properties it might have, but, in the end, it cannot contain reference to the fact that the creature is a concrete *other*. To that extent, he still cannot say that God has, prior to creating, an intended object that logically entails its product without deriving its content from that same product.

[275] Albert Van Roey, “Les fragments trithéites,” 135–163.

Chapter 5: Dionysius on precontainment

1 — Introduction

There is very little information about the figure who writes under the name Dionysius the Areopagite, but most contemporary scholars agree that he was a Christian, probably living in the Fifth Century and conversant with both the Neoplatonist tradition and Syrian Christian liturgy. His thought bears clear influences from Proclus, whose philosophical terms Dionysius adopts (and adapts) and whose argument that evil has no proper substance he repeats nearly blow for

blow in his treatise *On the Divine Names*.[276] It is also clear that, like his near contemporaries Proclus and Philoponus, Dionysius is (a) committed to the idea that God provides for his creatures and (b) is interested in describing how God oversees his creation through his providential activities. Like them, too, he wants providence to extend to each and every thing: God arranges principles, sources, and establishes *each* thing, down to the particular.[277]

In this and the next chapter, I attempt to show that Dionysius, again much like his near contemporaries, is interested in the CFP. He implicitly responds to it by suggesting that God knows the creature both in himself (that is, transcendently) and in his going out to the creature in the creative act (that is, relative to the creature as creator to creature or cause to effect). I also claim that, based on how Dionysius characterizes divine precontainment, divine procession, synergy between creatures and God, and hierarchy, it is possible to give his response a fuller characterization: God foreknows the creature in himself insofar as he possesses, though in an infinitely higher degree, the same powers and knowledges as the creature. In possessing them,

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[276] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, IV. Except where noted, I use Suchla's edition: *Corpus Dionysiacum: Band 1: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita: De Divinis Nominibus*, ed. Beate Suchla (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1990). I shall cite *The Divine Names* as "*DN*," followed by the chapter and section. Where more precision is necessary, I also include the page and/or line numbers from Suchla.

Regarding the connection between Proclus and Dionysius, see Hugo Koch, "Proklos als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen," *Philologus* 54 (1895): 438–454 and *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen: eine litterarhistorische Untersuchung.* Forschungen zur christlichen Litteratur und Dogmengeschichte, Band I, Heft 2/3 (Mainz, F. Kirchheim, 1900), 1–276 and Josef Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proklus als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253–273 and 721–748. More recently, see also H.D. Saffrey, "Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus," *Studia Patristica* 9 (1966): 98–105 and "New Objective Links Between Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic O'Meara (Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982), 64–74; and Carlos Steel, "Proclus et Denys: De l'existence du mal," in Denys l'Aréopagite et sa posterité en Orient et en Occident, ed. Ysabella de Andia (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1997), 89–108. Lilla Salvatore has argued for connections between Damascius and Pseudo-Dionysius: "Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite, Porphyre et Damascius." In *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident: Actes du Colloque International, Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994*, edited by Ysabel de Andia, 117–152. Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1997. This connection, however, remains more tenuous.

[277] For instance, *DN* XI.3, Suchla 220,1–3: Καὶ εἰ μὲν ἑτερότητα καὶ διάκρισιν ὁ ταῦτα λέγων φησὶ τὴν ἑκάστου τῶν ὄντων ἰδιότητα καὶ ὅτι ταύτην οὐδὲ ἕν τῶν ὄντων ὄν, ὅπερ ἔστιν, ἐθέλει ποτὲ ἀπολλύειν, οὐκ ἄν οὐδὲ ἡμεῖς πρὸς τοῦτο ἀντιφήσομεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταύτην εἰρήνης ἔφεσιν ἀποφανούμεθα. See also *DN* VIII.7 for the idea that God maintains each thing's nature (φύσις); *DN* V.7 for the idea that each thing has its own nature and λόγοι; and *DN* VIII.9, Suchla 207,4–5 for the idea that God preserves each being in its particular form, by which it is accustomed to be.

God knows exactly what his creatures, constituted by those same powers and knowledges and the corresponding activities, will be like. Further, since the activities that constitute creatures are actually a sharing in the singular, concrete activity in which God is always engaged, God always knows the very activity that *does* come to constitute the creature. He knows the creature in the creative act, on the other hand, insofar as he knows his own concrete act as rendered complex or differentiated so as to include creatures as cooperants. It is in the former sense that he knows creatures strictly in advance and the latter sense in which he knows them as particular.

As a mercy to my readers, I have divided this argument into two chapters. In this chapter, I focus on establishing (a) that Dionysius shows an interest in the CFP and (b) that, for him, God possesses, in a higher mode, all creaturely powers and knowledges. I shall reserve till the next chapter my argument for the claim that God knows things in his going out to them.

Note that the argument in these chapters is more conjectural than those in the previous chapters. Dionysius never explicitly thematizes the individual as such, not even in the broad sense in which I have been using the term (though, as I argue in the next chapter, he *does* imply that he has a position on individuals). Much less does he explicitly talk about the manner in which he thinks the divine idea relates to the individual or how this connection relates, in turn, to divine causation. As a result, my argument involves drawing elements from across the Dionysian Corpus in order to construct what I take to be a picture in which all those elements form a coherent whole.

Such an approach is warranted on the following grounds. First, Dionysius is a relatively systematic and certainly a sophisticated thinker. So, if

a) he is interested in the CFP,

b) the CFP is a problem only on the presupposition that creatures have their own individualities, and

c) Dionysius holds that there are such things as individuals in the relevant sense,

then it is plausible to think

d) that Dionysius recognizes a connection between the individual and the CFP.

Further, if the manner in which Dionysius seeks to secure divine foreknowledge in *DN* VII is echoed elsewhere in his corpus in his distinction between God in himself and God in his activities, it is plausible that the echoes are intentional: Dionysius is probably connecting his ideas about the relationship between God and creation and his views on divine foreknowledge. A second point favoring this approach is that Dionysius is clearly connected with the previous two thinkers with whom we have been dealing. He is their rough contemporary, probably knows and responds to Proclus, and is generally interested in related subjects.[278]

My argument begins with the passages in the *DN* in which Dionysius most explicitly discusses the manner in which God foreknows the creatures he will make: *DN* VII and V. On a straightforward reading, Dionysius thinks that God knows creatures in advance by possessing their paradigms. His insistence that God derives his knowledge about creatures not from the

[278] Philoponus was among the first to cite the Dionysian Corpus directly (in his *De opificio mundi*), so he was certainly acquainted with Dionysius as an author. John Rist suggests that Philoponus may even have known Dionysius personally or, at any rate, known who he was. For the reference in the *De opificio mundi* as well as thes speculations on the relation between Philoponus and Dionysius, see John Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul," in *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought: Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeauneau*, eds. Haijo Jan Westra (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1992), 136, note 7. Ronald F. Hathaway makes a similarly tentative suggestion to that effect in *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius: A Study in the Form and Meaning of the Pseudo-Dionysian Writings* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969), 5, 12.

creatures themselves but from his own nature suggests that Dionysius is aware that the divine ideas must be logically prior to their products. At the same time, he clearly wants to attribute to God genuine productive foreknowledge, both in the passages under consideration and in his need to consider biblical passages in which God shows clear, concrete intentions towards creatures. So, the divine ideas must also have some referential power. Along the way, I note that Dionysius is not clear on how exactly he thinks the paradigms meet these two demands. Indeed, he seems to suggest at least two approaches at once: on the one hand, he thinks that God knows creatures as he "precontains them." On the other hand, he sometimes talks about God as knowing creatures as "from him," which I take to mean something like "relative to him as their cause." There is thus a tension in Dionysius when it comes to this subject.

My next move is to suggest that this tension is not a bug but a feature: Dionysius thinks God knows things both by "precontaining them," or possessing their non-relative paradigms, and by knowing them as "being from him," as his actual effects in the creative act. To make that reading plausible, I turn to examine the Dionysian system as a whole, looking first at how Dionysius understands God to "precontain" creatures or their ideas and secondly at how he understands God to "go out to" his creatures in the creative act, rendering himself, to that extent, relative to them. God precontains his creatures by possessing the same powers that they will possess, though he possesses them in an infinitely more intense mode. That is to say that he is able to engage in the same activities as his creatures, producing *at least* the same effects as they do. To the extent that his powers are the same powers as those in creatures and those powers constitute creatures, he knows the creatures themselves. God "goes out to" his creature in enacting his creative powers, becoming present to it in his providences. In doing so, he establishes himself as in contact with his creature, making himself relative to it as cause to

caused, creator to creature. To put it another way, he knows the very act in which the creature shares; hence, he knows the creature as the particular cooperant in an activity in which he himself is practically involved.

Given (a) that his explicit discussion of the divine ideas and divine productive foreknowledge display this tension and (b) that his system of providence seems fitted to answer to both poles of that tension, it seems likely (c) that Dionysius intentionally includes in his system the resources to enable the divine ideas to achieve both their purposes, being both transcendent and relative to their particulars.

Before I proceed, I should make a few points about method and my relationship to the current literature. First, I assume Dionysius to be Christian. This is admittedly a contentious point. Beyond the fact that Dionysius was probably a Platonist-trained writer and familiar with Syrian rites, scholars can agree on little. Some scholars think him a Christian who merely uses Platonic terms. Others say he is a pagan philosopher seeking to pass off his thought as Christian so as to preserve the Platonic tradition in an increasingly hostile empire.[279] Some consider him a Chalcedonian, while others see him as a miaphysite; still others think he is simply an elderly monk seeking to avoid unwelcome controversies.[280] I doubt we can make much further progress

[279] Those who take him to be obviously Christian include Golitzin, "A Christian Mysticism?", 128–179; Vladimir Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (Paris: Aubier, 1944); Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*; and John Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul," in *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeauneau*, eds. Haijo Jan Westra (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1992), 137. Some take him to be Christian but then read him without substantive reference to his Christianity. For instance, see Perl, *Theophany*; and Sarah Klitenic-Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007). For those think him likely only ostensibly Christian, see Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order*, 21–29; Tuomo Lankila, "The Corpus Areopagiticum as a Crypto-Pagan Project," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 5 (2011): 14–40; Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953); and Jean Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu: Essai sur la structure rationelle de la doctrine mystique du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1959).

[280] For discussion regarding his supposed miaphysitism, see René Roques, *L'univers Dionysien: structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Aubier, 1954); for the claim that Dionysius is a "radical dyophysite," see István Perczel, "Christology and Eucharist in Two Redactions of Pseudo-Dionysius," in *The Metaphysics and Theology of the Eucharist: A Historical–Analytical Survey of the Problems of the Sacrament*, ed. Gyula Klima, 1–29. Historical–Analytical Studies on Nature, Mind and Action 10 (Springer, 2023).

without more evidence, though scholars such as Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi have recently shown that it is still possible to make headway.[281] But I see no solid reason to doubt Dionysius' commitment to Christian doctrines is genuine: his corpus is filled with references to Scripture, he shows considerable interest in the resurrection and insists that Christ became in essence human, and, even if his Christology and his salvation history remain somewhat underdeveloped, he nevertheless sees them as important enough to bring up throughout his corpus.[282] One may very well have doubts about how *healthy* his debt to Platonism is or whether he has what Vanneste calls a concrete, experiential faith, but that is not a reason to doubt his sincerity.[283] For all those reasons, I take myself to be warranted in taking seriously his faith—at least insofar as it involves assent to certain commitments regarding the resurrection and Incarnation.

Secondly, I largely sidestep two debates in recent Dionysius scholarship: that over just how "negative" Dionysian theology is and that over whether Dionysius draws a systematic distinction between God "in his essence" and what are called his "energies," "activities," or "powers."[284] Regarding the first, I can only say that I am aware that some scholars think

[281] Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi. *Dietro "Dionigi L'Areopagita": La genesi e gli scopi del Corpus Dionysiacum* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2018).

[282] For Dionysius' engagement with biblical and especially Pauline thought, see Maximos Constas, "Dionysius the Areopagite and the New Testament," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Mark Edwards, Dimitrios Pallis, and Georgios Steiris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 48–63 and Charles Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I."* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

[283] Jean Vanneste, "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1963): 286–306 and Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu*, 51. See also Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order*, xv. He says, on Epistle VIII that, "even in his most Christian moment," Dionysius "cannot completely hide the 'echo of Neoplatonist technique discerned by Vanneste." (xv)

[284] Those who see a clear distinction include Vladimir Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 70 and "La théologie negative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 28, no. 2 (1939): 204–221 and Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessaloniki: Πατριαρχικον Ιδρυμα Πατερικων Μελετων, 1994), 49–50, 57–58, 71, 85, 111; Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 4. More nuanced but sympathetic to this reading are Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 87 and John D. Jones, "An Absolutely Simple God? Frameworks for Reading Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite." *The Thomist* 69, no. 3 (2005): 371–406. Those opposed include Stephen Gersh, "Ideas and Energies in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite," *Studia Patristica Vol. XV*, ed. Elizabeth Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag Berlin, 1984), 297–300, especially 298–299; Eugenio Corsini, *Il trattato 'De Divinis Nominibus' dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide* (Turin: G. Giappichelli, 1962), 135–136. For discussion about this division, see Wiebke-

Dionysius' God so utterly beyond creaturely existence that he cannot even be considered a something at all, cannot enter into relations or have properties. It would take an entire doctoral thesis unto itself to properly enter into this debate, refute opposed positions, and fully support my own. I shall therefore make only relatively brief arguments in connection with this debate and then only so far as necessary to flesh out what I take to be his position on the divine ideas. It is worth noting, however, that, if I am correct about Dionysius, if my account is compelling, it should have some bearing on the debate.

As regards the second debate: all that I need to show is that Dionysius holds that God in *some* sense precontains, "in himself," and non-relatively, his creatures and that he nonetheless becomes related to them. If the term "energies" and its synonyms are taken simply to mean "God as providentially related to creatures," not certain uncreated non-substantial entities distinct from God, I am content. Given that fact, I should not have contend with either the (primarily Orthodox) scholars, who, following Vladimir Lossky, take Dionysius to be a proto-Palamite or the scholars who, following Eugenio Corsini, say that such an ontological distinction is *not* present and that Dionysius should instead be seen simply as blending the first and second hypotheses from the *Parmenides* in a single subject. God is both knowable and unknowable, involved and not involved.

2 — Foreknowledge

With those points in mind, let us proceed. Dionysius comes closest to laying out his full position on divine foreknowledge in *DN* VII. There, Dionysius asks in what sense God knows things

Marie Stock, "Naming the Unnamable: Dionysius on the Divine Names," *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 15 (2021): 134. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz thinks similarly, saying that Dionysius is probably intentionally blurring any clear distinction between God "in himself" and God in his act. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Parmenides*, and the Problem of Contradiction," in *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage: Volume 2: Reception in Patristic, Gnostic, and Christian Neoplatonic Texts*, eds. John Turner and Kevin Corrigan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 246.

given that he “has no intellective activities” (οὐχ ἔχων νοερὰς ἐνεργείας). His answer is that God knows in a transcendent manner. Dionysius characterizes this transcendent knowledge in the following passage.

> Accordingly, the divine mind holds together all things in its transcendent knowledge about all things—precontaining all things’ knowledge in accordance with all things’ cause in itself; knowing the angels before they came to be and producing the angels; and knowing and bringing to be all beings, if I may say so, from within and from the very source—and this, I think, is what scripture means when it says, “He who knows all things before their coming to be.” For the divine mind does not know by learning about beings from beings but from itself; and it prepossesses and precontains in itself, causally, all things’ knowledge and essence—not apprehending each severally but, according to the cause’s singular precontainment, knowing and holding together all things…[285]

It is possible to draw a few conclusions about divine knowledge from this passage. First, even if God does not have (merely) intellective activities, there is some sense in which it is legitimate to say he does *know* things.[286] Dionysius says that God has γνῶσις and even describes him as having “thoughts” (νοήσεις)—though, given his denial that God has intellective activities, he is probably using the latter term only in a loose sense. It makes sense that Dionysius should ascribe

[285] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 196,12–196,21: ὥστε ὁ θεῖος νοῦς πάντα συνέχει τῇ πάντων ἐξῃρημένῃ γνώσει, κατὰ τὴν πάντων αἰτίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν πάντων εἴδησιν προειληφώς, πρὶν ἀγγέλους γενέσθαι εἰδὼς καὶ παράγων ἀγγέλους, καὶ πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἔνδοθεν καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτῆς, ἵν’ οὕτως εἴπω, τῆς ἀρχῆς εἰδὼς καὶ εἰς οὐσίαν ἄγων. Καὶ τοῦτο οἶμαι παραδιδόναι τὸ λόγιον ὁπόταν φησίν «ὁ εἰδὼς τὰ πάντα πρὶν γενέσεως αὐτῶν». Οὐ γὰρ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων τὰ ὄντα μανθάνων οἶδεν ὁ θεῖος νοῦς, ἀλλ’ ἐξ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ κατ’ αἰτίαν τὴν πάντων εἴδησιν καὶ οὐσίαν προέχει καὶ προσυνείληφεν, οὐ κατὰ ἰδίαν ἑκάστοις ἐπιβάλλων, ἀλλὰ κατὰ μίαν τῆς αἰτίας περιοχὴν τὰ πάντα εἰδὼς καὶ συνέχων…

[286] See also *DN* VII.1, Suchla 193,13, where Dionysius refers to “τῶν θείων … νοήσεων. Even in the *Mystical Theology*, the furthest he goes in negating the divine is to say that God is not an intellect (… ἐστιν οὔτε νοῦς) and does not have intellection (οὔτε … νόησιν ἔχει). *Corpus Dionysiacum. Band 2. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De Coelesti Hierarchia. De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia. De Mystica Theologica. Epistulae*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Ritter (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1991), 149,1–2. (I shall abbreviate “*The Mystical Theology*” as “*MT*.” All references are to the Ritter edition, cited according to conventions I have established for the *DN*. I shall use the same edition for the Epistles, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. The abbreviations for the latter texts will be “*CH*” and “*EH*,” respectively.) Dionysius does also say that God does not know beings qua beings (οὔτε αὐτὴ γινώσκει τὰ ὄντα, ᾗ ὄντα ἐστίν), but that need not mean more than that he knows them in a mode above intellection. (*MT* V, Ritter 150,3) It must be admitted that Dionysius also suggests that God, since he is beyond every substance, must also be beyond every knowledge (γνῶσις): *DN* I.4. But given that even humans can attain, by divine aid, a knowledge that merits the name “unknowing” (ἀγνωσία), it seems probable that God simply possesses a similarly elevated knowledge. (*Ep*. I) In connection with that idea our ἀγνωσία has positive content, see Janet Williams, “The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite – II,” *Downside Review* 117/409 (1999): 238–240 and 242–243.

knowledge to God. If he be a Christian, he must deal with a tradition that ascribes to God intentional, rational action and even dialogue with creatures. But even if he were a pagan attempting to pass as Christian, he would still have to grapple with the Christian desire to talk about God as possessing something like intentional thought. A second thing this passage shows is that the knowledge Dionysius ascribes to God is foreknowledge: it is the knowledge by which he knew angels, for instance, "before they came to be" (πρὶν ἀγγέλους γενέσθαι). Thirdly, the foreknowledge at issue is productive foreknowledge.[287] When the scriptures say that God knows all things before their coming to be, Dionysius claims, they mean that God "knows and brings to be all beings…" In making this suggestion, Dionysius (a) intentionally includes productive foreknowledge as a key element within divine foreknowledge, (b) identifies foreknowledge as essentially productive, or (c) simply slides from foreknowledge in general to productive foreknowledge without feeling the need to keep the two conceptually distinct. On any interpretation, Dionysius takes divine foreknowledge in general to be closely linked with specifically productive foreknowledge. Finally, the fact that Dionysius says that the knowledge God possesses is "knowledge according to the cause," or "causal knowledge" (κατ' αἰτίαν), suggests that he is interested in identifying divine knowledge as foreknowledge and that foreknowledge as productive.

This passage also makes important claims about the logical relationships among God as knower, his productive foreknowledge, and creatures as known. Most important for our purposes are the following. In *DN* VII.2, Dionysius says "the divine mind does not know all beings by learning from them" but instead knows them "through itself as cause and principle."[288] Secondly,

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[287] John of Scythopolis reads him this way. See his scholia in Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux. *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 204–205. I shall cite John's scholia using Rorem and Lamoreaux's page numbers rather than by the scholia's numbers.
[288] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 196.

he says that God "does not take his knowledge about beings from them" but rather "provides to each their knowledge about themselves and about others."[289] I take it that Dionysius is making the same point in each case: the divine knowledge is in some way logically prior to the creatures it takes as its objects, and it *must* be so if it is to fill its role in securing for God his status as the one who "brings things into being." Such a connection makes sense given that the knowledge at issue is a productive foreknowledge that produces its own objects. Much like Proclus and Philoponus, Dionysius wants to ascribe logical priority to the divine mind and knowledge in relation to their objects in order to secure the causal priority God enjoys with respect to creatures. For were he to receive his knowledge from creatures, God would not have the foreknowledge necessary to provide for them. The reason is that, insofar as he is knower only thanks to the known, the known constitutes him as knower—in fact, *makes* him a knower. Just to the extent that he *is* a knower, then, God is not in a position to provide for creatures "before" they come to be—that is, unless his knowledge is such that it comes logically prior to the object known. (Before I move on to the next point, I should note that Dionysius' insistence that God knows things in a way that is *logically* prior to them and their existence lends further support to the idea that Dionysius should be read as taking God's knowledge to be productive foreknowledge.)

In this passage, lastly, Dionysius offers some insights into how he thinks divine foreknowledge works. For Dionysius, God knows things insofar as he knows himself: "knowing itself, therefore, the divine wisdom knows all things."[290] More particularly, God knows all things in knowing himself because he is all things' cause. So much is clear. But there are some apparent tensions in how Dionysius wants to cash out these claims. On the one hand, he seems to think

[289] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 197,7–9: … οὐκ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων λήψεται τὴν αὐτῶν γνῶσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοῖς ἑκάστοις τῆς αὐτῶν καὶ ἄλλοις τῆς ἄλλων γνώσεως ἔσται χορηγός.

[290] *DN* VII.2.3, Suchla 197,3: Ἑαυτὴν οὖν ἡ θεία σοφία γινώσκουσα γνώσεται πάντα. Dionysius repeats the thought several more times in the next few lines.

that God knows himself as cause in a sense involving no relation to effects. God somehow "prepossesses" his effects, his creatures, without having to stand in relation to them as cause. How that is supposed to be understood is not clear. One way to understand it would be to say that God knows himself as cause in that he knows his own power to produce such and such effects. Since that would seem to make the knowledge's content dependent logically on the creature, however, I consider it doubtful that Dionysius has such a picture in mind. Another way would be to understand God as possessing some property or plan whose character is identical with what appears in the resultant creature. Possessing and knowing such a property or plan might be taken to count as possessing and knowing the creature. It serves as a "proxy."

On the other hand, Dionysius uses language suggesting that God knows things insofar as he is their actual cause and source—that is, insofar as he actually produces them and hence stands in relation to them as cause to effect. "For if," he says a little later in *DN* VII, "according to a singular cause, God bestows being on all things, in that one, same cause, he will know all things as being from him *and* as preexisting in him; and, therefore, his knowledge of all things will not owe to the things themselves."[291] Here, the emphasis is not entirely on the things' preexisting in him; it is just as much on his *actually* having brought them into being, due to which act he knows them as "being from him."

The tension is deepened by the fact that there is yet a third way in which Dionysius talks about God's knowledge in this passage. He compares God's knowledge to light, which "precontains knowledge about darkness according to its cause in itself, not knowing the darkness from another but rather [knowing it] from the light."[292] On this picture, God seems to know

[291] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 197,5–8: Καὶ γὰρ εἰ κατὰ μίαν αἰτίαν ὁ θεὸς πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι τοῦ εἶναι μεταδίδωσι, κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἑνικὴν αἰτίαν εἴσεται πάντα ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὄντα καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ προϋφεστηκότα καὶ οὐκ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων λήψεται τὴν αὐτῶν γνῶσιν. Emphasis mine.
[292] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 196,21–197,2: ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ φῶς κατ' αἰτίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν εἴδησιν τοῦ σκότους προείληφεν οὐκ ἄλλοθεν εἰδὼς τὸ σκότος ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ φωτός.

creatures by knowing what he is *not*. Taken strictly, such a picture works only if the creature is understood to reflect God as something akin to a negative image. But given that creatures are not *merely* nothing and do in some sense resemble God, it is doubtful that Dionysius wants to be strict with the analogy. On a different interpretation, God knows things because they are what he *is*—existent, living, and so forth—though they possess his same character(s) in a much lesser degree and so are characterized by various reductions from his divine fullness. To put it the other way around, God precontains creatures to the extent that he possesses the same character they possess but in a transcendent fashion. Dionysius' talk about "precontainment," especially combined with his claim from *DN* V that God has within himself the "paradigms" in accordance with which he makes things, might suggest such a reading.

Notice that these three characterizations involve different commitments with respect to creaturely integrity and individuality. The second characterization in particular seems to involve God in a relation with something other than himself. It is comparatively easy to see how God might possess certain properties non-relationally, or non-relatively, and hence know his creatures in advance without presupposing them; it is much harder to see how he could know things by being their productive cause without presupposing the creatures as his effects. Later in this chapter, I shall argue that Dionysius sets up a system in which God knows in *both* ways at once, knowing creatures transcendently by precontaining their characters, knowledges, or powers and immanently by going out to them as their cause. For the time being, however, all I wish to note is that this tension exists in Dionysius and that, in any case, he is providing a way to understand how God knows things in advance.

3 — Divine ideas

The next step in my argument is to show that Dionysius understands God as knowing things in advance by possessing their paradigms. That he does so is a relatively uncontroversial point, but it is worth analyzing the relevant passages with some care regardless.[293] The key passage is in *DN* V.8. In this passage, Dionysius has just described the sun as somehow containing "within itself, as a unity, all its participants' causes,"[294] through which, among other things, it nourishes, perfects, and enlivens perceptible substances.[295] Having claimed such a causal role for the creature, he turns to the creator:

> Much more so must it be conceded with regard to [God, considered as] the sun's and all else's cause, that [he] precontains all beings' paradigms according to a singular, hyper-essential unity, since he produces even substances in accordance with a departure from [his own?] substance. We call "paradigm" those essence-producing principles that preexist unitarily in God, which theology calls predefinitions—and also divine and good volitions, which determine and produce beings—in accordance with which the One Above Essence predefined and led all beings [into being].[296]

This passage puts Dionysius in the "divine ideas tradition." Although Dionysius never says explicitly that it is because God possesses these paradigms, or principles, that God knows what he is doing when he creates, it is possible to interpret Dionysius thus. In *DN* VII, Dionysius says that God knows his creatures by knowing himself as precontaining their causes. In *DN* V, he suggests that the paradigms *are* the causes God precontains: he associates them with the causes

[293] Benjamin DeSpain, "Seeing One's Own Face in the Face of God: The Doctrine of the Divine Ideas in the Mystical Theologies of Dionysius the Areopagite and Nicholas of Cusa," in *Christian Mysticism and Incarnational Theology: Between Transcendence and Immanence*, eds. Louise Nelstrop and Simon D. Podmore, 29–46 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 37–39; Alberto Del Campo Echevarría, "La teoría platónica de las ideas en Bizancio (ss. V–XI): Principios, desarrollos e inversión final de la ontología clásica" (Doctoral thesis Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2010); Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique*, 92; Daniel Soars, "Divine Ideas and the Dependent Nature of Creation," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 30, no. 1 (2021): 49.
[294] *DN* V.8, Suchla 188,2–3: τὰς τῶν πολλῶν μετεχόντων ὁ εἷς ἥλιος αἰτίας ἐν ἑαυτῷ μονοειδῶς προείληφε.
[295] *DN* V.8.
[296] *DN* V.8, Suchla 188, 3–10: πολλῷ γε μᾶλλον ἐπὶ τῆς καὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ πάντων αἰτίας προϋφεστάναι τὰ πάντων τῶν ὄντων παραδείγματα κατὰ μίαν ὑπερούσιον ἕνωσιν συγχωρητέον, ἐπεὶ καὶ οὐσίας παράγει κατὰ τὴν ἀπὸ οὐσίας ἔκβασιν. Παραδείγματα δέ φαμεν εἶναι τοὺς ἐν θεῷ τῶν ὄντων οὐσιοποιοὺς καὶ ἑνιαίως προϋφεστῶτας λόγους, οὓς ἡ θεολογία προορισμοὺς καλεῖ, καὶ θεῖα καὶ ἀγαθὰ θελήματα τῶν ὄντων ἀφοριστικὰ καὶ ποιητικά, καθ' οὕς ὁ ὑπερούσιος τὰ ὄντα πάντα καὶ προώρισε καὶ παρήγαγεν.

precontained in the sun and holds that they produce creatures. On those grounds, it is reasonable to infer that Dionysius is, like Philoponus and Proclus, following earlier thinkers in the "divine ideas tradition." God knows creatures in advance because he knows his paradigms for them and brings them about according to those paradigms—without having to presuppose the creatures made according to them.[297] In some sense, God's knowing the paradigms counts as his knowing the creature.

I would like to take a moment to rule out a possible reading from the outset. One might think that God's knowing the paradigm for a creature counts as knowing the creature because the creature just *is* the paradigm transposed to a creaturely level. That is roughly how Meister Eckhart seems to read the relationship between divine ideas and creatures, and one might try to read Dionysius in the same way.[298] Three considerations count against such a reading. First, Dionysius denies that the ideas are substances or beings in their own right.[299] Secondly, if Dionysius thinks that God knows things from himself alone yet feels free to say that God knows things by possessing their divine ideas, he presumably thinks that the divine ideas *are* God under a certain aspect. Certainly, they do not present themselves as subjects on which God could operate. So, assuming God is distinct from his creatures, his paradigms are also best understood

[297] See John of Scythopolis' scholia on Epistle IX, where he says that Dionysius is putting the idea of paradigms to use to ensure that God's providence not entail the existence of a coeternal creation: Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, 262.
[298] See discussion in of this aspect of Eckhart in DeHart, "The Creature Makes Itself," 421–425. DeHart, Vladimir Lossky, and Georges Florovsky consider such an identification problematic. Paul DeHart, "Improvising the Paradigms: Aquinas, Creation and the Eternal Ideas as Anti-Platonic Ontology," *Modern Theology* 32, no. 4 (2016): 611–613; Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*: *Volume Three in the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976); Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique*, 91–92. For further discussion of Lossky's worry, see Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation*, chapter 1.
[299] *DN* V.9, Suchla 188,11–12 and XI.6. There might also be a connection with the Alexandrian Neoplatonists here. Philoponus, in considering how one might characterize the idea, likewise seems to think the natural options are that the ideas be substances *or* principles. See, relatedly, *DN* V.2. Golitzin sees Dionysius as eliminating the whole Proclan κόσμος νοητός in so doing. (*Et Introibo*, 57–58.) See also Corsini, *Il trattato*, 44, 51–52. Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu*, 26, on the other hand, thinks the divine energies or activities are themselves beings "dotés d'une véritable causalité." Further, "il leur confère une véritable existence en tant que puissances … ou participations de Dieu, qui, dans l'échelle des êtres, précèdent les participants." He interprets the language of "gifts" in *DN* II.5 and "first ones" (τὰ πρῶτα) in *DN* XI.6 as referring to the forms. (27)

as distinct from creatures. Thirdly and finally, Dionysius explicitly distinguishes between the ideas, or paradigms, and their “images and semblances” in creatures.[300] More probable is that, in some sense, a paradigm functions, as in Philoponus, as a proxy for the corresponding creature.

If I am correct that Dionysius holds that God must be simultaneously related to his creatures in his divine knowledge, so that we can say he knows *them* before they come to be, and unrelated to them because logically prior to them—and if Dionysius holds that God knows his creatures in advance by precontaining the corresponding divine idea—then one might expect the tensions in Dionysius’ position on divine foreknowledge to appear in his talk of the divine ideas. And indeed, such tensions do appear. For, on the one hand, Dionysius thinks God “precontains” the paradigms “in one, hyper-essential unity” (κατὰ μίαν ὑπερούσιον ἕνωσιν), not as relative to the various activities by which he proceeds to create the corresponding creatures.[301] On the other hand, Dionysius thinks the paradigms are “principles that produce substance” (οὐσιοποιοὺς … λόγους) and “the divine and good wills that … produce all beings” (καὶ θεῖα καὶ ἀγαθὰ θελήματα τῶν ὄντων … ποιητικά).[302] These latter descriptions shift the emphasis away from God in himself, prior to his engaging in the creative act, and towards God in his benevolent, creative relation to creation.[303] (Much the same tension appears in *DN* VII.4, where Dionysius suggests that God, as Logos, extends to all things as well as contains the λόγοι beforehand in himself.[304]) That this tension reflects the tension in *DN* VII strengthens the case that Dionysius connects the divine ideas to divine foreknowledge. More important for our purposes, it also suggests that

[300] *DN* VII.3, Suchla 197,21–22: εἰκόνας τινὰς καὶ ὁμοιώματα τῶν θείων … παραδειγμάτων. See also *DN* II.7, Suchla 132,15.
[301] *DN* V.8, Suchla 188,5.
[302] *DN* V.8, Suchla 188,7–9. Ernesto Mainoldi reads the matter similarly: “In [*DN* V.8] …, le idee-esemplari non risultano essere altro che il molteplice esercizio della volontà divina nel creare gli esseri.” “La teoria delle idee nello pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita,” in *Theories of Divine Ideas: From the Church Fathers to the Early Franciscan Masters*, eds. Tommaso Manzon and Irene Zavattero, 31–48 (Rome: Aracne, 2022), 35. It is possible to read Matthew Levering’s account of Thomas Aquinas in a similar light. Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation*, Chapter 1: “Divine Ideas.”
[303] Contrast with Philoponus, for instance, who would want to distinguish the will from the divine idea, or λόγος.
[304] *DN* VII.4.

Dionysius, like Proclus and Philoponus, has reason to work out how the divine paradigms relate to their copies.

4 — God's knowing things by precontainment and as from himself

Let us begin with the sense in which Dionysius thinks God precontains creatures. In this section, I make two claims in that connection. First, it is plausible to think that, when Dionysius says God precontains creatures, he means God possesses, though in a more intense form, the properties he will bestow on creatures when he creates them.[305]

I must pause here to define my terms. By "properties," I mean something like "powers" (δυνάμεις), whether they are enacted or not.[306] Such a reading is plausible for a few reasons. The primary reasons are textual. Dionysius himself says, in *DN* VIII, that God gives things their power to intellect, engage in discursive reason, perceive, live, and even belong to a certain ουσία, or φύσις.[307] Dionysius even goes so far as to say that God gives simple creaturely existence itself (αὐτὸ … τὸ εἶναι) its power to exist. Based on these passages, it is reasonable to think that Dionysius considers such essential properties to be, in some sense, activities with corresponding "potencies." (That is not to suggest that they are necessarily "in potency" before use. Some

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[305] It is also possible to frame the matter in different terms, saying that God possesses a different property than creatures but that the property lies along the same spectrum, sharing *something* in common with the other properties along that spectrum. So one might say that "intuition" (νόησις) and "perception" (αἴσθησις) are two different properties in one sense—they have different scopes for instance—and, in another sense, the same property in different modes: they are both forms of knowledge (γνῶσις). I doubt the difference matters much for my purposes: if one calls intuitive and perceptive mindedness different properties but allow that they share a common character along a spectrum, I can still make the same point.

As Radde-Gallwitz has pointed out, Dionysius thinks God possesses his properties absolutely, or non-relationally (ἀσχέτως), meaning that they cannot be *merely* relative to creatures, whether by analogy or due to their productive relation to the corresponding creaturely properties. Radde-Gallwitz, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Problem of Contradiction," 248–250.

[306] Dionysius uses no single word to capture all the things that might be called "properties" in contemporary parlance. Following the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions, he uses various terms for different kinds of property: "quality" (ποιότης), "quantity" (ποσότης), "accident" (συμβεβηκός), and so forth. He occasionally uses the term ἰδιότης (peculiarity), which means something like "special property," or "characteristic," which perhaps comes closest to "property" in the etymological sense, but it extends equally to characteristic activities.

[307] *DN* VIII.3, Suchla 201,18–21.

powers are associated with essential activities, or properties; a magpie cannot be a magpie unless it is exercising its capacity to live. And Dionysius seems to think that God himself must always be engaging in good activity because to do so is essential to him.[308]) Later in the same passage, he applies much the same to what might be considered more paradigmatic instances of properties: God "makes fire's inextinguishable powers and water's ceaseless streaming and marks out the atmosphere's flowing and sets the earth upon nothing."[309] Here, again, Dionysius seems to consider properties to be roughly the same as potencies and their activities. It must be admitted that Dionysius does not, as far as I know, ever suggest that *other* properties—such as mere qualities, accidents, and affections—are also powers or activities, but it would not be an unreasonable assumption. After all, God gives to each creature its power simply "to be." If being (accidentally) snub-nosed and pink with shame are genuinely among the ways the creature *is* at all, they are presumably among the powers Dionysius sees God granting to creatures.

Further support for an identification between properties and powers (in potency or in act) appears in the *EH*, where Dionysius describes the angels as having certain characteristic properties. The term Dionysius uses is "ἰδιότης," and he describes the angelic ἰδιότητα as including "their seeing the divine illuminations" (τῆς πολυθεάμενος αὐτῶν εἰς τὰς θειοτάτας ἐλλάμψεις ἰδιότητος) and "knowing the divine goodnesses" (αὐτῶν … τῶν θείων ἀγαθῶν νοήσεως).[310] These characteristic "properties" are also characteristic activities, namely those by which angels are best characterized as angels. In the *CH*, Dionysius uses the term in relation to an example from the perceptible world: fire, he says, has numerous ἰδιότητα, including being "invincible, unmingled, separating, unchanging, elevating, penetrating, lofty …, moving other

[308] *DN* IV.21, Suchla 169,16: ἐν θεῷ τἀγαθὸν ὕπαρξίς ἐστιν.
[309] *DN* IX.5, Suchla 202,15–16: καὶ τὰς τοῦ πυρὸς δυνάμεις ἀσβέστους ποιεῖ καὶ τὰς τοῦ ὕδατος ἐπιῤῥοὰς ἀνεκλείπτους καὶ τὴν ἀερίαν χύσιν ὁρίζει καὶ τὴν γῆν ἐπ' οὐδενὸς ἱδρύει.
[310] *EH* IV.7, Heil/Ritter 100,14–15.

things, comprehending…"[311] Once again, things that we might call properties and things we might be more disposed to call activities, powers, or disposition are treated as belonging to the same list, suggesting that, for Dionysius, they are not, on this level, entirely distinct.

One additional, contextual consideration can be used to support this reading. At least certain Platonists identify (essential) properties with powers and their activities, meaning that such a position is already within the Platonic tradition on which Dionysius draws.[312] Plotinus is one such example. Proclus is another.[313] While this evidence is weaker than that coming from the textual considerations, it does help show that reading Dionysius in such a way is not implausible.

My second claim in this section is that one can better understand how Dionysius portrays divine foreknowledge in *DN* VII if one sees God as precontaining creatures by possessing their powers in a higher mode or degree. Insofar as the creature is constituted by its powers and their enaction in certain constitutive activities, such as existing, God already knows and possesses the creature in and possessing the same powers and knowledges. There are two ways one might see this solution working. On the first, God knows what the creaturely power or activity is in advance because he knows exactly what it will be *like*. There is some precise likeness between the activities so that, even if they are not numerically identical, God knows what it would be *like* for the creature to have such a power and engage in such an activity. On the other view, the knowledge is practical: God knows what the creaturely act is like because it is, on some level, his act as well, insofar as all creaturely activity involves sharing in his own provident activities. His knowledge would then be akin to the knowledge one has of the acts in which one engages before one engages in them, as I know my next stroke with the oar before it comes to be. I do not, for

[311] *CH* XV.2, Heil/Ritter 52,18–20: ἀκράτητον ἀμιγὲς διακριτικὸν ἀναλλοίωτον, ἀνώφορον ὀξύπορον, ὑψηλὸν … κινητικὸν ἑτέρων, περιληπτικὸν. The suggestion that all these and many of the other activities and powers of fire can be thought of as properties comes towards the end of the passage, at Heil/Ritter 53,2–4.
[312] At least "completive" properties. See Chiaradonna, "Plotinus on Sensible Particulars," 47–62.
[313] Jan Opsomer, "The Natural World," in *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139–166, especially §7.4.3.

now, seek to adjudicate between the two interpretations. Nor is it clear that one must decide between them.

I should also note that, in making this argument, I am necessarily staking a claim in certain, thorny debates in Dionysius scholarship, namely those about how God relates to creation and whether he is such as to possess powers or properties.[314] Chief among the interpretations with which mine conflicts is one popularized in contemporary scholarship by Eric Perl, though it goes back at least to C.E. Rolt.[315] As Perl reads him, Dionysius holds that God is not a "particular something," a certain one among all beings (τι τῶν ὄντων).[316] As the one who supplies properties to all things, he himself has no properties.[317] For the same reason, he cannot stand in any determinate relation to things so as to be able to act upon or interact with them. To do so, he would have to be a thing among things, and that he cannot be. Since my purpose is not primarily to refute Perl but to explore how Dionysius sees the divine ideas as serving their function, I shall focus on making my own interpretation seem plausible rather than on undermining his reading. It is necessary to note at the outset, however, that I am aware that these conversations are underway. I shall return to them in the next chapter.

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[314] This debate is explicitly present in Perl, *Theophany*; Jones, "An Absolutely Simple God?"; Timothy Knepper, *Negating Negation: Against the Apophatic Abandonment of the Dionysian Corpus* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), especially chapter 1; and Mark Edwards, "How Negative Is the Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite?" *Verbum Vitae* 41, no. 3 (2023): 601–621. It is at least implicit in Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 185 and 189–190 (insofar as God's capacity to act historically is assumed); and Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique*.

[315] C.E. Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: The Macmillan Company), 1920.

[316] Such language *does* appear in the Dionysian Corpus. One can find it, for example, at *DN* VII.3, Suchla 198,7: Καὶ οὐκ ἔστι τι τῶν ὄντων; and *MT*, Ritter 150,2: οὐδέ τι τῶν ὄντων ἐστίν. But Perl takes this language to indicate that, because God is not counted among beings (ὄντα) and has no essence, he must therefore not be *a* something at all.

[317] The point goes much further than this: since God is not a determinate being, he cannot enter into *any* relations with creatures and so, arguably, cannot act within the world in determinate ways. He *is* the producing of things, their having of their various properties, but he does not himself act in the world in any way that we would recognize as action. Certainly, he is not capable of I–Thou relations of the sort that seem to be presupposed by the Christian scriptures. My argument has implications for this scholarly conversation but will not directly tussle with it.

5 — Containment and ὑπεροχή

5.1 — Introducing ὑπεροχή

To make my case, I first turn to the *DN*. In this treatise, Dionysius discusses the "names" that the Christian scriptures use to talk about God, placing a particular emphasis on what he calls the "conceptual names," which include such terms as "Wisdom," "Life," and "Goodness." I focus on the chapter on "Wisdom," where Dionysius demonstrates how such names are to be understood when applied to God. I do so primarily because, while Dionysius lays out his method more fully elsewhere, he is particularly clear in *applying* it in this chapter. It is also useful to start here because the chapter is relevant to my theme. I shall argue that, properly understood, Dionysius thinks the divine names denote two properties: the divine power to produce a corresponding power or property in creatures and the very same property found in creatures but in a higher, more intense, or more divine mode.

5.2 — Negation and ὑπεροχή

Dionysius starts *DN* VII by saying that one can rightly praise God "as wise and as Wisdom Itself," by which he seems to mean more broadly that it is appropriate to *say* that God is wise or to say that God is Wisdom Itself.[318] Not much later in the same argument, however, he cautions the reader that there is a danger in using these terms. He warns that, in "familiarly taking the things above us, wrapping them in what is customary to perception, and comparing the divine things to what is within our ambit, we are deceived," so that we end up "chasing after the divine and unspeakable reason (λόγον) according to [mere] appearance" rather than according to

[318] *DN* VII.1: Suchla 193,5–7: καὶ ὡς σοφὴν καὶ ὡς αὐτοσοφίαν ὑμνῶμεν, μᾶλλον δὲ ὡς πάσης σοφίας ὑποστατικὴν καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν σοφίαν … ὑπεροῦσαν.
A brief terminological note: I shall take "Wisdom" and "Wisdom Itself," when used as names for God, to mean the same thing.

reality.[319] (He suggests elsewhere that a similar danger is present when we attempt to apply conceptual terms to God.[320]) Dionysius is not clear on what this danger consists in, but it seems to be something like this: because one can say that God is wise and that creatures are wise, or that God has wisdom and that creatures have wisdom, one might conclude that the terms "wise" and "wisdom" have the same meaning in both cases and that divine and creaturely wisdom are the same in all respects. But, Dionysius thinks, the divine wisdom is *not* the same in all respects as creaturely wisdom; so, if one understands the term "wisdom" in its usual sense when one hears it applied to God, one will be misled.

Given this risk, Dionysius says that it is often better to speak in apparently privative terms—to say, for instance, that God is *not* Wisdom, *not* Mind.[321] In using such privative claims or terms—especially when they are applied to God in combination with the corresponding *positive* claims or terms—, one guards against the temptation to think one can, based on the properties seen in creatures, grasp what God is like in himself. Dionysius suggests that this is why the scriptures call the divine wisdom "foolishness" (μωρίαν); and it is on the same grounds that he himself calls God "mindless" (ἄνουν).[322]

Having said that negations are better than affirmations in talking about God, Dionysius is careful to note that, when such apparently privative terms are used in their properly theological sense, their function is not actually privative—and, in fact, not even negative. In *DN* VII.2, he says the following.

> [A]s I have said many times, the divine things must be intellected as befits the divine. For [the terms] "mindless" and "imperceptible" must be attributed to God

[319] *DN* VII.1, Suchla 194,7–10: οἰκείως ἡμῖν τὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς παραλαμβάνοντες καὶ τῷ συντρόφῳ τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐνιλλόμενοι καὶ τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς τὰ θεῖα παραβάλλοντες ἀπατώμεθα κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἀπόῤῥητον λόγον μεταδιώκοντες.
[320] See, for instance, *CH* II.3.
[321] "Mind" and "Wisdom" are only examples. The point applies to all the Divine Names.
[322] Suchla 194,5; *DN* VII.1, Suchla 194,16.

> according to transcendence (καθ’ ὑπεροχήν), not according to deficiency (οὐ κατ’ ἔλλειψιν)—just as we apply “irrational” to the one above reason, “imperfection” to the super- and prior-to-perfect, and “intangible, invisible darkness” to the unapproachable light in accordance with its superiority to visible light.[323]

Dionysius is making two distinct claims here, one broader and one narrower. The broader claim is that, when one ascribes some apparently privative term to God—at least when using them in the correct, theological manner—, one is not making the claim that God *lacks* some property.[324] Neither, presumably, would Dionysius want to hold that one is making a claim to the effect that “it is not the case that God is *x*,” which would be true even if there were no God. Nor is it plausible that God is being ascribed a privative property, “*not-x*,” given that Dionysius would have to allow those same properties to creatures as well as God—up to and including “τὰ οὐκ ὄντα” mentioned at several points in his corpus—, and he seems inclined to think the property one ascribes to God in using a given privative term is peculiar to him.[325] The narrower claim is that the apparently privative terms are in fact *positive* in meaning: to ascribe them to God is to make a claim about a positive property that God has. More particularly, Dionysius seems to think that, in making such claims, one ascribes to God the very same property whose absence the privative term would normally denote—but understood in a mode fitting for the divine. To return to the particular property at issue in *DN VII*, God is not “mindless” in the sense that plants or

[323] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 196,8–12: Ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ἔφην πολλάκις, τὰ θεῖα θεοπρεπῶς νοητέον. Τὸ γὰρ ἄνουν καὶ ἀναίσθητον καθ’ ὑπεροχήν, οὐ κατ’ ἔλλειψιν ἐπὶ θεοῦ τακτέον ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ ἄλογον ἀνατίθεμεν τῷ ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ τὴν ἀτέλειαν τῷ ὑπερτελεῖ καὶ προτελείῳ καὶ τὸν ἀναφῆ καὶ ἀόρατον γνόφον τῷ φωτὶ τῷ ἀπροσίτῳ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν τοῦ ὁρατοῦ φωτός.

[324] One finds the same principle in *DN* I.2; *DN* II.1, especially Suchla 125,16; and *CH* II.3–4. See, relatedly, the following passage where Dionysius says the theologian interprets terms use of God in their transcendence sense: *DN* VII.1, Suchla 193,14–194,1; VII.2 Suchla 196,8–12; *CH* II.3.

[325] *DN* IV.10, V.1, XII.4. It is also worth noting that, in Epistle VI, Dionysius makes it very clear that one does not, by pointing out that something does not possess some property, show that the subject possesses any other particular property. That God is “not white” tells us nothing about what he *is*, even if “not-white” is supposed to be a cipher for some particular, non-privative property. (Ritter/Heil 164,1–10)

nonexistent things (τὰ οὐκ ὄντα) are mindless: lacking in mind. Rather, he has a faculty or property that can be considered mind in a transcendent mode (ὑπεροχή).[326]

A brief aside is necessary here. I am aware that there is an alternative interpretive option I have not ruled out so far: that the transcendent property to which Dionysius refers is a causal property such as the ability to produce certain properties in creatures. Timothy Knepper is probably this view's most prominent proponent.[327] On this interpretation, the sense in which God possesses a property in a transcendent mode is ultimately no different from the sense in which God is named "from his gifts to creatures." For argumentative flow, I shall return to this point after having set out my own reading.

With the claim that God has mind in a transcendent mode, Dionysius is free to make an interesting move. He goes on to spend nearly the entire chapter detailing in what transcendent sense God *does* have mind, telling his reader what the divine mind (ὁ θεῖος νοῦς) is like, how it operates, and how the knowledge (γνῶσις) appropriate to it differs from perception (αἴσθησις), human reason (διάνοια, ἐπιστήμη), and intuition, or intellection (νόησις).[328] I have discussed those passages already, so there is no need to do so here. What matters is that, having used negation to avoid ascribing mere creaturely properties to God, Dionysius is apparently perfectly happy to return to positive attribution, only this time with the additional insight that the positive

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[326] To suggest that, when it comes to God, not to have some property *x* is not an absence or lack is to traffic in mere, empty honorifics. It only comes to be a genuine honor if the (apparent) claim that God is not *x* is taken to be pointing to a different property altogether (e.g., to the power to produce mind in other things) or as suggesting that God possesses the property normally denoted by the term but in a higher mode.

[327] Knepper, *Negating Negation*, 1–8. Knepper denies the divine names are "attributes," but he seems to be responding primarily to Alexander Golitzin, whom he takes to be using that term to relegate the divine names to God's periphery or, worse, the created sphere. (3–4, 19–25) Another worry seems to be that, if the divine names are "attributes," they fall into the merely linguistic sphere (34) Knepper himself wants to say the names are "part of the nature of God" (4), which I take to mean they are at least something *like* properties.

Eric Perl may be read as holding a similar view, one on which God just *is* the power and act by which he makes creatures. See Perl, *Theophany*, 46, especially in conjunction with Perl, *Theophany*, 27.

[328] Jan Opsomer, "Proclus," in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 129–150 discusses the "gnostic" continuum on which perception, intellection, and discursive knowledge all fall for late Platonists.

attribution must be understood in a “higher” sense. In Scholastic terms, he seems to think that the apparent *via negativa* is actually, on a deeper level, a *via eminentiae*.[329]

In this interpretation, I am pushing back against much recent scholarship, which tends to make Dionysius more strictly apophatic in his approach.[330] Eric Perl, for instance, would say that God possesses no properties whatever, causal or otherwise. If God has a “transcendence,” it is in the sense that he *is* the very production or determination by which creatures have properties.[331] God, on positions such as these, could not be said to have a property such as “wisdom,” or “knowledge,” consisting in an actual power that God implements in his activities in relation to creatures. But the manner in which Dionysius talks about the divine mind in *DN* VII lends itself to a different interpretation. Having said God is “mindless,” Dionysius clearly does not deny that God knows beings.[332] Rather, he insists that God knows in a mode that is somehow superior to creaturely knowing in all its forms. If he were *simply* interested in saying that God has nothing like what we might call knowledge, he would hardly have had to spend so much time talking

[329] For scholars who discuss the *via triplex* in connection with Dionysius, see Mark Edwards, “How Negative Is the Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite?” *Verbum Vitae* 41, no. 3 (2023): 602–603; Michel Corbin, “Négation et transcendence dans l’œuvre de Denys,” *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 69, no. 1 (1985): 41–76; see, opposed, Gregory P. Rocca, O.P., *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 22–25, who thinks the “transcendent way” is actually the negative way considered in terms of the reason for the fittingness of negation. I tend to agree with Corbin; Dionysius does not have an obviously distinct negative way; it *is* a *via eminentiae*. See also O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 14–18 and 33–35 in Rocca’s corner. I find I am in basic agreement with Janet Williams, “The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite – II,” *Downside Review* 117/409 (1999): 240. Williams also considers our unknowing to have a positive content. (238–240) This content shows up in the ecstatic untidiness of our thought and language. (242–243) Finally, see Denys Turner’s second chapter in *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), where he holds that God transcends human speech because he genuinely contains in an infinitely higher degree all the perfections he bestows on creatures.
[330] By contrast, it has become increasingly common to see Plotinus as something like a personalist about the One. Thanks to Mark Edwards for drawing my attention back to that point in this connection!
[331] Perl, *Theophany*, 26–27.
[332] Indeed, even at his most apophatic, Dionysius only ever denies that God knows his creatures “*qua* beings.” This is a point that Rosemary Arthur misses. This is understandable if she follows, as she seems to, Luibhéid’s translation: “God does not know things as they are.” While it is probably *right*—Dionysius is probably following Proclus in holding that God knows all things in a mode fitting his nature, not theirs—it is misleading insofar as it might suggest that God just does not know things except in an “indirect” way.

about the manner in which divine knowledge works and how it stands above creaturely knowledge.

That Dionysius does indeed consider the divine knowledge to be knowledge in a particular mode is further suggested by the fact that he immediately follows his discussion in this passage with a claim about the angels: “For the scriptures say also about the angels, too, that they know the things upon the earth, not knowing them according to perceptive activities, though they be perceptible, but according to the power and nature proper to the godlike intellect.”[333] Angels, like God, possess a knowledge beyond the human sort; but they, too, can be said to know things because they, like God, have a knowledge that transcends and somehow includes knowledge in its lower forms.[334] I shall return to the manner in which higher modes contain lowers modes in the next section. For now, what I wish to draw attention to is that Dionysius considers this afterthought on the angels to be relevant to his claims about God. He seems to be suggesting that, just as angels know perceptible objects in a mode higher than perception, so God knows even intellectual things in a mode higher than intellection. The point would be irrelevant if Dionysius intended to say that, unlike angels, God cannot be said to know things at all. Considering all the above points, I think the best way to read Dionysius is as holding that God possesses the same property in a higher degree or with a greater intensity.

[333] *DN* VII.3, Suchla 197,14–16: Καὶ γὰρ καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους εἰδέναι φησὶ τὰ λόγια τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ κατ’ αἰσθήσεις αὐτὰ γινώσκοντας αἰσθητά γε ὄντα, κατ’ οἰκείαν δὲ τοῦ θεοειδοῦς νοῦ δύναμιν καὶ φύσιν. Note that Dionysius says, in *CH* XV.3, that terms derived from human perception are ascribed to angels primarily as a way to speak of their heavenward activities. However, clearly, there is also a kind of providential activity: to say they know things on earth is not only to say they know things in heaven.
[334] On this point, I am in agreement with Perl, *Theophany*, 91–92.

6 — Considering some objections while strengthening my case

There are some passages where Dionysius seems to deny that God possesses the same properties as his creatures. I shall have to address them to show that they pose no threat to my argument. Consider the following passage from *DN* II: “All divine things,” Dionysius says, “even those revealed to [creatures], are known only in their participations. They themselves, whatever they be according to their proper source and foundation, are beyond mind (νοῦν) and every substance and knowledge.”[335] Yet that is not to say that they cannot be known, full stop. Dionysius makes it clear here and elsewhere that one *can* know them.[336] What it does mean is that they cannot be known in an intellective sense. What one knows in connection with them intellectively can be “nothing other than the powers—divinizing or essentiating or enlivening or enwisening—flowing towards [creatures] from [God].”[337] It is for that reason, “seeing nothing exactly like to all things’ elevated (because altogether transcendent) cause,”[338] that one eventually seeks to “break free” from all intellectual activities to look upon God himself. Let me put these claims in slightly different terms:

1) The divine things are never known in themselves because they are beyond intellective knowledge.
2) One *can* know the divine things “in their participations,” i.e., as the “powers” flowing from God.

[335] *DN* II.7, Suchla 131, 5–7: Πάντα γὰρ τὰ θεῖα, καὶ ὅσα ἡμῖν ἐκπέφανται, ταῖς μετοχαῖς μόναις γινώσκεται. Αὐτὰ δέ, ὁποῖά ποτε ἔστι κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν καὶ ἵδρυσιν, ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔστι καὶ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν καὶ γνῶσιν.
[336] *DN* I.4, Suchla 115,6–10; *DN* VII.1, Suchla 194,10–15; *DN* VII.3, Suchla 198,12–15.
[337] *DN* II.7, Suchla 131,9–10: οὐδὲν ἕτερον νοοῦμεν ἢ τὰς εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐξ αὐτῆς προαγομένας δυνάμεις ἐκθεωτικὰς ἢ οὐσιοποιοὺς ἢ ζωογόνους ἢ σοφοδώρους.
[338] *DN* II.7, Suchla 131,11–12: οὐδεμίαν … ἥτις ἀκριβῶς ἐμφερής ἐστι τῇ πάντων ἐξῃρημένῃ κατὰ πᾶσαν ὑπεροχὴν αἰτίᾳ.

3) There is no exact likeness between God *in se* and his effects, whether the latter term refers to the divine energies or the corresponding creaturely properties.

I take it that the third claim is intended to explain why the knowledge one can derive about the divine things from their participations is not the same as knowing them in themselves. That reading is supported by the manner in which Dionysius elaborates the third claim further on.

> For neither is there an exact likeness between the caused and the causes; but the caused possess derivative images of the causes, while the causes themselves transcend and remain above the caused according to the account (λόγον) of their proper principle. And that I may use examples suited to us: joys and pains are said to produce enjoyment and pain but themselves are neither joyed nor pained. And the fire, which heats and burns, is not said to be burned or heated. And if one should say that Life Itself is alive (ζῆν) or that Light Itself is enlightened (φωτίζεσθαι), one would not speak correctly, by my reckoning, unless one meant these things in some other sense, [meaning] that the properties found in the caused (τὰ τῶν αἰτιατῶν) exist beforehand, abundantly and essentially, in the causes.[339]

Here, Dionysius is running two arguments simultaneously. The first works like this.

1) One can only know a thing as it is in *in se* "from," or "via," another thing if there is an exact likeness between the two.
2) If two things have distinct properties, there is not an exact likeness between them.
3) *Qua* cause and *qua* caused, the cause and the caused have distinct properties.
4) So, there is no exact likeness between the cause and the caused.
5) God is cause in relation to creatures.
6) Therefore, there is no exact likeness between God and creatures.

[339] *DN* II.8, Suchla 132,14–133,4: Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔστιν ἀκριβὴς ἐμφέρεια τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς καὶ τοῖς αἰτίοις, ἀλλ' ἔχει μὲν τὰ αἰτιατὰ τὰς τῶν αἰτίων ἐνδεχομένας εἰκόνας, αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ αἴτια τῶν αἰτιατῶν ἐξῄρηται καὶ ὑπερίδρυται κατὰ τὸν τῆς οἰκείας ἀρχῆς λόγον. Καὶ ἵνα τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς χρήσωμαι παραδείγμασιν, ἡδοναὶ καὶ λῦπαι λέγονται ποιητικαὶ τοῦ ἥδεσθαι καὶ λυπεῖσθαι, αὐταὶ δὲ οὔτε ἥδονται οὔτε λυποῦνται. Καὶ τὸ πῦρ θερμαῖον καὶ καῖον οὐ λέγεται καίεσθαι καὶ θερμαίνεσθαι. Καὶ ζῆν εἴ τις φαίη τὴν αὐτοζωὴν ἢ φωτίζεσθαι τὸ αὐτοφῶς, οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἐρεῖ κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον, εἰ μή που καθ' ἕτερον ταῦτα εἴποι τρόπον, ὅτι περισσῶς καὶ οὐσιωδῶς προένεστι τὰ τῶν αἰτιατῶν τοῖς αἰτίοις.

7) One cannot know God *in se* from creatures.

This argument has to do with the subjects possessing the properties at issue: respectively God (possessing τὰ θεῖα/τὰ τῶν αἰτιατῶν τοῖς αἰτίοις) and creatures (possessing τὰ τῶν αἰτιατῶν, as it were, τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς). The second argument has to do with the properties themselves. This argument is a fair bit simpler than the first: the thought is that one cannot grasp the properties in the cause based on prior familiarity with the properties in the caused because there is some necessary distinction between the properties in the cause and the caused. Since God is cause in relation to creatures, one cannot grasp his properties (τὰ θεῖα) as they are in themselves by knowing the corresponding creaturely properties that are their effects.

For now, I focus on the first argument. The claim Dionysius is making is, I take it, something like the following: (a) there is some difference in character between the property in the cause and the property in the caused and (b) the difference is that between the cause and the caused as such. Let us turn to an example. Imagine a kettle on the fire. Considered *qua* heating the kettle, the fire is characterized by a different property than the kettle *qua* being heated—namely, heating. That is not to say that the two do not share *any* property: heat for instance. But considered as *relata* in this particular relationship, the two *must* have different properties. That Dionysius has such a strictly logical and relative difference in mind seems probable for two reasons. The first is that he describes the effects as possessing (or perhaps being) "copies" (εἰκόνας). In contrast, the divine things, as causes, are the originals and, as suggested in *DN* V, the models, or paradigms (παραδείγματα), on which things are based. There is further evidence for this point elsewhere in the *DN*. In *DN* IX, Dionysius likens the dissimilarity between cause and effect to the dissimilarity between portrait and subject: the portrait cannot have an exact likeness to the subject in part because it is a *copy*—that is, not because it has or lacks certain

intrinsic properties but because it is derivative. So too with God and creatures. Creatures cannot have an exact likeness to God because they are *his* (or his λογοι's) copies.[340]

The second reason is that, considering (a) that Dionysius seems broadly familiar with the philosophical and theological landscape in his era and (b) that disputes over the relationship between paradigms and copies, or icons, were very common in both the Christian and pagan traditions with which Dionysius was apparently familiar, (c) it is unlikely that Dionysius would have been unaware that he was bringing such associations into play by saying that there can be no exact likeness between God and creatures *because* he is their cause, or original, and they his effects, or copies.[341]

Notice that such a reading leaves open the possibility that the cause and the caused do in fact share *something*: a property or properties that sit on a continuum, as the fire may be hot (i.e. have the power to burn and heat things) and the kettle may be hot (i.e. have the power to burn and heat things—even if only because it received that power first from the fire). Here is where I wish to return to the second argument I mentioned a moment ago, the one having to do with properties rather than the subjects possessing those properties. Were Dionysius to commit himself to the idea that God and creatures possess the same character in differing degrees, it

[340] *DN* IX.6, Suchla 211,19–212,1.

[341] I have already discussed the paradigms in Proclus in my chapters on him. One can also find discussion, though, in Melina Mouzala, "Proclus on the Forms as Paradigms in Plato's *Parmenides*: The Neoplatonic Response to Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias' Criticisms," *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2022): 115–163; Jan Opsomer, "The Natural World," in *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139–166; and Eric Perl, "The House That Jack Built: A Homeric Metaphor for Procline Metaphysics," *Ancient Philosophy* 37 (2017): 169–184. Similar worries exercise Philoponus, as I showed in the previous chapter. For Dionysius' familiarity with philosophy, consider his extensive use of Neoplatonic and Peripatetic philosophical terms throughout the *DN*. Besides Proclus and Philoponus, there were also arguments revolving around the relationships among copies and paradigms in figures such as Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius of Gaza. See Richard Sorabji, "Waiting for Philoponus," in *Causation and Creation in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Brian D. Prince (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 71–93. Origen, likewise, was thinking in such terms, arguing that a God who is essentially creator must. And, as Ilaria Ramelli and Alexander Golitzin have argued, Dionysius may have known Origen himself or his thought, whether directly or through his reception via figures such as Evagrius or the Cappadocians. Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare*, 270–284; Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Evagrius, and Dionysius," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Mark Edwards, Dimitrios Pallis, and Georgios Steiris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 94–108.

would be possible to read his argument in the passages from *DN* II like this: the cause and the caused cannot be the same because, while they *do* possess the "same" property in one sense, they possess it in a different degree; and that difference in degree amounts to an absolute difference—just as red, green, and blue could be considered different properties even though they all consist in variations on a character that might be interpreted as a single property: light. To return to the earlier example, the heat and the heated, one might say that the fire passes on heat to the kettle, but the kettle, though it does become *hot* thereby (and so can heat other things in its own turn—can boil water, can crisp a fish filet—), never gains heat in precisely the same degree or intensity as the fire; and that difference in intensity is enough to ensure an absolute distinction between the property in the fire and the property in the (heated and hence hot) kettle. Further, while the fire has its heat "from itself," the kettle only ever has its heat by receiving it from the fire.

And indeed, it is plausible to read Dionysius as taking this route. Dionysius is open to the possibility that the things pertaining to the caused (τὰ τῶν αἰτιατῶν) are found in the causes in some "essential" (οὐσιωδῶς) and "exceeding" (περισσῶς) sense. If the difference he had in mind were so complete that there were *no* connection between the property in the cause and the caused, he would have no reason to allow such a possibility. He would also have no reason to allow such a possibility if the difference were that between the cause *qua* cause and the caused *qua* caused. At least in the relationship between cause *x* and caused *y*, there are no degrees: *y* cannot be "somewhat the cause" in the relationship. It is or it is not. On the other hand, if *x* "passes along" some property to *y*, a property that it itself possesses, then it makes sense to talk about *x* as possessing, in a higher degree, the property *y* possesses. In that case, the relevant difference between the two comes not *only* from the fact that *x* is cause and *y* is caused but also from the fact that, as cause, *x* does not pass along its property to *y* in such a way that *y* possesses

that property with the same intensity. Obviously, this passage does not decisively show that Dionysius thinks God actually possesses the same properties as creatures in a higher degree, but it lends itself to such a reading; and when one considers it in addition to the evidence supplied by *DN* VII, it becomes considerably stronger.

I would like to submit one more, supporting evidence for the idea that Dionysius thinks creatures and God possess properties that stand, in one sense, on a spectrum. In *DN* IX, he recognizes the apparent paradox or even contradiction in his claims that God is both beyond all comparison with creatures and that all creatures are in some sense like him. To do so, he says in what sense the caused are like and in what sense unlike God: They are similar, he says, "according to their received imitation," through which they imitate "the inimitable." They are dissimilar, on the other hand, because the caused, precisely as caused, "fall short in relation to the cause," being left behind "by incomparable and infinite measures."[342] That is, creatures are similar to God so far as they do in fact possess something that *tracks* his own properties; and yet, as they are mere imitators, caused by him, they cannot be equal to him—and must be *made* similar to him. I would suggest that Dionysius be taken at his word: he says that he is supplying a distinction in order to help his reader understand his system. And once this explanation is taken aboard and used to read the various other evidences I have cited in this section, it becomes all the more reasonable to read Dionysius as holding that creaturely and divine properties sit on a spectrum.

7 — Angels unsaid

[342] *DN* IX.7, Suchla 212,9–15: Τὰ γὰρ αὐτὰ καὶ ὅμοια θεῷ καὶ ἀνόμοια, τὸ μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἐνδεχομένην τοῦ ἀμιμήτου μίμησιν, τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὸ ἀποδέον τῶν αἰτατῶν τοῦ αἰτίου καὶ μέτροις ἀπείροις καὶ ἀσυγκρίτοις ἀπολειπόμενον.

By my reckoning, the evidence so far should be enough to make my claims about "ὑπεροχή" plausible: God possesses the properties that he gives creatures in a higher degree or mode. However, secondary evidence can be drawn from elsewhere in the Dionysian Corpus—namely, from the way in which Dionysius talks about the angels. I shall draw on that evidence both because it further strengthens my case and because it suggests some important analogies between how we know God and how humans know creatures on higher ontological rungs than theirs, which in turn has certain implications for what we can say about the analogy between creaturely and divine properties.

In *EH* II, Dionysius carefully lays out his views on how scriptural terms (and presumably human terms in general) apply to the angels. First, he says that one should not take any material terms to have their usual sense when applied to them.[343] Angels are not (generally) perceptible and hence cannot be uncomplicatedly referred to using such terms. (Indeed, they are "existences beyond our knowledge and contemplation."[344]) Dionysius says that it *is* possible, however, to use the terms in an anagogic fashion: through them, one can be led to contemplate the angels rightly. In order to illustrate the point, Dionysius turns to the apophatic approach that the scriptures take when talking about God. He rehearses the points we have already discussed: God is above all creation and so cannot be simply named according to our concepts. God *can*, however, be named and hymned from all creation, especially by using "dissimilar similarities."[345] He may also, more appropriately, be named by "true negations" (αἱ μὲν ἀποφάσεις … ἀληθεῖς).[346] Having made this digression, Dionysius returns to the angels. "If, then," he says, "negations regarding the things divine are true, while the affirmations are unfitting to [God], more appropriate to the invisible[—

[343] *CH* II.1.
[344] *CH* II.2, Heil and Ritter 10,13–14.
[345] *CH* II.3
[346] *CH* II.3, Heil and Ritter 12,20–13,1.

namely, the angels—]is their manifestation through dissimilar shapes."[347] Here, the thought seems to be that "dissimilar similarities" and "negations" are connected. Evidence that God can be fittingly "unsaid" somehow serves as evidence that "dissimilar similarities" may be fittingly used for the angels. Dionysius never says that the reverse is true, that angels can be fittingly "unsaid," but the suggestion is certainly there. And there is further support for that inference in the same passage: he says the angels can be said to lack reason (λόγος) and perception (though it is not clear that they can be *hymned* by the negation, as God can).[348] But, as with God, the negation is not to be taken in its usual sense. It must be said as befits angels:

> With regard to non-rational living things or soulless stuffs, we properly construe reasonlessness and insensateness as a wanting in reason and perception; but, [when using these same terms] with regard to immaterial and intellective substances, we are admitting, in a manner befitting the holy, that they, as supermundane, surpass our discursive and bodily reason and the material perceptions foreign to bodiless intellects.[349]

What these privative terms and negations actually communicate about the angels is that they possess the corresponding positive properties in a transcendent mode (ὑπερέχον).[350] So, for instance, the term "desire" (ἐπιθυμία), when applied to non-rational animals, denotes a passionate attachment (προσπάθεια) to material goods, arising from innate, bodily impulses (ἐξ ἐμφύτου κινήσεως), while, when applied to angels, it denotes a divine yearning (ἔρως) for immaterial goods.[351] Dionysius presumably does not mean that the angels love God but *not* their fellow creatures. Since "yearning," for Dionysius, is a term associated not only with desire for

[347] *CH* II.3, Heil/Ritter 12,20–13,3: Εἰ τοίνυν αἱ μὲν ἀποφάσεις ἐπὶ τῶν θείων ἀληθεῖς, αἱ δὲ καταφάσεις ἀνάρμοστοι τῇ κρυφιότητι τῶν ἀπορρήτων, οἰκειοτέρα μᾶλλόν ἐστιν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀοράτων ἡ διὰ τῶν ἀνομοίων ἀναπλάσεων ἐκφαντορία.
[348] Though note that one *can* hymn the celestial hierarchy and its powers: *EH* I.2.
[349] *CH* II.4, Heil/Ritter 14,19–24: Ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀλογίαν τε καὶ ἀναισθησίαν ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ἀλόγων ζῴων ἢ τῶν ἀψύχων ὑλῶν στέρησιν λόγου καὶ αἰσθήσεως οἰκείως ἀποκαλοῦμεν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἀΰλων καὶ νοερῶν οὐσιῶν ἁγιοτρεπῶς τὸ ὑπερέχον αὐτῶν ὡς ὑπερκοσμίων ὁμολογοῦμεν τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς μεταβατικοῦ καὶ σωματικοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς ὑλαίας καὶ ἀλλοτρίας τῶν ἀσωμάτων νοῶν αἰσθήσεως.
[350] *CH* II.4, Heil/Ritter 14,22.
[351] *CH* II.4. See also *CH* XV.8.

God but also with the desire to extend God’s providence to one’s subordinates in love, he presumably means that the angels actually share in God’s yearning more *intensely* than do merely material creatures; they thus love all things and that more intensely. What Dionysius is attempting to show is that the angels have properties belonging on a spectrum with human properties, only intensified and transformed because angelic existence is more intense.

One can find the same thought in the *DN*. In *DN* V, Dionysius makes a move that is especially interesting for my purposes. He considers an objection from an unnamed interlocutor who asks why the angels, if they receive their characteristic properties from a “lesser,” less universal providence—namely God as Wisdom rather than Life or Being—, are superior to creatures whose most characteristic properties come from those more universal providences. Dionysius concedes that his opponent would have a point *if* angels did not also receive Being and Life. But angels *do* receive those gifts—and indeed, they receive them in a higher degree.[352] This argument would fall through immediately if the properties that Dionysius were attributing to the angels—Being and Life—were not in some sense the same as the being and life found in lesser creatures; for then it would make little sense to talk about the angels as having those things in addition to their own characteristic properties. Angels have better knowledge, life, and existence than do humans, aardvarks, parlor palms, and moss agates—and in a way commensurate with our own knowledges, lives, and existences.[353] As a final point, I note once more that Dionysius thinks those in higher ontological rungs possess positive properties on a spectrum with those in the lower: angels, he says, “know perceptible things through their own deiform intellect,” not “insofar as they are perceptible.”[354]

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[352] *DN* V.3.
[353] This principle appears especially clearly in *EH* XII.
[354] *DN* VII.3, Suchla 197,14–16: Καὶ γὰρ καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους εἰδέναι φησὶ τὰ λόγια τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ κατ’ αἰσθήσεις αὐτὰ γινώσκοντας αἰσθητά γε ὄντα, κατ’ οἰκείαν δὲ τοῦ θεοειδοῦς νοῦ δύναμιν καὶ φύσιν.

Just as with the angels, so too with God. We are given no indication that Dionysius sees himself as employing two different processes when dealing with God and with angels. On the contrary, he immediately shifts from using affirmation and negation in the one case to using it in the other as if they were the same process.[355] For instance, in the just-cited passage from the *CH*, Dionysius immediately shifts from his talk about angels into claims about God: "We shall find the theologians who know the mysteries molding these [unlike terms] not only around the heavenly orders' manifestations but also, at times, around the Godheadly manifestations."[356] Other links exist as well: the angels are said to "transcend" the properties found in their subordinates, much as God is.[357]

What does this teach us? First, the fact that Dionysius seems to consider the process by which human language and thought are led up to the angels—through unsaying and unlike likenesses—to be the same process by which humans are led up to God suggests that our approach to God and his ὑπεροχή are to be attributed to his belonging to a higher τάξις. If that is correct, we can draw on knowledge about how humans interact with the angels. If (a) to apply privative terms to the angels is actually to attribute to them the same properties but in a more intense mode or degree and (b) the same rule applies in our talk about God, then (c) it is plausible to think that our talk about God *also* involves genuine, positive attributions—just ones that go beyond our capacity to convey in human language.

I should clarify that I do not mean to say that, for Dionysius, there is no qualitative "leap" from one ontological rung to another. There clearly is. Phenomenologically at least, there are differences among perception, discursion, and intellection. Rather, what I am suggesting is that there is both a sense in which Dionysius thinks about various properties as on a sliding scale and

[355] *CH* II.5, Heil/Ritter 15,21: Οὕτω.
[356] *CH* II.5, Heil/Ritter 15,8–10: Ταῦτα τοὺς μυστικοῦς θεολόγους εὑρήσομεν οὐ μόναις ταῖς τῶν οὐρανίων διακόσμων ἐκφάνσεσιν ἱερῶς περιπλάττοντας, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐταῖς ἔσθ' ὅτε ταῖς θεαρχικαῖς ἐκφαντορίας.
[357] *EH* II.4, Heil/Ritter 14,22.

a sense in which he thinks about those same properties as coming in distinct qualitative stages, between which there are categorical differences. The relationship between angelic and human life, say, is thus akin to that between excellence and goodness. One cannot be excellent without being good, and, indeed, excellence might just *be* a particularly rich or intense goodness. At the same time, to say something is good is not yet to say it is excellent. One may be a good but not an excellent singer, say, and that difference can be qualitative as well as quantitative. Another illustration might be drawn from the relation between animals and humans (or at least how we think about that relation): despite the continuities between communication in humans and non-rational animals, there seems to be something genuinely novel that arises with the ability to convey abstractions. I suspect something of this kind of relation is involved here: the angelic life is wholly distinct from merely human life and yet is of such a character that it genuinely belongs on a spectrum with human life.

8 — Against the idea that the names allow God only a power-granting role

I think I have already shown that it is plausible to see God as having more and more intense powers and activities than his creatures, where those powers and activities are to be understood as on a spectrum with their subordinate counterparts. However, as I noted earlier, there is a view on which to say that God has a power or property "by transcendence" is to say that he possesses a property or power to *give*, to creatures, the power or property normally connoted by the term under consideration. God is called "Life," for example, not because he himself engages in an activity analogous to living but because he engages in an activity through which he bestows on certain creatures a property, or power, to engage in the activity that the term "living" normally refers to. If one were to transpose the same logic to an everyday example, one might say that fire

is only called "hot" because it makes things like the pot able to boil water or burn food and not also (and primarily) because it is itself capable of boiling water or burning food.

In this section, I address this reading, showing that there are good reasons to think that, for Dionysius, God possesses the ability to perform activities in more than a power-granting mode. Indeed, having the same powers as his creatures in an infinitely higher degree, God is able to perform the very same activities they are.

8.1 — Initial reply

I shall start by simply pointing out that, when Dionysius clarifies in what sense terms such as "Good," "Living," and so forth are applicable to God, he seems to give those terms more than a merely power-granting sense.[358] Let us return to *DN* VII. Dionysius says that God is wise in that he gives wisdom to all creatures *and* in that he knows all things before they come to be by knowing himself as their cause. So, while Dionysius clearly does think that it is appropriate to call God "wise" because he makes creatures wise, he seems to think there is more to the name than that. God possesses, "in himself," a power analogous to but far surpassing creaturely wisdom. It is for that reason that God can be called more-than-wise (ὑπέρσοφον).[359] Language suggesting that God possesses properties "in himself" appear in other places as well. For instance, as Andrew Radde-Gallwitz has pointed out, Dionysius says that God contains things' sources and ends "non-relatively" (ἀσχέτως), which Radde-Gallwitz takes to mean that God possesses things' sources and ends absolutely, without relation to the things he makes.[360]

[358] He clearly *does* sometimes use the names purely in a causal sense: in *DN* II.3, he makes it clear that God is named (κατονομάζεται) according to his good-fitted gifts (ἀγαθοπρεπῶν … δωρεῶν), including "the good" (τὸ ἀγαθόν), "the fine" (τὸ καλόν), "the existent" (τὸ ὄν), "the lifegiving" (τὸ ζωογόνον), and "the wise" (τὸ σοφὸν). Suchla 125,17–18. See also *DN* VII.1, Suchla 195,1–2.
[359] *DN* II.3, Suchla 125,15.
[360] *DN* V.8, Suchla 187. Discussed in Radde-Gallwitz, "Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Parmenides,* and the Problem of Contradiction," 248–249.

My fuller reply will involve drawing on principles that run through the Dionysian Corpus as a whole. Broadly, there are two principles that give reason to think God possesses properties sitting on a spectrum with the related creaturely properties and having effects besides mere power-bestowal. The first is that, broadly speaking, the higher a principle is on the ontological ladder, the more powers it possesses and the more intense the powers in it answering to those found in its subordinates. There is no need to think that it works differently with God. It is therefore likely that God, who is the *first* source, also possesses his creatures' powers in a higher degree. The second principle is that God does engage in intramundane activities in various miracles and in the Incarnation.

8.2 — On using "ἀρχή" and "αἰτία" for creatures

To make use of the evidence from the hierarchies, I must first show that one can draw an analogy between causation among creatures and divine causation with respect to creatures. To do that, I need to show that Dionysius thinks creatures can be "causes" in a relevant sense. And since finding a claim to that effect in the Dionysian corpus is not straightforward, I shall dedicate the current section to that task.

Perhaps the main reason to ask whether Dionysius allows creatures any genuine causation is that, by and large, he reserves the term "cause" (αἰτία) for God. (a) He refers to God as the "one cause" in the *EH*.[361] On its own, that might not count for much. It could be, after all, that Dionysius is simply attempting to say that God is the one *ultimate* cause, with all other causes being folded up under it. (b) But in the chapters in the *DN* dealing with the "causal names," such as "Life Itself," "Being Itself," and so forth, Dionysius clearly distances himself from any

[361] *EH* I.3, Heil/Ritter 66,7: ἡ μία τῶν ὄντων αἰτία.

suggestion that he is describing multiple causes.[362] If he were open to the idea that there are creatures who can share in causation in some derivative sense, one might expect him not to object on those grounds. (c) Finally, in *CH* XIII.3–4, Dionysius says that every holy participation and imitation is attributable to God as cause (αἰτία) and source (ἀρχή) but to the first angels as "source, after God" (μετὰ θεὸν ἀρχὴν) of the same participations and imitations.[363] Dionysius might thus seem to distinguish "cause" from "source" and to reserve the former for God.[364]

But there are several reasons to doubt that things are so simple. First, in *DN* VII, Dionysius says that "light precontains knowledge of the darkness insofar as it is cause" (τὸ φῶς κατ' αἰτίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν εἴδησιν τοῦ σκότους προείληφεν οὐκ ἄλλοθεν εἰδὼς τὸ σκότος ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ φωτός).[365] That might be enough to show that Dionysius is happy to admit *some* creaturely causation, even if, in his attempt to avoid attributing independent causation to the divine providences and in attempting to maintain that there is no ultimate counter-principle to God, Dionysius prefers not to call creatures causes. In *DN* V, he takes for granted that the sun is a cause in relation to some things even if it is also caused by God.[366] In *DN* I.8, he suggests much the same, saying that God is named for "other causes and powers." This passage is especially notable since it is clear that the causes in question are *not* God's "broader or narrower providences."[367] Secondly, there are passages in *CH* XIII.4 where Dionysius draws the following link between God's relation to his creatures and the hierarch's (in human cases, the bishop's) relation to his subordinates: "For, just as God purifies all by being every purification's cause—or rather, … just as our hierarch, purifying and enlightening through the deacons or priests, is said

[362] *DN* V.1–2, XI.8.
[363] *CH* XIII.3, Heil/Ritter 46,20–21.
[364] Note that, in *DN* III.2, Suchla 141,6, Dionysius seems to refer to the Virgin Mary (or rather her *body*) as a source, or principle: τοῦ ζωαρχικοῦ καὶ θεοδόχου σώματος.
[365] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 196,21–197,2.
[366] *DN* V.8
[367] *DN* I.8, V.2.

to purify and enlighten, so too does the angel who effects purifications … attribute his own purifying science and power to God, indeed, as cause, but to the Seraphim [also] as first-operating hierarch."[368] In this passage, Dionysius appears to admit that, much as God is cause, or source, in relation to his creatures, so too can the bishop function as cause in relation to his ecclesial subordinates and the seraph in relation to its angelic underlings.

Thirdly, Dionysius shows that he is using a broadly Platonic framework, in whose terms it would be highly peculiar to deny creatures causality altogether. In *DN* IV.10, Dionysius says that God possesses "in himself every paradigmatic, final, productive, formal, and elemental [or material] cause."[369] These are the five causal terms usually used by the "Middle Platonists." (He omits the instrumental cause, which is present in Proclus and Philoponus.[370]) Platonists, who prefer to reserve true causality for the final, paradigmatic, and productive/efficient causes, would still allow that particulars can be causes in a secondary (formal or elemental/material) sense.[371] So, assuming Dionysius is using the terms in any way like other Platonists from the era, it is doubtful that he means to claim that God is the *only* cause. That would involve a far stronger denial than he anywhere suggests. I take it as likely, therefore, that creatures *do* have some causal

[368] *CH* XIII.4, Heil/Ritter 49,1.
[369] Suchla 155,1–2: ἐν αὐτῷ πᾶσα ἀρχὴ παραδειγματική, τελική, ποιητική, εἰδική, στοιχειώδης καὶ ἁπλῶς πᾶσα ἀρχή.
[370] Michael Frede, "The Original Notion of Cause," 129; Greig 76 and 89; for Philoponus on the six causes, see *Contra Proclum* VI.12, 159,1; note: Philoponus uses "ἀρχή" for "cause" in his *Contra Proclum* (e.g., *CP* 159,1–5)—though note that he *also* uses the term "αἰτία" at CP 159,5–11, suggesting the two terms are interchangeable for him. That would suggest Dionysius *is* thinking in these terms and that the use of ἀρχή for intra-worldly causes is already present in roughly the same period. See also Simplicius' *Simplicii in Aristoteles Physicorum Libros Quattuor Priores*, ed. Hermanus Diels (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1882), I, Proemium, Diels 3,13–19: his principles/causes are τὸ ποιητικόν, τὸ τελικόν, τὸ παραδειγματικόν, τὸ εἶδος, ἡ ὕλη, and τὰ στοιχεῖα. He seems to think "cause" and "principle" are synonymous, against Porphyry, who gives some slight conceptual precedence to "principle" as that which precedes, over against "cause" as that which has a product. See also Simplicius *In Physicorum* I, Proemium, Diels 10,8–12,4. Finally, see Proclus, *In Parmenidem* IV, Luna/Segonds 79 (888,17–22). His term is, again, "αἰτία." On the whole, there seems to be no clear distinction between the terms "cause" and "principle" except, perhaps, in Porphyry and, later, Damascius. If Dionysius draws a distinction, it is not along Damascius' lines: Damascius uses "principle" for the uncoordinated, "cause" for the coordinated; it hardly makes sense to read Dionysius as doing the same when he retains the term "cause" mostly for God but allows "source," or "principle," to others. For discussion, see Greig, *The First Principle*, 231–243.
[371] For an overview of the concept of cause in Neoplatonism, see R.J. Hankinson, "The Neoplatonists," in *Cause and Explanation in Ancient Greek Thought* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 404–447.

power and that it is legitimate to say that they have causal power both in the sense that can produce certain effects and in the sense that they can pass along certain powers from God.

Fourthly and finally, Dionysius seems to think that creatures are genuine "coworkers with God." He uses such language at several points in the *CH*, in each case seeming to mean that creatures have "providential activities," passing along perfection and light to other creatures.[372] This is possible because, by participating in their respective hierarchies, creatures can "achieve, by grace and God-given power, those things that are in the Godhead naturally and supernaturally,"[373] the result being that they are "led to cooperation with God."[374] That is not to say that their participation is involved in constituting the activity as such. God could bring about without their aid the effect in which they do in fact, by his favor, collaborate. But they do have some genuine agency, which would in turn seem to suggest causal capacity.[375]

All these considerations are enough to suggest that Dionysius allows creatures some causal power, even if, in keeping with his hymnological aims, he prefers to refer only to God as cause. I can now proceed to causation among creatures in the hierarchy.

8.3 — Causation in the hierarchies

At various points in his corpus, Dionysius makes it clear that he is committed to the claim that, the more potent an entity, the more powers it has.[376] Further, and more important for our purposes, is his commitment to the idea (a) that the higher, more potent causes have all the

[372] *EH* I.2.
[373] *DN* III.3: ἐκεῖνα τελοῦσα χάριτι καὶ θεοσδότῳ δυνάμει τὰ τῇ θεαρχίᾳ φυσικῶς καὶ ὑπερ φυῶς ἐνόντα καὶ πρὸς αὐτῆς ὑπερουσίως δρώμενα.
[374] *CH* III.3: ἀνάγεται πρὸς τὴν θείαν συνεργίαν.
[375] For instance, see *CH* VII.4, where Dionysius says that the highest angels share in God's work.
[376] Note an exception in *CH* XV.3: humans are less capable of perception than are their irrational counterparts among the animals. For discussion, see Eric Perl, "Hierarchy and Participation in Dionysius the Areopagite and Greek Neoplatonism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1994): 20–21.

powers to be found in the inferior causes and (b) that the higher causes are therefore able to perform the same activities as their inferiors and *more*. I have already mentioned the fact that the angels possess knowledge in a higher form than do creatures that can know only through perception or discursive reasoning. Much the same applies with other properties: in addition to their especial characteristics, angels also possess life and existence in higher degrees or modes than do humans, hedgehogs, and barberry bushes.[377] Dionysius even says that they possess answers to human passions such as anger and desire, again understood as more elevated or intense than their human counterparts. (Though note that, certain terms associated with bodily passions, when applied to the angels, are apparently straightforwardly equivocal.) Admittedly, Dionysius does not generally draw attention to the places in scripture where angels are credited with performing mighty acts in more "worldly" terms, e.g. slaying the firstborn in Egypt or wrestling with Abraham. He apparently prefers to say the angels as more capable and more alive than other creatures insofar as they have a greater capacity to bring knowledge to others and to cling to God.[378] But, given that angels are supposed to possess *more* and more *intense* gifts than the creature in lower ranks and, further, that Dionysius seems to think the angels are generally to be understood as depicted in the scriptures,[379] it would be surprising to find that Dionysius thought that their only providential activities were those involved in bestowing visions, promulgating laws, or otherwise conveying messages to humans.

[377] This is also true among angels. See *CH* XII.2. See *CH* V for the idea that angels in higher ranks contain the lower illuminations and powers.
[378] This may be because he tends toward an apparently pacifist or pacifist-leaning approach. God is never described as wrathful, only as meek and generous; the angels are never said to do more than censure (*possibly* punish) the evil (Epistle VIII), and Christ is portrayed as forever pursuing his beloved creatures by shining his light upon them. One must balance these tendencies, however, with the fact that God *does* bring plagues down on Egypt.
[379] *CH* IV, VIII–IX.

Another example comes from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Dionysius divides the Christian clergy into three categories: bishops, priests, and deacons.[380] What is interesting for our purposes is that Dionysius seems to treat the bishops as something akin to Neoplatonic causes in relation to their subordinates. They "precontain" the powers belonging to those below them and, in turn, give that power to their subordinates.[381] The bishop provides power to his subordinates in two senses. First, he is the one who enables them to exercise their own powers.

> For even if some among the revered symbols can be performed by the priests, a priest will never work the holy divine birth [i.e. baptism] apart from the most divine ointment or perform the mysteries associated with the divine Communion unless the Communion's symbols first be placed on the most divine altar. But neither will he be a priest unless called to this [office] by the hierarchs. Whence the divine decree has assigned it to the enthused bishops' perfective powers alone to sanctify the priestly orders, to consecrate the ointment, and to perform the rite to consecrate the holy altar.[382]

Just as the higher hypostases in Proclus must (a) give the lower hypostases their character and existence and (b) prepare the ground for the lower hypostases' activities by rendering the

[380] Throughout the *CH* but especially clearly in *CH* V. I choose to translate "hierarch" (ἱεράρχης) as "bishop" simply for ease (and a fairly common tradition).

[381] As Paul Rorem points out, Dionysius appears to attribute perfecting power to the priests in *EH* VI. Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 33–35. Rorem notes that since the monks have "being perfected" as their peculiar characteristic, it would seem to follow that the priest who confers their consecration must be able to bestow perfection at least in some instances. One possibility, though Dionysius never explicitly says anything to this effect, is that the bishop can deputize certain individuals, granting them the ability to perform an activity above their station. Such an option would certainly be consonant with claims that Dionysius makes elsewhere. There are precedents in liturgical documents from the same region, with the *Didascalia Apostolorum* assuming the bishop can deputize presbyters and deacons to perform the baptismal and eucharistic rites. See Richard Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments: With an Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 146–147; the *Apostolic Constitutions* also allow either a bishop or priest to baptize. P.A. de Lagarde, ed., *Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Leipzig, Teubner; London: Williams & Norgate, 1862) VII.22, Lagarde 206,5–6.

[382] *EH* V.5, Ritter and Heil 107,23–108,4: Εἰ γὰρ καὶ πρὸς τῶν ἱερέων τελοῦνταί τινα τῶν σεβασμίων συμβόλων, ἀλλ' οὔποτε τὴν ἱερὰν θεογενεσίαν ὁ ἱερεὺς ἐνεργήσει τοῦ θειοτάτου μύρου χωρὶς οὐδὲ τὰ τῆς θείας κοινωνίας τελέσει μυστήρια μὴ τῷ θειοτάτῳ θυσιαστηρίῳ τῶν κοινωνικῶν ἐπιτεθέντων συμβόλων. Ἀλλ' οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἱερεὺς ἔσται μὴ πρὸς τῶν ἱεραρχικῶν τελειώσεων εἰς τοῦτο κεκληρωμένος. Ὅθεν ἡ θεία θεσμοθεσία τὴν τῶν ἱερατικῶν τάξεων ἁγιαστείαν καὶ τὴν τοῦ θείου μύρου τελείωσιν καὶ τὴν ἱερὰν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τελετουργίαν ταῖς τῶν ἐνθέων ἱεραρχῶν τελεσιουργοῖς δυνάμεσιν ἐνιαίως ἀπεκλήρωσεν.

For a discussion of whether the priests can preside alone, see Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 33–35.

ὑποκείμενον–2 fit to receive them, so too must the bishop empower the priests and deacons through ordination and prepare the elements necessary for the priests to perform their role.[383]

Secondly, the bishop enables his subordinates to engage in their own activities by allowing them to take part in the broader activity in his own, ongoing activity as bishop. The priest is, in some sense, only able to perform his characteristic activities by joining in an ongoing activity whose primary agent is the hierarch.[384] That activity is the hierarchy itself.[385] This activity and its connection with the bishops ccan be understood on two levels. On the more abstract level, one might say that the whole worship the Church offers up—its coming together, performing its rites, transforming its members, and contemplating God—is an activity, one that occurs first and primarily in the bishops.[386] As its primary (proximate) agents, the bishops would be able, in principle, to perform that activity (and its subordinate activities) even without the priests, deacons, or laity. (It is probably for that reason that Dionysius talks about the bishop as the one whose power flows through the hierarchy as a whole.) The more concrete aspect becomes visible if one turns one's attention to the concrete practices in which the Church engages. In rites such as baptism and the eucharist, the bishop invites the priests and deacons into his activity, allowing them to take charge over some element in a broader activity that he would be able to perform alone. In the baptismal rite, the bishop anoints and immerses the baptizand, but he normally allows the deacons to strip the baptizand naked, the priests to continue the

[383] *CH* XIII.4: deacons attribute activity to their hierarch. Dionysius himself never sets out such a system with respect to Being, Life, and so forth—probably because, as he makes clear in *DN* V and XI, what would be distinct hypostases and causes for Proclus cannot be for Dionysius. They are all names for the providential activity of God in its more universal or less universal forms (*DN* V.2, V.4, XI.6; see also *DN* I.8.) But he clearly states in *DN* II.6 and *CH* XIII.3 that creatures must be fitted to receive God. For the use of the concept of aptitude in Dionysius, see Panagiotis Pavlos, "Aptitude (Ἐπιτηδειότης) and the Foundations of Participation in the Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite," in *Studia Patristica* XCVI, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 377–396.
[384] That is not to say that the hierarch is the primary agent overall since he gets his own powers from Jesus: EH V.5, Heil and Ritter 107,16–17.
[385] *CH* III; for commentary, see Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 38.
[386] *EH* I.2.

anointment and reclothe him, and so forth.[387] Rutledge points out that we have no cause to think the bishop could not do all these things himself. And there is good reason to think he *could* do so, as we shall see in the next point.

Third and most important is that the hierarch is able to (a) perform the activity in which the hierarchy consists and (b) distribute roles in the hierarchy to the priests and deacons because he already has a practical knowledge about how to perform the whole activity and so *also* has the knowledge and powers that are peculiar to its subordinate elements.

> The hierarchs' order has been shown to be perfective, the priests' to be enlightening, and the deacons' to be purgative and discerning—the hierarchic rank clearly knowing (ἐπισταμένης) not only how to perfect but also, at the same time, how to enlighten and purge; having in itself the priestly powers along with the enlightening and the purgative knowledge. For while the worse cannot leap up to the better—and besides, it is in no wise legitimate for them to attempt such a vanity—, the more divine powers, in their perfection, also know, along with their own, the subordinate priestly knowledges.[388]

That is, the bishop knows what his subordinates can do, and the knowledge he possesses is *practical* knowledge, enabling him to do whatever his subordinates can. (It is for that reason that he is said to contain the subordinate priestly powers (τῶν ἱερέων δυνάμεως) as well as knowledges.) If the deacon can purify, so can the bishop; if the priest can celebrate the eucharist, so can the bishop. Presumably, if there were no others around to help him, the bishop could complete the baptism by himself. Certainly, such a possibility is plausible enough given other,

[387] *EH* II.M.3–7; see commentary in Dom Denys Rutledge, *Cosmic Theology: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys, An Introduction* (New York: Alba House, 1964), 66–67.

[388] *EH* V.I.7, Heil 109,15–21: Δέδεικται τοίνυν ἡ μὲν τῶν ἱεραρχῶν τάξις τελειωτικὴ καὶ τελεσιουργός, ἡ δὲ τῶν ἱερέων φωτιστικὴ καὶ φωταγωγός, ἡ δὲ τῶν λειτουργῶν καθαρτικὴ καὶ διακριτική, δηλαδὴ τῆς ἱεραρχικῆς τάξεως οὐ τελεσιουργεῖν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ φωτίζειν ἅμα καὶ καθαίρειν ἐπισταμένης καὶ τῆς τῶν ἱερέων δυνάμεως ἐχούσης ἐν ἑαυτῇ μετὰ τῆς φωτιστικῆς καὶ τὴν καθαρτικὴν ἐπιστήμην. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἥττους ἐπὶ τὰ κρείττω μεταπηδᾶν ἀδυνατοῦσιν—πρὸς τῷ μηδὲ θεμιτὸν αὐταῖς εἶναι πρὸς τοιαύτην ἐγχειρεῖν ἀλαζονείαν—, αἱ δὲ θειότεραι δυνάμεις μετὰ τῶν οἰκείων καὶ τὰς ὑφειμένας τῆς αὐτῶν τελειότητος ἱερὰς ἐπιστήμας γινώσκουσιν.

See also *EH* V.Θ.7, Heil 114,13–19, where the diaconal rank is considered to be solely purificatory (μόνον καθαρτικὴ) and the priestly rank to be concerned *not* solely with purification (οἱ δὲ ἱερεῖς … οὐ μόνον κεκαθαρμένων). The implication seems to be here that the higher ranks are capable of the effects of their subordinates; it is just that they are not *only* capable of them. It seems likely, given the above passage, that Dionysius intends this implication to apply to the bishops as well.

slightly earlier texts from the same region: the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions* assume that the bishop can perform the baptismal rites without aid, though it is also perfectly normal for him to delegate the power to his subordinates.[389]

We get a picture on which the bishop, as source, does not simply enable his subordinates to perform their activities. Rather, he *delegates* the "particular" activities below him to his subordinates, activities that he can delegate in part because he himself has the power to execute them if need be.[390]

9 — Dionysius depicts God as possessing and using genuine powers

I take myself to have shown that, for Dionysius, higher powers contain the subordinate powers *both* in the sense that they can serve as their source *and* in the sense that they themselves can produce at least the same effects as their subordinates. I also take myself to have shown that there is no good reason to think that Dionysius exempts God from this general rule. In this section, I finally turn to the ways in which, for Dionysius, God in fact *does* engage with his creatures in discrete, intramundane activities as well as in a deific, power- or essence-bestowing mode—just as one would expect given my argument so far in this chapter.

Before proceeding, I should mention why I have reserved what might seem to be the most obvious evidence till now. In short, I wanted to lay the groundwork to show that the miracles and other intra-worldly acts ascribed to God are consonant with what Dionysius says about powers in

[389] Richard Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments: With an Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 146–147; the *Apostolic Constitutions* also allow either a bishop or priest to baptize. P.A. de Lagarde, ed., *Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Leipzig, Teubner; London: Williams & Norgate, 1862), VII.22, Lagarde 206,5–6.

[390] It is worth noting that such a picture is also not foreign to Neoplatonic thought. Proclus holds that particular hypostases (such as particular souls or intellects) can empower particular hypostases in a lower τάξις and, indirectly, material entities, enabling them to perform activities that are otherwise outside their natures. So, for instance, the primary Intellect can function *qua* providence, or *qua* god, because it participates in a particular henad, and statues can prophesy because they are possessed by gods: van den Berg, "Theurgy in Proclus' Philosophy," 223–239.

general. In doing so, I hope to answer from the outset certain objections—particularly the objection that Dionysius, given his broadly Platonic metaphysics and his commitment to the idea that God is not a particular being, must merely be paying lip service to the biblical narratives, that, at most, he must take them as allegorical.[391] My indirect approach also serves a more positive function. By showing that Dionysius thinks higher causes generally have the capacity to produce the very same effects as their subordinates, the claim that Dionysius *also* thinks God occasionally "steps in" to produce supernatural effects, interruptions or novelties in the cosmic order, should seem perfectly natural.

9.1 — Miracles, visions, and Jesus

Let us start with those passages in which Dionysius shows God (seemingly the Godhead in general rather than this or that Person) interacting with his creatures through miracles. In *CH* VIII, Dionysius attributes Israel's various exiles to God:

> For … the divine and fatherly love for humanity, chastening Israel to recall it to its holy station and having handed it over to avenging and wild peoples for correction, by manifold promptings brought those under his providence (once more) to a better state and gently led them back from their captivity into their former ease.[392]

Dionysius suggests, in this passage, that God has a direct hand in historical affairs, arranging events so as to produce particular changes in his creatures. While the surrounding passage is about the way in which God usually communicates with humans through the angelic hierarchy, there is no hint here that the angels are his mediators in causing the exile or the return. Dionysius

[391] That is how Hathaway, for instance, seems to read the miracle accounts in Epistle VII. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order*, 73–74.

[392] *CH* VIII.2, Heil/Ritter 34,17–21: Ἡνίκα γὰρ ἡ θεία καὶ πατρικὴ φιλανθρωπία τὸν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπιστρεπτικῶς ὑπὲρ τῆς ἱερᾶς αὐτοῦ σωτηρίας παιδεύσασα καὶ τιμωροῖς καὶ ἀτιθάσοις ἔθνεσιν εἰς ἐπανόρθωσιν ἐκδεδωκυῖα τῇ παντοίᾳ τῶν προνοουμένων ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον μεταγωγῇ καὶ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας ἠφίει καὶ πρὸς τὴν προτέραν ἐπιεικῶς ἐπανῆγεν εὐπάθειαν…

attributes the angels only a role in bringing the news to Zechariah to announce the time to return to Israel and build the Temple.[393]

Dionysius attributes several other particular acts to God in Epistle VII. God, he says, has caused the sun and moon to cease in their orbits, brought about an unseasonable solar eclipse when Jesus died on the cross, and, most notably, brought down plagues upon Egypt.[394] In each case, the effect is attributable directly to God, seemingly without intermediary, and the effect is apparently not to be understood as merely giving a power to creatures. God has the power to produce changes in his creatures and so appear as an agent among other agents. That such acts are directly performed by God is further supported by Dionysius' insistence that such miracles are "possible only to Christ the omnicausal" (μόνῳ Χριστῷ τῷ παναιτίῳ δυνατά).[395] Were Dionysius meaning merely to say that these events were performed by creaturely agents but that, like all creaturely activities, they are possible only because God first gives power to the creature, he would have no reason to put such stress on its being *only* Christ who could perform such acts. It seems likely, then, that the properties that God possesses can be understood as capacities like those found in creatures—only more so, able to accomplish things that make little sense by creaturely lights. But whatever else his properties and activities are, they are not *less* than creaturely properties and activities.[396]

An objector might say that, even in such cases, one God can be understood as only giving powers to the creature: God simply causes the creature both to have a new power and to exercise it immediately. But, to my mind, such a move would render unclear the difference between

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[393] *CH* VIII.2, Heil/Ritter 34,21–35,3.

[394] Epistle VII.2, Heil/Ritter 168,9–12.

[395] Epistle VII.2, Heil/Ritter 169,11–12: Τοσαῦτά ἐστι τοῦ τότε καιροῦ τὰ ὑπερφυῆ καὶ μόνῳ Χριστῷ τῷ παναιτίῳ δυνατά.

[396] Note that I am not the first scholar to suggest that Dionysius might be attempting to show that God "intervenes" from time to time in the world. István Perczel, "Revisiting the Christian Neoplatonism," 281 discusses the astronomical episodes mentioned in Epistle VII, suggesting their use as an attack on Proclus and a defense of the concept of divine intervention.

saying that God has only the ability to give a power to a creature and that God sometimes operates on the creature as an efficient cause.

I now turn to other passages in which it seems fairly clear that God must have something akin to highly intensified creaturely properties: those dealing with the Incarnation. The first thing these passages furnish is more evidence that God can perform acts with intramundane, creaturely effects. So, for instance, Christ is born by a virgin and performs such miracles as walking on water.[397] But more interesting is that, in these passages, we see, more clearly than in the other passages dealing with miracles, that God stoops to act in a creaturely *mode*, not merely producing the same effect through a higher, divine activity.

To see this, let us start with the fact that Dionysius thinks that, in the Incarnation, God the Son takes on human nature.[398] He makes it clear in Epistle IV that he does not mean to call Jesus a man in the merely power-granting sense "but as being truly man according to the whole essence."[399] I take it that the point is more general than that Jesus takes on *human* nature in particular. Rather, the point is that he takes on *nature*, or *essence*, at all: "having verily come into

[397] *DN* II.9. Notably, at Suchla 133,9, Dionysius calls Jesus' formation in a virgin's womb "contrary to nature" (παρὰ φύσιν). In Epistle IV, he says that the virgin's giving birth to Jesus, on the other hand, is "supernatural" (ὑπὲρ φύσιν). It is possible that Dionysius is employing a distinction that Evagrius (among others) employs. In his *Great Letter to Melania*, Evagrius says God's being born of a woman is contrary to his nature (§57) but that a human's being born of a virgin simply "transcends nature" (§59). In the letter, Evagrius seems to mean that being born is an act possible to God but "inferior" to his usual mode of operation, while being born of a virgin is somehow "superior" to the mode of operation of a human. Evagrius Ponticus, *Évagre le pontique: Lettres: Lettre sur la foi, corpus des 63 lettres et Grande Lettre*, ed. and trans. Paul Géhin (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2025), 596–599. I shall cite Evagrius' letter simply as "*The Great Letter*," along with section headings.

This reading tells against scholars such as Eric Perl and Christian Schäfer, who, because they hold that creation is nothing but God's appearing in creaturely mode, see no sharp distinction between God's appearance in the Incarnation and his appearance in all other cases. Perl, *Theophany*, 109; Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius*, 78, n. 7; John D. Jones, "Introduction," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Divine Names and Mystical Theology: Translated from the Greek with an Introductory Study*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 60. I think such a view fails to take into account the genuine novelty the Incarnation represents. (Further evidence is the fact that Dionysius describes Christ's work as something wholly new in Epistles IV and IX.)

[398] For instance, see *MT* III, Heil/Ritter 146,7–8: πῶς ὁ ὑπερούσιος Ἰησοῦς ἀνθρωποφυϊκαῖς ἀληθείαις οὐσίωται. See also *EH* III.Θ.11 and III.Θ.13; *CH* IV.4; *DN II*.6 and *II*.9. For other passages and an excellent overview of Dionysian Christology, see Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 308–309.

[399] Epistle IV, Ritter 160,5: ἀλλ' ὡς αὐτὸ κατ' οὐσίαν ὅλην ἀληθῶς ἄνθρωπος ὤν.

being, though beyond being, [he] essentiated himself."[400] (Dionysius uses much the same language in *DN* II.[401]) What seems to matter to Dionysius is that, even in taking on essence, Jesus remains not merely above humanity—though Dionysius says that as well—but above *being* (ὑπερούσιος). In the Incarnation, God begins to act in an essential, or creaturely, mode—though without ceasing to act in his hyperessential mode: "In the things pertaining to our nature, he was hypernatural and, in the things pertaining to essence, hyperessential, transcending us [even in] having all things pertaining to us from us."[402]

The marvel is not that God can perform such miracles. It is that, in the Incarnation, the Son performs supernatural acts in a localized, human mode: it is (a) that he somehow becomes essentially human—indeed, that he takes on an essence at all is astonishing—and (b) that, in doing so, he does not fall into his own contrary but retains all his divine properties, including his transcendence. One can see that Jesus is God because he can walk on water; but the astonishment seems to come less from the fact that God could perform such miracles—he notes in Epistle VII that prophets have done similarly with divine help—than from the fact that, in Christ, God himself upholds not merely *some* feet but his very own feet on the water.[403] In doing so, he is interacting with the world in a decidedly "essential" way, even if not in quite the usual human way. Every other case in which an individual starts behaving according to a lower rank involves dissolution. An angel who engaged in perception would tumble into a lower rank and cease to be

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[400] Epistle IV, Ritter 160,9–10: Εἰς οὐσίαν ἀληθῶς ἐλθὼν ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν ουσιώθη. See discussion in Jones, "Introduction," 60.
[401] *DN* II.10.
[402] *DN* II.10, Suchla 135,7–9: ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ τὸ πάντων καινῶν καινότατον ἐν τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἡμῶν ὑπερφυὴς ἦν ἐν τοῖς κατ' οὐσίαν ὑπερούσιος πάντα τὰ ἡμῶν ἐξ ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ὑπερέχων; see also Epistle III, which describes Jesus' "putting aside his own hiddenness" as a "sudden" (ἐξαίφνης) event, against all hope. See echoes of the sudden in the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:3 and 22:6), discussed in Stang, *"No Longer I"*, 96–98; see also, in that connection, the quote by Apollophanes in Epistle VII.3. But see also the connection to the *Parmenides* (Corsini, Hathaway). For more on the coming forth from hiddenness of Jesus, see *EH* III.Θ.12–13. See discussion in Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare*, 225–228
[403] Epistle IV.

fully itself.[404] But God somehow retains his power, engaging in divine activities, while stooping to what are somehow human activities (τὰ ἀνθρώπου)—activities in a divine and human mode at the same time.[405]

All the above considerations serve as evidence that, for Dionysius, God can act in a creaturely mode because he contains all creaturely powers in a more intense mode. But I also take it to lend support to a point I made earlier. Earlier, I claimed that, for Dionysius, the higher an "entity" sits on the ontological scale, the more powers it possesses, along with the practical knowledge that goes with those powers. That God seems able to act in a creaturely mode because he possesses the creaturely powers suggests that the bishop, likewise, can be understood to be able to perform the same activities as the priests and deacons, even going so far as to perform, in their absence or for their benefit, in their own, subordinate mode.

It is worth noting one more point. In the Incarnation, God seems to be in a position similar to the position that a bishop, or hierarch, assumes in condescending to perform merely priestly activities. A bishop is perfectly able to perform the σύναξις, but he is also the one through whom the priestly activities are rendered possible, and it is his own activity that holds together the hierarchy, enabling the priests and deacons to partake in the same power. Likewise with Jesus, who, in human flesh, performs human activities while remaining transcendent and continuing to sustain all things as their source.

That there should be such a similarity makes sense given that Dionysius' thought tends to repeat itself at different levels. Jesus is the source whence all hierarchy flows; he is himself, in a

[404] *EH* VI.Θ.6; *DN* IV.23.

[405] This represents another possible connection to Evagrius' *Great Letter*, or *Letter to Melania*: Evagrius Ponticus, *Évagre le pontique: Lettres: Lettre sur la foi, corpus des 63 lettres et Grande Lettre*, ed. and trans. Paul Géhin (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2025), 596–599. I shall cite Evagrius' letter simply as "*The Great Letter*," along with section headings. In §§56–57, he says that Christ acted "contrary to nature" in becoming incarnate. In that respect, the Incarnation represents activity like that by which creatures tumble into nonbeing. Somehow, though, God can actually act in ways contrary to his own nature without such dissolution. (§§58, 60–62) Dionysius is probably thinking along the same lines.

sense, the hierarchs' hierarch.[406] As the hierarch's activity flows through and constitutes the hierarchy, so does Christ's own activity—variously called "light"[407] and "love,"[408] among other terms—flow through and constitute the broader cosmic order in which the hierarchies are situated. Indeed, it is ultimately his activity that flows through and constitutes the hierarchies themselves. That such a consonance exists between the role Jesus plays and the role the bishop plays simply provides further, supporting evidence for my interpretation. Dionysius holds that God contains creatures much as the hierarch (and every other source, or cause) contains his subordinates, and that containment involves possessing the subordinate knowledges along with their powers.

9.2 — The upshot for foreknowledge

This section has claimed that God contains things before making them at least in the sense that he contains either their powers or a divine power on the same spectrum. If I am correct, it becomes much easier to say in what sense Dionysius thinks God knows things (a) from himself (b) as their cause (c) insofar as he precontains them. He precontains them insofar as he possesses the very powers in which they themselves are engaged.

Before moving on to the next chapter, I emphasize a point what has been, till now, a side point. At least when it comes to intelligent creatures such as humans and angels, one contains the powers peculiar to one's rank along with, or perhaps by possessing, a certain knowledge

[406] Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, 197.
[407] *CH* I.1–2.
[408] *EH* I.3, *DN* IV.12–13.

(ἐπιστήμη, γνῶσις). For instance, the bishop can perfect because he possesses a perfective knowledge, purify because he possesses a purificatory knowledge, and so forth. In *CH* III.3, Dionysius says the same with respect to angels: those who perfect can do so because they are skilled in the perfective art.[409] It is worth recalling, in this connection, that Dionysius says that *God* possesses things' "knowledges" (εἴδησιν καὶ γνῶσιν) before the things themselves come to be. While he uses different terminology in these passages (εἴδησις rather than ἐπιστήμη), Dionysius seems to be drawing an analogy between the creaturely and the divine cases. Just as the hierarch possesses the knowledge that he passes on to his subordinates, enabling them to engage in their characteristic activities in the hierarchy, so too, it seems, does God possess the knowledges he passes on to creatures, enabling them to engage in their characteristic activities.

Even given the apparent parallels between the divine and human cases, one might ask whether the knowledge in each case is the same. In the human case, after all, the knowledge involved is not *foreknowledge*. It is, rather, practical knowledge about his own capacities and activities. In contrast, the knowledge God possesses, as foreknowledge, might seem to be knowledge about creatures, not knowledge about how to perform certain activities. In response to such worries, I note three points. First, as I have already argued, Dionysius is clearly thinking about creative foreknowledge when he says that God contains "things' knowledge" before they come to be. In other words, to say that God prepossesses things' knowledge should not be read first and foremost as just an indirect way to say that God has knowledge about things before they come to be. Secondly, Dionysius tends to couple the claim that God prepossesses things' knowledges with the claim that he prepossesses their substances as well. That fact suggests that it is the knowledge belonging to the creature, not mere knowledge about the creature, that God

[409] *CH* III.3, Heil/Ritter 19,12–14: τοὺς δὲ τελεσιουργοὺς ὡς ἐπιστημονικοὺς τῆς τελεστικῆς μεταδώσεως τελεῖν τοὺς τελουμένους τῇ πανιέρῳ μυήσει τῆς τῶν … ἱερῶν ἐπιστήμης. As is often the case, knowledge is paired with activity here.

possesses before the creature comes to be. Thirdly, and more negatively, note that, even in the human case, the gap is not wide between practical knowledge about one's own capacities or activities and knowledge about what capacities or activities a subordinate will come to possess through one's instruction.[410] Dionysius never explicitly says that the bishop "foreknows" the priest whom he consecrates, but such a reading is certainly consonant with what he *does* say: the bishop, as the one who gives the priest the knowledge that constitutes him *as* priest, could be said to foreknow the priest *qua* priest insofar as he already possesses the priest's knowledge and activity. So too with God, who "leads" things into being and knowledge by first possessing the knowledge and powers that he bestows upon them.

I raise this point about knowledge for three reasons. First, it lends further support to the broader claim from this section. If (a) the fact that a cause possesses subordinate knowledge also implies that it possesses subordinate powers and (b) the analogy between God and other causes holds, then it would seem to follow that (c) the fact that God possesses creaturely knowledges also implies that he possesses their powers. To say that God possesses creaturely powers is to say that he can perform the corresponding activities, and he can perform those activities because he possesses the corresponding creaturely knowledges. (Indeed, to say he possesses the knowledges may be just one way to say that he possesses the corresponding powers; the two things are tightly linked for Dionysius.) Secondly, it allows one to further clarify in what sense God might know things by possessing their powers before making them. If God possesses creaturely powers and perfectly knows himself, he must know his own power to engage in activities in a creaturely mode. He possesses, as it were, creaturely "know-how" along with the creaturely powers. That would open an option to Dionysius: he could say that God knows exactly what the activities his

[410] Roques sees knowledge and activity as interwoven. For an especially clear articulation, see Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, 92.

creatures will engage in are like. Alternatively, he might say that God knows the creaturely activities to come precisely as *his own* activity, since, in giving his practical knowledge to creatures, he enables them to perform their own activities, making God, as it were, a universal cooperant. This second possibility will have to wait to be fleshed out in the next chapter.

Lastly, the idea that God possesses creaturely practical knowledge sets the stage for the next step in my argument. The close connection between the possession of subordinate knowledges and the ability of the cause to involve itself in the activities of its subordinates play a key part in my attempt to make plausible the analogy between divine synergy with creatures and the synergy of the bishop with his subordinates.

Chapter 6: Dionysius on God's knowing creatures in the creative act

1 — Introduction

This chapter picks up the argument from the previous chapter. In that chapter, I argued that Dionysius shows interest in the CFP. I then suggested he hints at an approach to the issue in *DN* V and VII: God both knows things by containing their powers in himself in a higher mode and knows things in his going out from himself in his creative activities. In the former way, he knows creatures in their universal aspect and without relation to them; in the latter way, he knows creatures in their individuality and as in relation to him. I did not, at the time, attempt to work out in detail the sense in which God might know the individual in his going forth to it in the act of creating it. Instead, I proceeded to argue the case that God genuinely possesses creaturely powers

and knowledges and that Dionysius connects that fact to God's creative standing in relation to creatures.

In this chapter, I return to work out the second prong of this argument, considering in what sense Dionysius thinks God is related to things "in himself," not simply as anticipated in him but as "being from him." My suggestion is that Dionysius sees God as knowing things in his very going out to them, as making himself accessible to and hence relative to them. Then, noting the connection between God's going out to creatures and his knowing them, I suggest one way that knowledge can be understood: by analogy with the bishop's hierarchical knowledge. Finally, simply to strengthen my case, I argue that there are points in the *DN* where Dionysius seems to presuppose creatures have something like individuality.

2 — Procession, ecstasy, and divine knowledge

Throughout his corpus, Dionysius describes God as proceeding to his creatures and, in so doing, "departing from himself" in some sense.[411] Dionysius uses various terms for this outgoing (or, from the creaturely perspective, outgoings). Sometimes, he calls them "providences" (πρόνοιαι).[412] At other times, they are "providential activities" (προνοητικὰς ἐνεργείας),[413] "activities" (ἐνέργειαι),[414] "processions" (πρόοδοι),[415] or "powers" (δυνάμεις).[416] Though what exactly they are is not fully clear, a few things can be gleaned about them from the passages in which they figure. First, they are not substances in their own right. Dionysius makes that plain in

[411] Epistle IX.3; yet he also always "remains in himself": *DN* II.11, III.1, IX.5, IX.8–9, XI.1–2, XIII.2; III.Θ.3.
[412] *DN* I.8, Suchla 120,9–10.
[413] Epistle IX.3, Heil/Ritter 203,4.
[414] *DN* IX.9, Suchla 213,14.
[415] *DN* II.5, Suchla 128,15; V.2, Suchla 181,18; IX.9, Suchla 213,14; Epistle IX.1, Heil/Ritter 195,3.
[416] *DN* II.7, Suchla 131, 9; Epistle IX.1, Heil/Ritter 195,3.

DN XI.[417] Indeed, based on what Dionysius says in *DN* V.2, they are probably not creatures at all, not even created properties existing "in" a substance; Dionysius contrasts the idea that they could be "creative hypostases or substances," or even that they are different things from one another, with his own preferred claim: that they are "the whole, good providences coming from the one God."[418] Secondly, they are not the same as God "in his nature." God "in himself" is imparticipable, while creatures can and do share in his activities.[419] Thirdly, they are the means by which God bestows properties on his creatures:

> On the one hand, speaking principally, divinely, and causally, we call the singular hyper-principal and hyper-essential principle and cause "To Be Itself" and "Life Itself" and "Deity Itself"; and, on the other hand, speaking with respect to participation, we call the providential powers flowing from the unparticipated God "Essentiation Itself," "Living Itself," "Divinization Itself," from which [powers] the beings that share in them both are and are said to be existents, living things, divinized things, and so forth.[420]

For my purposes, the key point here is that Dionysius seems to think that, in his providential activities, God becomes somehow involved in relations with the creatures for which he provides. In *DN* IV, he says the following:

> For the truth's sake, one must dare to say even this: that even He Who Is All Things' Cause, in his good and beautiful longing for all things, through an effluent, yearning goodness, comes to be outside himself in his providences towards all beings and is, as it were, charmed by goodness, by love, by longing, to descend from above all things to be in all things…[421]

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[417] *DN* XI.6, Suchla 222,6–7.
[418] *DN* V.2, Suchla 181,18. Scholars disagree how far Dionysius sets himself apart from pagan Neoplatonists in referring all things to God. As mentioned in the last chapter, Golitzin sees Dionysius as eliminating the whole κόσμος νοητός, leaving nothing in between God and his (particular) creatures. (*Et Introibo ad Altare*, 57–58) If there are universals, they are only commonalities, not causative entities. Roques thinks similarly. (*L'univers Dionysien*, 80–81) Perl does not read Dionysius as doing anything very different from earlier Neoplatonists. He simply places the emphasis, thinks Perl, on the One, or God, as *ultimate* source. Perl, *Theophany*, 67–68.
[419] *CH* VII.4; *DN* V.4.
[420] *DN* XI.6, Suchla 222,13–223,1: Ἀλλ' αὐτοεῖναι καὶ αὐτοζωὴν καὶ αὐτοθεότητά φαμεν ἀρχικῶς μὲν καὶ θεϊκῶς καὶ αἰτιατικῶς τὴν μίαν πάντων ὑπεράρχιον καὶ ὑπερούσιον ἀρχὴν καὶ αἰτίαν, μεθεκτῶς δὲ τὰς ἐκδιδομένας ἐκ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀμεθέκτου προνοητικὰς δυνάμεις τὴν αὐτοουσίωσιν, αὐτοζώωσιν, αὐτοθέωσιν, ὧν τὰ ὄντα οἰκείως ἑαυτοῖς μετέχοντα καὶ ὄντα καὶ ζῶντα καὶ ἔνθεα καὶ ἔστι καὶ λέγεται καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὡσαύτως.

In this passage, Dionysius shows that he wants a picture on which God is genuinely involved with his creatures—indeed, *outside* himself and *in* and *with* them—in his "providences." In his providence, he makes himself available to them, enabling them to participate in him.[422]

I must make a brief excursus before moving on to discuss the connection between the energies and divine knowledge. I am *not* making the claim that Dionysius draws a systematic distinction between, on the one hand, God in his "nature," or "substance" and, on the other hand, the "activities" (ἐνέργειαι), "powers" (δυνάμεις), or "providences" (πρόνοιαι) in which God activates his intrinsic, natural potencies. My claim is simply that Dionysius draws a distinction between God as transcendent and uncorrelated with his creatures and God as present to and correlated with his creatures. Or, to put it in slightly different terms, he draws a distinction between God in his logical priority with respect to creatures—as logically prior to his creative act—and in his willing engagement with and relation to his creatures in his creative act. The difference between my claim and the one Lossky makes will allow me to sidestep yet another thorny debate in Dionysius scholarship. And to show that there *is* such a distinction, one can look to the whole corpus. Dionysius often returns to the idea that God "goes out of himself" to be in his providential relation to creatures while remaining "ever in himself." One need look no further

[421] *DN* IV.12.13, Suchla 159,9–12: Τολμητέον δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας εἰπεῖν, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πάντων αἴτιος τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ τῶν πάντων ἔρωτι δι' ὑπερβολὴν τῆς ἐρωτικῆς ἀγαθότητος ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται ταῖς εἰς τὰ ὄντα πάντα προνοίαις καὶ οἷον ἀγαθότητι καὶ ἀγαπήσει καὶ ἔρωτι θέλγεται καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὑπὲρ πάντα καὶ πάντων ἐξῃρμένου πρὸς τὸ ἐν πᾶσι κατάγεται…

[422] In the last chapter, I suggested that Dionysius follows Evagrius is thinking that God, in becoming incarnate, acts against his own nature. Christ gives himself to his creatures in a new way, allowing himself to undergo even creaturely passions. It is probable that "eros" is connected, for Dionysius, to God's power to transgress even the apparent divide between his own nature as "principle" and creaturely receptivity. It is worth noting that, *DN* IV.13, he clearly connects eros with Christ's union with creatures. (I am thus in disagreement with John Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20, no. 4 (1966): 243.) It is also worth noting, as Patrick Corry does, that Dionysius never negates the names associated with love in the *MT*: "*Erōs, Ekstasis*, and Silence in Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*," *Pro Ecclesia* 31, no. 3 (2022): 302–320. Perhaps the reason is that love characterizes God's historical acts, which transgress categorical lines in this way. That would fit with the idea that God is, for Dionysius, not merely love's cause but love *qua* object itself (τὸ … αὐτός ἐστι): *DN* IV.14, Suchla 160,2–3.

than *DN* IV on God as ecstatic love, *DN* XI on God as differentiating himself to his creatures, and Epistle IX on God as provident. There is no need to posit δυνάμεις or ἐνέργειαι as a ontological category distinct from οὐσία—at least in God.[423]

With that excursus complete, let us return to the passages from *DN* V and *DN* VII to discuss the way in which Dionysius connects divine foreknowledge and the divine ideas with the divine energies. In the passage from *DN* V, Dionysius says "that [God] precontains all beings' paradigms according to a singular, hyper-essential unity, since he produces even substances in accordance with a departure from [his own] substance."[424] I take it that Dionysius is talking about two distinct "moments" in divine knowledge. God knows creatures, first, insofar as he precontains them. (If I am correct, that means insofar as he possesses their powers.) Secondly, he produces them "in a going forth from [his own] substance." Though Dionysius does not, in this passage, connect God's going forth from his own substance with God's foreknowledge, the connection between foreknowledge and providence just earlier in the same passage makes the link plausible.

One can see the same two moments in the passage from *DN* VII:

> For if, according to one cause, God bestows being on all beings, according to that same, singular cause … he will know everything as being from him (ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὄντα) and as preexisting in him (ἐν αὐτῷ προϋφεστηκότα) … Consequently, God does not possess, on the one hand, a self-knowledge proper to him and, on the other hand, a different knowledge gathering up all creatures in common. For all things' cause, by knowing itself, will hardly fail to know the things that proceed from it and whose source it is.[425]

[423] Though Dionysius certainly does subscribe to some form of οὐσία–δύναμις–ἐνέργεια distinction: *DN* 4.23.
[424] *DN* V.8, Suchla 188.
[425] *DN* VII.2, Suchla 197,4–14: Καὶ γὰρ εἰ κατὰ μίαν αἰτίαν ὁ θεὸς πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι τοῦ εἶναι μεταδίδωσι, κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἑνικὴν αἰτίαν εἴσεται πάντα ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὄντα καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ προϋφεστηκότα καὶ οὐκ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων λήψεται τὴν αὐτῶν γνῶσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοῖς ἑκάστοις τῆς αὐτῶν καὶ ἄλλοις τῆς ἄλλων γνώσεως ἔσται χορηγός. Οὐκ ἄρα ὁ θεὸς ἰδίαν ἔχει τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνῶσιν, ἑτέραν δὲ τὴν κοινῇ τὰ ὄντα πάντα συλλαμβάνουσαν. Αὐτὴ γὰρ ἑαυτὴν ἡ πάντων αἰτία γινώσκουσα σχολῇ που τὰ ἀφ' αὑτῆς καὶ ὧν ἐστιν αἰτία ἀγνοήσει.

On the one hand, Dionysius says that God knows creatures as preexisting in him. Presumably, that is to say that God knows them insofar as he precontains their knowledges and powers. On the other hand, Dionysius says that God knows his creatures “as being from him,” or as “the things that are gone out from him” (τὰ αφ’ αὐτῆς). Dionysius says these are one and the same knowledge. God does not possess one knowledge dealing with his own nature and another knowledge dealing with creatures. Even so, Dionysius seems to be drawing a distinction between two “moments” in that selfsame knowledge. My suspicion is that, when he says God knows creatures “as being from him,” Dionysius is talking about God’s knowledge under its practical or providential aspect. God not only knows himself in himself; he also knows himself insofar as he has actually gone forth from his own substance to produce creaturely substances. To put it in the terms from *DN* IV, God knows himself in his ecstatic dwelling in creatures. Or, to use my own terms, God knows himself *qua* cause in relation to his effects. There are a couple reasons to take this reading. First, the term “τὰ ἀφ’ αὐτῆς” suggests creatures understood as existing distinct from God—that is, not insofar that they or their character remain in but insofar as they have proceeded from God. Secondly, earlier in *DN* VII, Dionysius connects divine foreknowledge with God’s knowledge about the creatures he has produced. Since this passage is an elaboration on that earlier passage, it would be natural to read Dionysius as having in mind the distinction between creatures understood as possessed “before” their creation in their λόγοι and as having their own substantial reality.

3 — The analogy with the bishop

At this point, I would like to illustrate how such an approach to God’s productive knowledge might look. I would also like to strengthen the reading I have given of the distinction

between knowledge and activity in oneself and in relation to what is “from oneself.” To accomplish both tasks, I wish to return to the relation between the bishop and his subordinates. (Note that, to some degree, I shall have to deal with the bishop, the angelic hierarchs, and God simultaneously since Dionysius uses the analogy among them in both directions—up the scale from bishop to God and down the scale from God to bishop. But I shall still generally attempt to start from the bishop.)

As I mentioned in section VIII.3 of the previous chapter, hierarchy is a “sacred knowledge and activity.” Its ultimate source is God, but its proximate source within the Church is the bishop: “For just as we see every hierarchy reach its terminus in Jesus,” Dionysius says, “so too [do we see] each particular hierarchy [reach its terminus in] its proper, enthused hierarch.”[426] From a standpoint within the hierarchy, one can therefore say that it is the hierarch whose power flows through and connects the elements so that they form a whole.[427] Dionysius does not strictly say that, relative to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the bishop is primary agent in the activity that constitutes the hierarchy, but such an inference is plausible for two reasons. First, there is the parallel between the bishop and Jesus. Jesus is described elsewhere as the ultimate agent in all hierarchy, so, considered as proximate hierarch “after [him],”[428] it would make sense for the bishop to be understood as primary agent in his own hierarchy. Secondly, for Dionysius, “our whole hierarchy’s arrangement” “comes to its end and fulfillment” “in the hierarchs’

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[426] *EH* V.5, Heil/Ritter 107,16–17: Ὡς γὰρ ἅπασαν ἱεραρχίαν ὁρῶμεν εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀποπεραιουμένην, οὕτως ἑκάστην εἰς τὸν οἰκεῖον ἔνθεον ἱεράρχην. For God as leader in all activity and science, see *CH* III.2, Heil/Ritter 17,11–18,1. Same term is used of the apostles in *EH* I.5, Heil/Ritter 67,16. For God as source, see *EH* II.Θ.4. For bishop as source and one in whom the whole is completed, see *EH* V.I.5; God as guide appears again in *EH* V.Θ.3, Heil/Ritter 111,19–21. For Jesus in particular as source see, e.g., *EH* I.1 and I.2 and *EH* V.Θ.5, Heil/Ritter 112,12–15.

[427] While there is a case to be made that the sacraments (as “divine things”) or the scriptures (as our hierarchy’s substance) are the actual proximate source of the ecclesiastical hierarchy’s activity, they are not themselves intelligent and so cannot serve a role, in their hierarchy, exactly analogous to the role of the seraphim in the celestial hierarchy.

[428] *CH* XIII.3, 4.

order."[429] That the bishops should constitute the hierarchy's (proximate) fulfillment makes sense: the hierarchy *is* a divine knowledge and activity, and the bishops are "those who have been initiated into perfectly knowing the all divine things pertaining to their own hierarchy."[430] Insofar as they have the fullest possible knowledge within their own hierarchy (and are thus, also, presumably able to perform the relevant hierarchical activities), the bishops are the creaturely agents in whom the hierarchy is performed.

To the degree possible for a creature in his rank, the bishop engages in the hierarchy in a simple, primarily contemplative fashion, imitating the angels.[431] But because his hierarchic activity is not just for his own contemplation but also a providential activity directed towards his subordinates,[432] he does not always allow his own activity to remain (simply) simple. In performing the Church's rites, especially the eucharist, he resorts to myriad "sacred enigmas" in order to make "his own, singular knowledge as hierarch" (τὴν ἑνιαίαν αὐτοῦ τῆς ἱεραρχίας ἐπιστεήμην) accessible to his subordinates.[433] So, for instance, he moves from the altar to the sanctuary's edges and back again, censing the whole space. In doing so, however, he never ceases to look to the "uniform principles" (ἑνοειδεῖς λόγους) according to which he performs the activity, so that his mind remains fixed on God in contemplation.[434] He remains, as Dionysius says elsewhere in the *EH*, "uniform once for all" (καθάπαξ ἑνοειδής).[435] It is for that reason that he can go out to "secondary" tasks without surrendering his own unity.

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[429] *EH* V.5, Heil/Ritter 107,13–17.
[430] *EH* V.4, Heil/Ritter 107,6–10; see also *EH* V.Θ.7 and I.3.
[431] For the angels' simple activity modulating into providence, see *DN* IV.8.
[432] *EH* III.Θ.7, Heil/Ritter 86,13–16; *CH* III.3
[433] *EH* III.Θ.3, Heil/Ritter 83.
[434] *EH* III.Θ.3, Heil/Ritter 83.
[435] *EH* III.Θ.10, Heil/Ritter 89,17. See also *EH* II.M.8, where the hierarch is apparently not derailed by his procession but has carried on in contemplation, and III.M.428A, where the hierarch remains "uplifted to God" through immaterial contemplations rather than joins in the material contemplations he offers as an aid to his followers.

Because he remains unified even after incorporating these complexifications in his activity, the bishop can be viewed from two different angles. On the one hand, one can see him as performing a singular activity. One the other hand, because his activity comes to involve more elements, it becomes possible to view that same activity as extended and, at least notionally, decomposable into component units. Dionysius is not explicit on why that should be the case, but I suspect there are at least two intuitive reasons at work. First, it is possible to confuse the activity with the elements it incorporates and unites. The more elements the activity unites, the more likely humans are to view the activity simply as those units themselves, taken in sum. That is basically the mistake Dionysius thinks humans make when they fail to see that the various providential activities through which God acts in the world are attributable to a single source.[436] Secondly, once the contemplative activity comes to incorporate "external" activities or behaviors, it is necessarily extended through time in a way that bare contemplation (to the extent possible for a human, even a bishop) is not.[437]

In complexifying his activity, the hierarch enables others to join in on one and the same activity. I wish to show that there's good reason to think this means that he enables them not merely to join in on the same kind but numerically the same act. I shall begin with the fullest passage dealing with this topic. It appears in *CH* XIII.

> Purification and all the other Godheadly activities that shine forth through the first substances [i.e. the seraphim] are distributed among all the remaining [substances] according to each one's analogy to the divine share. … Hence it is not unfitting if the seraph is said to purify … For, just as God purifies all by being every purification's cause

[436] *MT* I.2, Heil/Ritter 142,12–15.

[437] Angels contemplate in a way that suggests a different temporality. While Dionysius says, in *DN* X.3, that no creature is eternal in the strict sense, he allows that the angels think the intelligibles in a uniform fashion, all at once. To the extent that the bishop achieves the angelic thought Dionysius thinks possible for humans (*DN* I.4 and VI.2; Epistle X), he too may well think in a simpler mode. Presumably, this is what Dionysius has in mind when he says that the bishop keeps his eyes on the principles underlying the liturgy/hierarchy (*EH* III.Θ.3, Heil/Ritter 83) and when, in *DN* IV.9, VII.1, and VII.2, he says that humans can achieve, through a "concentrating" process, something approaching incorporeal, angelic knowledge.

> —or rather (to use an example nearer us), just as our bishop, purifying and enlightening through the deacons or priests, is said to purify and enlighten, so too does the angel who effects the purification … attribute his own purifying science and power on the one hand to God as cause and on the other hand to the Seraphim as first-operating hierarch; as if … one were to say that, ‘on the one hand, the source … of my purification working in you is the one who leads into existence the first substances and … moves them to the first proper shares in his own providential activities …; and, on the other hand, [it] is the foremost substances’ order [that is] hierarch and, after God, the ruler—by which [order] I myself was, in Godlike fashion, initiated into purification. It is this latter, therefore, who purifies you through me, through whom the cause and maker of all purification has brought forth his own providential activities to us from the hidden.”[438]

There are indicators in this passage that Dionysius is thinking about the seraph’s activity (and God’s) as one and the same activity throughout the hierarchical arrangement: it is God’s activities that are brought to the subordinate ranks, his light “shining forth.” In just the same way, one can say that the bishop performs his activities “through” the priests and deacons. Unfortunately, the passage is not fully clear on how God’s (or the seraph’s or bishop’s) activity is to be connected with the apparent activities in which subordinate ranks engage. One *can* read it as indicating simply that superiors receive glory for what their inferiors do because the former have given the latter their ability to act in the first place.[439] Read thus, the passage need not imply that the subordinates share in a single activity with their superiors or that the superiors are agents in their subordinates’ activities.

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[438] *CH* XIII.4, Heil/Ritter 48,15–49,12: … τὸ τὴν κάθαρσιν καὶ πάσας τὰς θεαρχικὰς ἐνεργείας διὰ τῶν πρώτων οὐσιῶν ἀναλαμπούσας εἰς πάσας τὰς λοιπὰς διαδίδοσθαι κατὰ τὴν ἑκάστης πρὸς τὰς θεουργικὰς μετουσίας ἀναλογίαν. … Οὐδὲν οὖν ἄτοπον, εἰ καθαίρειν λέγεται … ὁ Σεραφὶμ. Ὡς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς καθαίρει πάντας τῷ πάσης καθάρσεως εἶναι αἰτία, μᾶλλον δὲ (παραπλησίῳ γὰρ χρήσομαι παραδείγματι) καθάπερ ὁ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἱεράρχης διὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ λειτουργῶν ἢ ἱερέων καθαίρων ἢ φωτίζων αὐτὸς λέγετα καθαίρειν καὶ φωτίζειν τῶν δι’ αὐτοῦ καθιερωμένων τάξεων ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀνατιθεισῶν τὰ οἰκείας ἱερὰς ἐνεργείας, οὕτω καὶ τὴν οἰκείαν καθαρτικὴν ἐπιστήμην καὶ δύναμιν ὁ τὴν κάθαρσιν … τελετουργῶν ἄγγελος ἐπὶ θεὸν μὲν ὡς αἴτιον, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν Σεραφὶμ ὡς πρωτουργὸν ἱεράρχην ἀνατίθησιν, ὡς ἄν τις φαίη … τὸν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ καθαιρόμενον ἐκδιδάσκων ὅτι «τῆς εἰς σὲ πρὸς ἐμοῦ τελετουργουμένης καθάρσεως ἀρχὴ μέν ἐστιν … ὁ καὶ τὰς πρώτας οὐσίας καὶ πρὸς τὸ εἶναι παραγαγὼν … καὶ αὐτὰς κινῶν ἐπὶ τὰς πρώτας τῶν οἰκείων προνοητικῶν ἐνεργειῶν μετουσίας …, ἱεράρχης δὲ καὶ μετὰ θεὸν ἡγεμὼν ὁ τῶν πρωτίστων οὐσιῶν διάκοσμος, παρ’ οὗ τὸ καθαίρειν ἐγὼ θεοειδῶς ἐμυήθην. Οὗτος οὖν ἐστιν ὁ δι’ ἐμοῦ σε καθαίρων, δι’ οὗ τὰς οἰκείας προνοητικὰς ἐνεργείας ἐκ τοῦ κρυφίου καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς προήγαγεν ἡ πάσης αἰτία καὶ δημιουργὸς καθάρσεως».

[439] This is how D.F. Duclow *seems* to read Dionysius, though it is not fully clear: Duclow still recognizes the connection to the illustration from fire or light. D.F. Duclow, “Isaiah Meets the Seraph: Breaking Ranks in Dionysius and Eriugena?” in *Eriugena: East and West*, eds. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1994), 69.

But while such a reading is possible, it faces difficulties when combined with other passages. Even just a little earlier in *CH* XIII, Dionysius says that the ranks function as something akin to increasingly opaque strata, each passing on a light that never simply "belongs" to any one stratum but passes through each to the next.[440] If this image is to be combined with that in which the seraph "gets credit" for what the angel accomplishes because it is its power's, knowledge's, and activity's proximate source, the latter image must presumably not be interpreted as one in which each rank, after receiving its power from its superior, possesses that power independently from then on. Other relevant passages appear in the *EH*. Dionysius says that it is "through all the priestly ranks" (διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἱερῶν τάξεων) that the bishop "works the things pertaining to his own priestly mysteries" (ἐνεργεῖ τὰ τῆς οἰκείας ἱεραρχίας μυστήρια).[441] And he says in *EH* V.6 not only that the priests perform their priestly activities "under the enthused hierarchical order" (ὑπὸ τῇ τῶν ἐνθέων ἱεραρχῶν τάξει) but also that the priests perform their *own* activities "with" the hierarchs.[442] These passages are hard to square with the idea that the bishop simply "hands over" the hierarchical powers to their subordinates, who can then act out their own activities even without ongoing participation in a hierarchy whose term is the bishop. At very least, Dionysius is envisioning a situation in which the activities in which the bishop and his subordinates engage are tangled up with one another. One should expect nothing else, given that Dionysius is intimately familiar with the ways in which the bishop, priests, and deacons work together to perform most liturgical rites. A reading that takes these passages into account must therefore allow at least such cooperative activities.

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[440] *CH* XIII.3.
[441] *EH* V.5, Heil/Ritter 107,18–19.
[442] *EH* V.6, Heil/Ritter 108,10–11.

Preferable to such a reading, though, is a reading on which superior and subordinate are engaged in numerically one and the same activity.[443] Dionysius is committed to the idea (a) that hierarchy is an activity, (b) that it is the bishop who performs the activity that constitutes the human hierarchy, and (c) that the other members in the hierarchical arrangement are able to join in that activity insofar as they share in the power and knowledge that comes from the bishop. One way to fit all these commitments together would be to hold that what the bishop does is enable the subordinate members to engage as agents in one and the same activity in which he is already engaged. To put it in something like contemporary analytic terms, the other members in the hierarchy are accessory but genuine agents performing a single act token whose primary and only necessary agent is the bishop.[444] It is only by literally co-operating with the bishop that the priests, deacons, and so forth are able to engage in hierarchy. I would suggest that something like this reading is a reasonable way to read Dionysius. In addition to the considerations I have already noted—points (a) through (c) in this paragraph—and the fact that such a picture allows them to fit together, there is reason to take such a picture up because it fits with how Dionysius thinks about the connection between hierarchy and salvation. Dionysius seems not to think there are multiple human "hierarchies," multiple activities through which humans know God and are assimilated to him. There is only one such activity, "our hierarchy," and it is only in joining in with that one activity that one achieves salvation.[445]

It is at this point that this excursus on the bishop becomes most helpful for thinking through the relationship between God and his creatures. Since the simple activity in which the

[443] Perl, "Hierarchy and Participation," 21–23 makes something like this claim. But his interpretation takes a somewhat different tack insofar as he thinks that synergy, when it is between a creature and God, does not "that the creature and God 'work together' as though the creature were another being, additional to God…" (23) I suspect this is an early expression of his claim, in *Theophany*, that creatures are nothing but God's appearing. Perl, *Theophany*, 31.

[444] He might also be a sufficient agent—again, with respect only to his particular hierarchy. All hierarchy still has its ultimate source in Jesus.

[445] *EH* I.3, III.Θ.12; *CH* I.2–3.

bishop engages is, in its providential aspect, the very act by which all the subordinate members in the hierarchy and their respective activities are united, the members and their respective activities become, as it were, additional elements or complexifications in that same activity. They may be viewed as distinct. But to the extent that they are genuinely participations in one and the same activity, they can be rightly seen as simply that activity under different "aspects," corresponding to the additional agents allowed to engage in that one activity. This maps well onto the way in which Dionysius describes God as relating to his creatures. In *DN* II and elsewhere, he describes Jesus as entering into the complex for our sakes,[446] enabling us to join in his divine life through baptism and the other sacraments and, in time, becoming coworkers with God in his "providences."[447] Dionysius relies, in various places, on a strong analogy between the bishop (and other creaturely sources and causes) and God. If one extends that analogy to the way the bishop's simple activity allows others into it as "complications" without compromising its essential simplicity, one has a compelling way to understand passages like those in *DN* II—and, indeed, other cases of divine activity. Just as the hierarch incorporates the priests and so forth into his hierarchical activity, so too does God incorporate us into his own, singular activity.

Importantly, the fact that the activity remains singular suggests that the knowledge involved in performing the activity *also* remains, at least in one sense, singular. And one can see that idea borne out at points in the text. In *EH* III.Θ.10, Dionysius, describing the point at which the bishop and priests wash their hands before the eucharist, says that the bishop is thus enabled to be "once and for all uniform," "free and absolute" even in his "boniformly proceeding to the secondary things."[448] This uniformity consists in his keeping his eyes on the λόγοι that undergird

[446] *EH* III.Θ.13, Heil/Ritter 93,16–18 and *EH* III.Θ.12. Indeed, he takes on flesh: EH III.Θ.12, Heil/Ritter 93,7.
[447] *CH* XV.1.
[448] *EH* III.Θ.10, Heil/Ritter 89,16–18: καὶ πρὸς τὰ δεύτερα προϊὼν ἀγαθοειδῶς ἄσχετος ἔσται καὶ ἀπόλυτος ὡς καθάπαξ ἑνοειδής.

the rites, namely the divine providences,[449] and in passing on his "unitary knowledge" to his subordinates simply in performing his own activity.[450] It is because he keeps his eyes on that (relatively) unified, singular knowledge that he is able to administer the sacrament and unite the congregation.[451]

In the above discussion, I have been exploring how activity and knowledge work in the *bishop's* case. I now turn to why one should think the insights I have drawn from the bishop apply to God. For the most part, these points draw on points I have already made, so I shall keep them brief. First, just as the bishop and his activity serve as the source from which the ecclesiastical hierarchy flows (at least if one leaves off attention to the celestial hierarchy), so God and his activity serves as their *ultimate* source.[452] Jesus' power in particular flows through the hierarchy, enabling its members to remain knit to God.[453] Secondly, God multiplies himself without leaving himself just as the bishop does—or, rather, the bishop as God does—so that subordinates can share in his knowledge and light as far as possible. Indeed, this is among the most common ways for Dionysius to talk about divine providence.[454] Thirdly, in these same passages, God remains, if anything, even more singular in his activity and knowledge than does the bishop. Dionysius makes that clear in places like *DN* VII. (d) God brings creatures into genuine synergy with him, just as the bishop enables his subordinates to join him in *his* activity.[455] In connection with the passages in which he says that creatures are called to

[449] See *EH* III.Θ.15 for the idea that the sacraments are the gifts of the divine activity.
[450] *EH* III.Θ.10, Heil/Ritter 89.
[451] *EH* III.Θ.14. See also *DN* IV.6, where the assumption is that the higher one goes up the continuum, the simpler one's knowledge will be. At the summit, the simplicity is attributable to the fact that hierarchy is *God*'s activity. See Coughlin, "Theurgy, Prayer, Participation," 167–169.
[452] EH I.2–3.
[453] *DN* XI.5 says we engage in peace with all others only in Christ; *EH* III.Θ.12 describes the hierarchy as knit together by grafting to Christ's body as its members.
[454] *DN* IX.5, X.9, XI.1, XI.2; *EH* III.Θ.3; Epistle IX.3.
[455] For the idea that God works with creatures, see *EH* I.1, Heil/Ritter 63,2–4, 64,13: θεουργικοὶ; *CH* III.2, Heil/Ritter 18,15–17, III.3, Heil/Ritter 19,21–22. The same logic applies to the whole cosmic order. Humans are to work together among themselves and with the angels to do the divine things (τὰ θεῖα κατὰ δύναμιν συνεργήσωμεν) in accordance with, or in cooperation with, Jesus' providence (κατὰ πρόνοιαν Ἰησοῦ). See *DN* XI.5, Suchla 221,7–8.

cooperation with God, Dionysius talks about God, like the bishops, as an orchestrator or leader.[456]

All this should be sufficient to show that one can draw the analogies from the bishop to God. The final hurdle is to show that the insights drawn from hierarchical activities can be applied to non-hierarchical activities—in other words, that God draws creatures into his own (numerically singular) activity not only with respect to illumination or knowledge but also with respect to their constitutive, essential activities. To my knowledge, Dionysius never explicitly says as much. But there are two considerations to favor this extension from the hierarchical domain to the broader providential domain. First, it fits structurally: just as God works his way out to all members in the hierarchies, complexifying his activity to include others, so too does he work his way out towards multiplicity in his other providential activities.[457] Secondly, Dionysius makes it clear that things *in general* share in others providentially, the greater caring for the lesser and the lesser rising to the greater.[458] Importantly, the sun seems to have some providential capacities, bringing life, perfecting things, and so forth, without being an intelligent entity.[459]

If the synergy seen in the hierarchy and between God and his intelligent creatures holds with respect to other providential acts, then two things seem to follow. First, God becomes the universal cooperant in all creaturely activities. Indeed, since it is he who initiates and enables creatures to act by allowing them to join in his activity, there is a sense in which he is also the

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Michael Frede has noted that, at least among the Stoics, a “cooperative cause” (συνεργόν) is a mere “contributor” to an effect that it in no proper way brings about. Michael Frede, “The Original Notion of Cause,” in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 140–143. It is possible though perhaps unlikely that Dionysius has this definition in mind; but it certainly fits well with the idea that God alone makes possible the hierarchy in the full sense, and, as Frede points out (141), the term “συνεργόν” has an intuitive, everyday use. Dionysius may well have had something like the Stoic distinction in mind even if not in the technical sense.

[456] For the idea that the bishop leads the people as a chorus, see *EH* VII.M, Heil/Ritter 122,23: Συναγαγὼν ὁ θεῖος ἱεράρχης ἱερὸν χορόν; see also *EH* V.Θ.5, Heil/Ritter 112. For God as leader, see *CH* III.2 and *EH* V.Θ.5.

[457] *DN II.11*, IX.5, IX.9, XI.2; *CH* I.2; Epistle IX.

[458] *DN* IV.10 and 12–13.

[459] *DN* IV.4, V.8. Indeed, it exhibits all the activities associated with the hierarchies: it purifies, illuminates, and perfects things, only on the sensible rather than the intellective level.

primary agent in all creaturely activity—except insofar as it involves deprivation or weakness. Secondly, God presumably engages in those activities as an intelligent (or hyper-intelligent) agent, knowing his own capacities and their exercise. God knows all things in knowing himself.[460] If, with respect to intelligent creatures, that knowledge consists in God's possessing creaturely knowledges and powers in a higher degree, one would expect the same to be true with respect to other creatures. Dionysius gives no indication that God's creative activity should be seen as *less* when it is received by non-rational creatures.

I would now like to draw all these threads together. If (a) God is the primary agent in all creaturely activity, with creatures as accessory but genuine co-agents, and (b) God knows his own acts through direct, practical knowledge, then (c) he presumably knows the creatures themselves so far as he knows his own acts as having complexifications, namely those necessary to permit co-agents. One then has a way to understand how God knows creatures as being "from himself," without having to posit that he knows them by some means other than his knowledge about himself and his activities.

One might ask whether this explanation succeeds in maintaining God's knowledge's priority in relation to creatures. For if he knows the creature as "other," as strictly "individual," only in the moment he creates it and hence enters into a cause–caused relationship with it, he might be taken to derive his knowledge from the creature. I am not certain that a clear solution is available, but there are two directions in which Dionysius might explore. First, he might hold that, even when God creates, he knows the creature only *in* his creative activity; that is, he does not need to look outside himself or somehow "sense" that his activity has an object. Instead, insofar as he knows the very activity—not just in type but also in token—that *he* is engaged in, and that activity constitutes the creature as what it is, he knows the creature itself. Such a

[460] *DN* VII.2.

response, unfortunately, does not ensure that God's act is prior to the creative act or the creature, though it does ensure that his knowledge is not posterior either.

Another possibility would be to say that God knows the creaturely act because it is in some sense *identical* with his own act. That is, he himself is engaged in "living," in his supreme, divine mode and only then posits, as it were, subordinate cooperants in the same activity. There is one "living" in which all creatures engage: God's. Let us go back to the liturgical example: when the bishop begins the liturgy, he almost always involves the priests and deacons in his activity. Their participation is not essential and does not go towards "constituting" the activity. That the bishop accomplishes on his own. But they *do* participate, joining in, extending the activity so that it is coming from them as well. The bishop knows the very activity of each of the subordinates because it is *his* activity "spread out" through them. Only those elements of their activity that are not in line with the activity he himself has initiated would fall outside his productive knowledge's scope. If he knows his own concrete acts before he performs them, he also knows his subordinates' acts insofar as they are one and the same act. So too, perhaps, with God.

4 — Summing up: knowledge by precontainment and creation

Let us take stock. I have argued (a) that Dionysius thinks God contains creatures insofar as he knows his own powers, which are akin to creaturely powers in an infinitely higher mode. Since his power contains within it the knowledges and powers necessary to engage in those same activities in a creaturely mode, he knows creatures at least insofar as he knows exactly what it will be *like* for them to engage in their activities when he produces them. Based on the last section, it is now also possible to construe God's knowledge about creatures "in himself" as a

practical knowledge about his own capacity to engage in the simple, creative activity by which he brings creatures to be. I have also argued (b) that Dionysius knows his creatures exactly *in* his (and hence their) activity.

Given all that I have argued up to this point, it is possible to read the ambiguities in *DN* VII as intentional and reflected throughout Dionysius' system: God knows his creatures causally both "in himself," logically "before" his activity, and his very going forth from himself in his activity; or, from the creaturely perspective: he knows God knows things causally *both* as they are precontained in him *and* insofar as they proceed from and are distinct from him.

This view has much to commend it. Besides the fact that it allows one to read Dionysius' position on foreknowledge in *DN* VII with all its elements in mind, it also weaves into a coherent whole various elements found elsewhere in the Dionysian Corpus:

1) the way God is present to his creatures through his providences,
2) the manner in which he remains in himself while taking up residence ecstatically in his creatures,
3) the analogy between the bishop and Jesus, and
4) the relationship between the hierarch as primary hierarchical agent and the subordinate members in the same hierarchical arrangement—

And it does this weaving in a way that happens to dovetail nicely with Dionysius' apparent interest in exploring the relationship between God's ideas, paradigms, or λόγοι and the creatures made according to them. Additionally, it is a helpful reading because it shows that the different aspects under which God's foreknowledge presents itself in *DN* VII—as knowledge about

creatures as ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὄντα and as knowledge about creatures as precontained in him—reflect and indeed hook up to the broader Dionysian system. Finally, this reading yields an ostensible answer to the CFP: Dionysius can say that God knows his creatures "in advance" as he knows their powers in himself and knows them as from him as far as they share in the activity in which he puts those same powers in practices. Their constitutive activities *are* in some sense his activity; to the extent, therefore, that he knows his own activity "before" performing it by having practical knowledge about that activity, he could be said to know the creatures themselves in advance. As I shall argue when I conclude this chapter, such a solution falls upon severe problems, but that does not make it any less a worthy addition to the answers made by his near contemporaries.

5 — Dionysius implies the individual

In my introductory chapter, I stipulated that the CFP can only arise on the assumption that the creature has its own individuality, enabling it to stand in relation to other creatures, God, and its own divine λόγος. Having argued, in the previous chapter, that Dionysius is interested in the CFP, I therefore take myself to be entitled to hold that he is at least implicitly concerned with irreducible creaturely individuality.

But however legitimate such a move may be, it still constitutes a weaker proof than would evidence that Dionysius has some positive concern with the individual. In this section, therefore, I argue that there are commitments in the Dionysian Corpus that point to the further commitment that creatures have a basic numerical identity, or individuality. Having so argued, I feel free to take it as plausible that Dionysius has an interest in the CFP not only under its formal aspect but also under a more concrete, positive aspect. If (a) Dionysius wants to attribute all things to providence and (b) he seems to be committing himself to something like numerical

identities, it is plausible to think (c) that he is concerned with whether and how providence extends to the concrete individual as such.

This section's argument will also serve to head off some final, fundamental objections that might be made to my argument in this and the previous chapter. There are major interpreters for whom Dionysius does not hold that there are individuals in my sense. C.E. Rolt arguably holds such a view, though I do not have the space to show it with any certainty. Suffice it to say that Rolt's Dionysius is assimilated to the British Idealism common in Rolt's day, especially to F.H. Bradley's particular expression.[461] More recent, clearer, and highly influential is Eric Perl. For Perl, creatures are nothing but their "constitutive determinations," or properties; their constitutive determinations, in turn, are nothing but God appearing in particular, differentiated modes.[462] It would seem to follow that creatures themselves are nothing but God himself appearing in particular creaturely modes—a conclusion that Perl's own rhetoric would suggest he accepts.[463] If he is correct, Dionysius cannot be worried about the CFP: there is no creaturely individuality distinct from God's by which creatures could be related to him or the divine ideas in the first place.[464]

It is worth sketching Perl's argument to show how my own argument in this section relates to his. His reading starts from the idea that, "in the Greek philosophical tradition that Dionysius draws on and continues,"[465] to be is to be thinkable, which is to be distinguishable

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[461] Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 7. Rolt explicitly likens Dionysius' God to Bradley's Absolute. See also F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1893), especially Chapter 26, "The Absolute and Its Appearances."
[462] For the latter claim, see Perl, *Theophany*, 31, 46, 93.
[463] Perl, *Theophany*, 31: God is "nothing but what is differently present, or appears, in and as all things," while "the whole of reality is nothing but the differentiated presence of God." He says, likewise, that God is "all things without distinction" (31), i.e., not as separate but as something like F.H. Bradley's Absolute. I doubt C.E. Rolt is correct in saying that Dionysius' God is akin to Bradley's Absolute, but Dionysius' God as *Perl* reads Dionysius certainly is.
[464] Relatedly, Perl thinks that, insofar as knowledge is only of beings and God is not a being, even God does not know himself "in himself." Instead, he knows himself only as he is in, or appears as, creatures. (*Theophany*, 98–99)
[465] Perl, *Theophany*, 5

from other things, and what can be distinguished from other things must be finite.[466] Perl thinks that, for the Neoplatonist, all things stem from some single source that explains their sharing in a single cosmic order. Now, were that source a thing, it would have to have a determinate character by which it could be distinguished from other things, and that would mean it would be included in the cosmic order as a finite something, and the question could be raised again as to what provides for the whole cosmic order.[467] If, therefore, the source is to provide for that cosmic order, it must be nothing *but* the activity by which things are determinate and intelligible. All things are nothing but that source in its finite appearances as determinate and intelligible.[468]

Finally, Perl holds that, because Dionysius clearly draws from the Neoplatonists, using their language and so forth, he too must agree with the non-Christian Platonists who come before him in this tradition: God is nothing but what appears in and as creatures, and creatures are nothing but God appearing as finite.[469]

The first thing to note is that it is far from clear that such a move is even legitimate. Even assuming Perl were correct about the Platonic tradition up to Dionysius—and it is by no means obvious that he is—, he would still need to do a close reading to show Dionysius himself holds such a view. And that Perl does not do. Instead, his approach in the opening three chapters in *Theophany*—those where he initially establishes his position on the God–world relation—is to start by setting out the "Platonic view," as he sees it, and then, in the final few pages, to describe Dionysius' system in those same terms, occasionally sprinkling in quotations that can be read in (Perl's) Platonic terms and reading them accordingly.

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[466] Perl, *Theophany*, 5–6.
[467] Perl, *Theophany*, 11.
[468] Perl, *Theophany*, 26–27, 31–32.
[469] There are additional reasons Perl thinks creatures have no individuality: for him, things are their determinations, which are just ways to describe their relations to others. "Each thing," he concludes, "is nothing but its relations to others, its places within the [cosmic] structure…" (*Theophany*, 81) Perl is pretty clearly using "individual" in something like my sense: a logical subject in whom relations can inhere.

Given that Perl's reasons for holding his view on the God–world relation in Dionysius are rather weak, my argument in the previous chapter, to the effect that God genuinely acts in history and comes face to face with his creatures by making himself accessible in Christ Jesus, should already be enough to refute Perl's position on how Dionysius sees God's "relation" to the world. Now, if I can give good reason to think that Dionysius holds there are individualities that are not reducible to their intelligible properties, I can refute Perl's other major tenet: that to be is to be intelligible and hence to consist in properties, which are nothing but God's appearances. If creatures possess, beyond their intelligible properties, something akin to an irreducible, logical subjecthood, it becomes doubtful that they can be readily assimilated to God as Perl would like to do.

5.1 — The resurrection[470]

I begin with *EH* VII, where Dionysius describes a Christian rite for the dead. His overview contains all the expected elements: a Christian who has clung to the faith and lived a righteous life will be resurrected; in the resurrected state, he will be immortal,[471] impeccable,[472] and filled with clear light.[473] They will also be embodied. All these claims are relatively uncontroversial.

[470] Relatively little attention has been given to the body's value in Dionysius' anthropology; the subject appears in several places in scholars but rarely gets more than a cursory treatment. Filip Ivanović, "Body and Soul in Dionysius the Areopagite," in *The Byzantine Platonists, 284–1453*, eds. Frederick Lauritzen and Sarah Klitenic Wear (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 2021), 113–123; Wiebke-Marie Stock, "Dionysius the Areopagite," in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 364–379; Eric Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysios the Areopagite," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, nos. 3–4 (1994): 334–335; Timothy Riggs, "*Eros* as Hierarchical Principle: A Re-evaluation of Dionysius' Neoplatonism," *Dionysius* 27 (2009): 74–77; Jean-Michel Hornus does notice the value of the body in Dionysius but considers it a mere veneer or addition poorly overlaid on a basically Platonic system. If I am right about the coherence of the picture of the body found in Dionysius, Hornus' view becomes harder to maintain. Stiglmayr, unfortunately, just gives a blow-by-blow recounting of the chapters. Jean-Michel Hornus, "Quelques réflexions à propos du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et de la mystique chrétienne en general," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 27, no. 1–2 (1947): 37–63; René Roques, "Symbolisme et théologie négative chez le Pseudo-Denys," *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1 (1957): 107; Josef Stiglmayr, "Die Eschatologie des Psudo-Dionysius," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 23, no. 1 (1899): 1–21.
[471] *DN* I.4, Suchla 114,7 and VI.2, Suchla 192,1–5; *EH* VII.I.1, Heil/Ritter 121,5–7.
[472] *EH* VII.I.1, Heil/Ritter 120,22–121,1.
[473] *EH* V.Θ.5, Heil/Ritter 125,15–16.

But then things take a more contentious turn: Dionysius criticizes four unnamed groups for their views on the body and the general resurrection. He first criticizes those who think the person who dies "passes into nonexistence" (εἰς ἀνυπαρξίαν … χωρεῖν).[474] Secondly, he attacks those who hold the soul abandons the body forever, existing as bodiless from then on.[475] A third group holds that souls will be "yoked to other bodies" (σωμάτων ἄλλων)—that is, bodies other than their antemortem bodies.[476] And a fourth group holds that bodies in the resurrection will be, in all key respects, *exactly* as they were in this life.[477] For my purposes, the first and third groups are most interesting. I start with the latter group. Against this group, Dionysius makes the following, very terse argument. In assigning new bodies to the souls, these individuals, he says, end up "wronging them who have toiled alongside the divine souls and … taking the holy compensations from those who have come to the most divine races' end."[478] He makes the same argument in two other passages. The first appears earlier in the same section. Just as the soul will be resurrected, so too, says Dionysius,

> the pure bodies yoked to and travelling with the sacred souls, having signed on with and competed alongside them in their divine labors, will, in the souls' immovable foundation in the divine life, jointly receive their own resurrection. For, having been united with the holy souls to which they were united in this life, as having become Christ's members, they will receive a godlike, incorruptible and deathless, and blessed lot.[479]

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[474] *EH* VII.I.2, Heil/Ritter 121,10–11.
[475] *EH* VII.I.2, Heil/Ritter 121,11–14.
[476] *EH* VII.I.2, Heil/Ritter 121,14–17: Ἄλλοι δὲ σωμάτων ἄλλων ἀπονέμουσι ταῖς ψυχαῖς συζυγίας ἀδικοῦντες τὸ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ὡς οἴμαι τὰ συμπονήσαντα ταῖς θείαις ψυχαῖς καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀντιδόσεων οὐκ εὐαγῶς ἀποστεροῦντες τὰ πρὸς τὸ πέρας ἐλθόντα τῶν θειοτάτων δρόμων.
[477] *EH* VII.I.2, Heil/Ritter 121,17–21.
[478] *EH* VII.I.2, Heil/Ritter 121,15–17: … ἀδικοῦντες τὸ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ὡς οἶμαι τὰ συμπονήσαντα ταῖς θείαις ψυκαῖς καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀντιδόσεων οὐκ εὐαγῶς ἀποστεροῦντες τὰ πρὸς τὸ πέρας ἐλθόντα τῶν θειοτάτων δρόμων.
[479] *EH* VII.1, Heil/Ritter 120,22–121,7: Τὰ δὲ καθαρὰ τῶν ἱερῶν ψυχῶν ὁμόζυγα καὶ ὁμοπόρευτα σώματα συναπογραφέντα καὶ συναθλήσαντα κατὰ τοὺς θείους αὐτῶν ἱδρῶτας ἐν τῇ τῶν ψυχῶν ἀτρέπτῳ κατὰ τὴν θείαν ζωὴν ἱδρύσει συναπολήψεται τὴν οἰκείαν ἀνάστασιν. Ἑνωθέντα γὰρ αἷς ἥνωντο κατὰ τὸν τῇδε βίον ἱεραῖς ψυχαῖς, ὡς μέλη Χριστοῦ γεγονότα τὴν θεοειδῆ καὶ ἄφθαρτον ἀθάνατόν τε καὶ μακαρίαν ἀπολήψεται λῆξιν.

I take "τε" to link "ἄφθαρτον" and "ἀθάνατόν" rather than "ἀθάνατόν" and "μακαρίαν." It does not suggest a new list starting with "immortal" but rather allows "incorruptible" and "deathless" to form a unit parallel with "godlike" and "blessed."

And finally, a bit further on:

> For if [it is] in soul and body [that] the one who has fallen asleep led a life dear to God, worthy too, along with the soul, is the body that strove beside it in holy labors. Hence does divine justice give it its compensative share together with its own body as its fellow traveller and partner in the holy life or its contrary.[480]

In all three passages, Dionysius makes two claims. First, the resurrected body must be the same body as the antemortem body.[481] Secondly, it must be *that* body because it shared in the same life and struggles as the soul. For its share in that life, it deserves a share in the resurrection and, more particularly, to be united in with its companion, its particular soul.[482] Notice what this argument presupposes: that the body and soul have their own (numerical) identities, distinct both from each other's and from the composite's (that is, the whole person's). It is because *this* body in union with *this* soul struggled to lead a righteous life that the former deserves to be united with the latter in the resurrection.

I want to be careful here. Even if Dionysius is dependent on this presupposition in some sense, he may not be aware that he is doing so. And even if he is aware, he may not be especially concerned with it. To lend further plausibility to my reading, I wish to make a suggestion about who the third group in *EH* VII might be. Scholars have made several claims as to their identity. Rosemary Arthur ventures (with some reservation) that Dionysius might have in mind the

[480] *EH* VII.Θ.9, Heil/Ritter: 129,24–28. Εἰ γὰρ ἐν ψυχῇ καὶ σώματι τὴν θεοφιλῆ ζωὴν ὁ κεκοιμημένος ἐβίω, τίμιον ἔσται μετὰ τῆς ὁσίας ψυχῆς καὶ τὸ συναθλῆσαν αὐτῇ σῶμα κατὰ τοὺς ἱεροὺς ἱδρῶτας. Ἔνθεν ἡ θεία δικαιοσύνη μετὰ τοῦ σφετέρου σώματος αὐτῇ δωρεῖται τὰς ἀμοιβαίας λήξεις ὡς ὁμοπορεύτου καὶ συμμετόχου τῆς ὁσίας ἢ τῆς ἐναντίας ζωῆς.

[481] Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 215 notes that there will *a* transformation. Stock, "Dionysius the Areopagite," goes further, saying that "it is certainly not to be imagined as unaltered lowly material." (371)

[482] Wiebke-Marie Stock, "Dionysius the Areopagite," in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright, 364–379 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Filip Ivanović, "Body and Soul," 121–123; Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare*, 215; Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy," 334–335; Timothy Riggs, "*Eros* as Hierarchical Principle: A Re-evaluation of Dionysius' Neoplatonism," *Dionysius* 27 (2009): 74–77. Ivanović, unfortunately, as the only one to thematize body–soul separation, for some reason insists that the body cannot be separated from the soul at all (121, 123); it is unclear what he means, but it is hard to say how it could be squared with Dionysius' claim that death does involve a διάκρισις. Perhaps he means that there remains some ineffable link even after the separation.

particular Origenism anathematized at Constantinople in 553.[483] Denys Rutledge suggests the Pythagoreans.[484] René Roques names the Epicureans and "certain Stoics."[485] Finally, Stock says they are "probably Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophers," such as Plotinus, "who believe" that the soul passes through multiple "reincarnations."[486] Dionysius is familiar with both the Christian and Neoplatonic traditions, so all these suggestions are plausible; but I suspect Arthur is nearest the mark: Dionysius is probably thinking about figures such as Evagrius Ponticus or Origen (as their opponents present them).[487] Anti-Origenists take Origen and his followers to be committed to the view that the resurrection body is numerically distinct from the antemortem body.[488] Dionysius would likely have known about the recent controversies around Origen and his theology. As recent scholarship has it, he was probably a monk in the same tradition as Evagrius Ponticus.[489] Further, his language mirrors closely the language the tenth anathema from Constantinople, which is directed at those who say "the bodies' nature will go into the nonexistent."[490] Though not conclusive, this similarity in language might suggest that Dionysius and those who authored the anathema were responding to similar opponents in a similar milieu, adding further credence to the idea that he was familiar with the debate. Finally, the argument

[483] Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 176–177.
[484] Rutledge, *Cosmic Theology* 188, footnote 2.
[485] Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 291.
[486] Stock, "Dionysius the Areopagite," 369. Stiglmayr thinks this group is either the Neoplatonists or the Neopythagoreans. Stiglmayr, "Die Eschatologie des Pseudo-Dionysius," 4, note 3.
[487] For a discussion of which see Jon F. Dechow, "Methodius' Conceptual World in His Treatise *De resurrectione*," in Katharina Bracht, ed., *Methodius of Olympus: State of the Art and New Perspectives* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 125–148.
[488] Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). Whether or not Origenists held such a position, there seem to have been those who held to a similar one not long after Dionysius. For example, in certain fragments from his treatise on the resurrection, he seems to say that the resurrection body is not the same in number as the antemortem body: Albert Van Roey, "Un traité cononite contre la doctrine de Jean Philoponus sur la resurrection," in Αντιδωρον: Hommage à Maurits Geerard pour célébrer l'achèvement de la *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, 123–140 (Brussels: Jacques Noret, 1984), fragment 32 on page 137.
[489] See Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, 340–345, 415; István Perczel, "Une théologie de la lumière: Denys l'Aréopagite et Évagre le Pontique," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 45 (1999): 79–120.
[490] See the "Canones XV," in "Appendix (Versiones Graecae)," in *Volumen I: Concilii Actiones VIII - Appendices Graecae - Indices*, ed. Johannes Straub, Part 1 of *Tomus IV: Concilium Universale Constantinopolitanum sub Iustitiano Habitum*, vol. IV of *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 249: εἰς τὸ ἀνύπαρκτον χωρήσει ἡ τῶν σωμάτων φύσις.

Dionysius makes for the claim that the body somehow "deserves" its fair share in the resurrection is basically the same found in earlier figures involved in debates over the resurrection body, including Athenagoras, Methodius, Epiphanius, Gregory Nazianzen,[491] Pamphilus, and Eustathius.[492] At least some of these have Origen or his followers in mind, and it is plausible that, in echoing their arguments, Dionysius is also echoing their concerns. If Dionysius does have these intra-Christian debates in mind, it becomes still more plausible to read him as concerned with the body's numerical identity.[493]

It must be admitted that such debates were not *entirely* foreign in pagan contexts: there are fragments suggesting that the Stoics would have been concerned with how one might identify an individual as the same individual in different cosmic epochs.[494] One might therefore ask whether the concern comes from some Stoic influence. But given that the debate is about bodies, that Stoic debates would have been at greater temporal remove, and that Dionysius directly echoes earlier Christian rhetoric, a Stoic-influenced concern with numerical identity in bodies seems unlikely—unless, again, filtered through a figure such as Evagrius.

I should be clear that, while these historical considerations strengthen my case, the case does not hang on them. Whatever group Dionysius has in mind, his response is the same: his

[491] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* VII.21 (PG 36:781–783).

[492] For an overview with pointers to texts by Athenagoras, Eustathius, Methodius, and Pamphilus, see Sophie Cartwright, "The Philosophy or the Resurrection in Early Christianity," in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy*, ed. Mark Edwards, 153–163. For Epiphanius, see Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, especially chapters 2 and 3. For a few other figures, such a Cyril of Jerusalem, see Thomas L. Campbell, *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, trans. Thomas L. Campbell (Lanham, MD; New York; London: University Press of America, 1981), 204, note 333.

[493] It is worth noting that the idea that the body should will share in the resurrection as a joint recipient can be seen as early as the *Shepherd of Hermas*. See brief discussion in Angelo P. O'Hagan, *Material Re-creation in the Apostolic Fathers* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968), 128–129.

[494] A final connection I should mention is with the Syriac tradition. Ephrem the Syrian talks about the soul's and body's yearning to be reunited after death. In his hymns, the assumption seems to be that it is not enough to have a body that is the same in kind or properties. It must be numerically identical with the premortem body. See hymn VIII.8 in Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 135; and hymns XII and XV in Ephrem the Syrian, *Select Metrical Hymns and Homilies of Ephrem Syrus*, trans. Henry Burgess (London: Sampson Low, Son and Co., 1853), 29–30 and 41–43.

interlocutors are being unjust to the body because *it*—it and no other—toiled alongside the soul and deserves reward. This fact already commits Dionysius to a concern with the body's numerical identity in at least some sense. And the matter clearly matters to him since he brings it up at three different points in the treatise. That should be sufficient to establish the point as plausible.

There is still interpretive work to do. Even if it be granted that Dionysius is concerned with the body's numerical identity, it remains to be shown how he understands that numerical identity to be secured, assuming he has any more particular, considered commitments at all. A few possibilities present themselves. First, he might hold that the body consists in certain property-instances bundled together. He could then claim numerical identity between the resurrection and antemortem bodies as long as they shared certain (at least formally identical) properties. Secondly, he might that what secures the body's numerical identity is the soul, understood as a form. By informing some matter, the soul constitutes that matter as "its body"; so, as long as the soul is operating on matter to form a body at all, the body will be numerically the same body. Such is Origen's view on Sophie Cartwright's interpretation.[495] Thirdly, he might hold that the body is something like what contemporary analytic philosophers call a bare substratum: a mere individuality. I take it that something like the last position best fits the data.

To make that case, I return to *EH* VII, this time considering the first group Dionysius criticizes, those for whom the person, on death, "passes into nonexistence" (εἰς ἀνυπαρξίαν … χωρεῖν).[496] Dionysius is terse here, and the sentence is somewhat convoluted, so it needs some interpreting. I set out the problematic portion in full here.

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[495] Sophie Cartwright, "Soul and Body in Early Christianity: An Old and New Conundrum," in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 179–185.

[496] *EH* VII.I.2, Heil/Ritter 121,10: Τῶν δὲ ἀνιέρων οἱ μὲν εἰς ἀνυπαρξίαν ἀλόγως οἴονται χωρεῖν.

> Τῶν δὲ ἀνιέρων οἱ μὲν εἰς ἀνυπαρξίαν ἀλόγως οἴονται χωρεῖν, οἱ δὲ τὴν σωματικὴν εἰσάπαξ ἀπορρήγνυσθαι τῶν οἰκείων ψυχῶν συζυγίαν ὡς ἀνάρμοστον αὐταῖς ἐν θεοειδεῖ ζωῇ καὶ μακαρίαις λήξεσιν.[497]

One can read the sentence so that "χωρεῖν" takes the first "οἱ" as its subject, but another possible reading would make its subject "τὴν σωματικὴν … συζυγίαν." On the first reading, Dionysius is attacking the view that the person is annihilated upon death. On the second reading, he is criticizing the idea that, when a person dies, the soul's "bodily yoking" (which would then mean "the body") passes into nonexistence.[498] Dionysius would then seem to be concerned with the idea that, if the body is annihilated, it cannot be united with its soul later on. I think the first reading somewhat more natural, but both possibilities should be noted. Regardless, since Dionysius is committed to the idea that the whole human substance is a body–soul composite, it is possible to read him as concerned, even on the first interpretation, with securing the idea that the body, just as much as the soul, in some sense "survives" after death.

Such an interpretation is plausible if one reads *EH* VII in relation to *EH* II. In the latter passage, Dionysius insists that "death is not the substance's annihilation" (θάνατός ἐστιν ἐφ' ἡμῶν οὐ τῆς οὐσίας ἀνυπαρξία) but a "severance" (ἀλλ' ἡ τῶν ἡνωμένων διάκρισις), in which the soul becomes invisible (ἀφανές) and formless (ἀειδῆ) in the body's absence and the body itself undergoes alterations in its form (σωματοειδῶν ἀλλοιώσεων), losing its human appearance in the process (ἐκ τῆς κατ' ἄνθρωπον ἰδέας ἀφανιζόμενον). Given that he expects the reader to

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[497] *EH* VII.I.2, Heil/Ritter 121,10–12.

[498] As near as I can tell, only two translators have read the sentence along these lines. The first is Colm Luibhéid, trans., *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York; Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 250. The second is Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy," 335. Maurice de Gandillac, however, does translate "τὴν σωματικὴν … συζυγίαν" as "le lien des corps avec leurs âmes propres." Maurice de Gandillac, trans., *Oeuvres complètes du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite.* Collection "Bibliothèque Philosophique" (Paris: Aubier, 1943), 313. This translation shifts the emphasis back onto the body in a way that could bolster my reading. If the genitive a few lines later, "ἄλλων σωμάτων," is appositive, then that sentence identifies the συζυγία(ι) with bodies, increasing the likelihood that the term "συζυγίαν" is being used to refer to the body in line 11 as well. That raises, in turn, the likelihood that "συζυγίαν" is the subject of "χωρεῖν."

take this account as support for or elaboration of the idea that death is not “an annihilation” but “a severance,” or “separation,” Dionysius presumably assumes that neither element is annihilated after the composite dissolves. Otherwise, the destruction would go beyond *mere* severance, undercutting his point in drawing the distinction in the first place. So, Dionysius must think that the body survives postmortem changes such as decay. That Dionysius uses the term “ἀλλοίωσις” lends further support to that conclusion. In the Aristotelian tradition, this term has a technical meaning: it refers to alterations that occur with respect to the same subject (ὑποκείμενον), considered *qua* substance (οὐσία), as when one and the same man goes from non-musical to musical or when (as one may hope) a heart is converted from stone to flesh. In contrast, the term for a change in which a subject, or concrete substance, comes to be is “γένεσις,” and the term for a change in which a subject is destroyed is “φθορά,” or “corruption.”[499] Dionysius shows a familiarity with Aristotelian terms at various points in his corpus, using all the above terms as well as terms such as quality (ποιόν), quantity (ποσόν), form (εἶδος), matter (ὕλη), and attribute, or accident (συμβεβηκός) in something like their Aristotelian senses.[500] Given that fact, it seems entirely plausible that he should be using the term “ἀλλοίωσις” with its technical sense in mind. If that is correct, then, one can read the passage from *EH* VII in that light: Dionysius is

[499] For Aristotle’s account, see his treatise *De generatione et corruptione*. I use Marwan Rashed’s edition: *Aristote. De la génération et la corruption. Nouvelle edition,* ed. and trans. Marwan Rashed (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2005). For the idea that alteration involves a change in a subject that remains, in some important sense, “the same,” see *GC* I.1, Rashed 2 (Bekker 314b2–5); for the idea that the subject in alteration is a substance (ουσία), and that the alteration is a change in its accidents or affections, see *DC* I.2, Rashed 11 (Bekker 317a20–27); for the idea that corruption involves a change from one substance to another, see *DC* I.3, Rashed 13 (Bekker 317b24–26). Finally, note that Aristotle distinguishes genesis proper (γένεσις ἁπλῆ) from mere conjunction (σύγκρισις) and corruption proper (ἁπλῆ φθορά) from mere dissociation, or separation (διάκρισις). Genesis and corruption proper occur when one thing “changes as a whole from this to that” (μεταβάλλῃ ἐκ τοῦδε εἰς τόδε ὅλον): *DC* I.2, Rashed 11 (Bekker 317a20–27). Dionysius, unlike Aristotle, thinks humans are composite substances, so it would be impossible to say for certain whether he would utilize Aristotle to hold that death, viewed as διάκρισις, cannot be corruption proper; but it is certainly possible, and Dionysius does seem to think that (a) death does not involve the substance’s annihilation and (b) it is proper to call the changes the body goes through alterations (again: ἀλλοιώσεις) rather than corruption.
[500] For “coming to be,” “corruption,” and “alteration,” all considered together in relation to time and in distinction from one another, see *DN* X.3, Suchla 216,10–11.

criticizing individuals who think that, after humans die, their bodies undergo substantial corruption (ἁπλῆ φθορά); and his own position is that, despite all appearances, the body actually survives its own decay, undergoing only an alteration—albeit an alteration that, for just about any other philosophical school, *should* constitute a corruption.

I want to make a brief aside before moving on to the next section: the fact that Dionysius feels the need to insist that the body survive in some way in order to be given its just reward suggests that he is not convinced that it could simply be reconstituted, the fact that the same bodily form is involved securing the body's own identity. This sets him at odds with Origen on some construals, though not on all.[501] It also apparently sets him at odds with any picture on which numerical identity is secured by mere, formally identical properties. Dionysius seems to think that continuity is necessary.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways to understand the body as ὑποκείμενον. It could consist in a property or properties that remain throughout even its most apparently destructive changes. Identifying the body with something like Philoponus' "body *simpliciter*" might do the trick, and there are passages where Dionysius talks about matter in terms that might allow such a reading.[502] But Dionysius clearly wants *this* body to survive, not merely a "body simpliciter" that can appear in multiple bodies, and he treats the body and matter as distinct in *DN* IV.[503] Another interpretation would be that Dionysius takes the body to be a bare substratum whose numerical identity is not secured by any properties. A position in this vicinity would be in line with

[501] As noted by Henri Crouzel, *Origène et Plotin: comparaisons doctrinales* (Paris: Téqui, 1991), 384–385, 422, 425–426; and Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 107. Origen apparently himself holds that the body deserves a share in the resurrection for its toil alongside the soul.
[502] For passages in which Philoponus talks about "body simpliciter" and "the three-dimensionally extended," see *CP* XI.3, 412,16, 413,23, and 414,4. For passages in which Dionysius describes body in a way suggesting that it has its own being and properties, see *DN* IV.28, Suchla 174,5: Καὶ γὰρ καὶ αὕτη κόσμου καὶ κάλλους καὶ εἴδους ἔχει μετουσίαν; and *DN* IV.28, Suchla 174,5–7: Εἰ δὲ τούτων ἐκτὸς οὖσα ἡ ὕλη καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἄποιός ἐστι καὶ ἀνείδεος, πῶς ποιεῖ τι ἡ ὕλη ἡ μηδὲ τὸ πάσχειν δύνασθαι καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἔχουσα;
[503] *DN* IV.27 for body and IV.28 for matter.

Origen's own views on the body, assuming interpreters such as Henri Crouzel and Mark Edwards are correct.[504] Since Dionysius is probably in the same monastic lineage as Evagrius, such an interpretation is entirely plausible (and becomes even more so if Ilaria Ramelli is correct in thinking Dionysius had access to Origen's texts).[505]

There are also positive reasons to favor this second reading. Let us return to *EH* VII. The fourth group against which Dionysius writes seems to hold that the resurrection body is exactly the same, qualitatively, as the antemortem body. In attacking this group, Dionysius says that God has promised to transform "what [humans] are" so completely that, in the resurrection, their bodies no longer even need food.[506] Elsewhere, he claims the body will be immortal.[507] Taken together, the two claims suggest a transformation so complete as to constitute what would be, on some views, a change in nature. In the ancient world, it was common to define man as "mortal, rational animal." Porphyry, for instance, does so in his *Isagoge*.[508] If one considers the human—or the body for that matter—to consist in its mortality, one might say that an immortal human body is impossible. In *DN* VI, Dionysius considers just such an objection. He says that "the ancients" would consider an immortal humanity "contrary to nature" (παρὰ φύσιν).[509] His response is to claim that it is not *contrary* to nature but *above* nature (ὑπὲρ φύσιν) and that, since

[504] Origen may be read as holding that the body is something like a bare ὑποκείμενον, as noted by Crouzel, *Origène et Plotin*, 384–385; 422; especially 425–426 and Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 107. Origen apparently himself holds that the body deserves a share in the resurrection for its toil alongside the soul. See also Mark Edwards, "Origen's Two Resurrections," *Journal of Theological Studies* 46, no. 2 (1995): 502–518.
[505] Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Evagrius, and Dionysius," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Mark Edwards, Dimitrios Pallis, and Georgios Steiris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 100. I am not particularly confident in Ramelli's thesis. It seems to rely too much on similarities that could be explained by a broadly Origenian milieu. But it seems worth mentioning regardless.
[506] *EH* VII.I.2.
[507] *DN* VI.2.
[508] Porphyry, *Introduction*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), §3 9.12–13, 10.10–15, 11.17, and 11.21–12.1. John Philoponus *may* have held a similar view, though it is hard to tell since his works on the resurrection only survive in fragments in his opponents' work. It seems plausible enough, however, that he considers mortality part of the definition of humanity. See Basil Lourié, "John Philoponus on the Bodily Resurrection," *Scrinium* 9, no. 1 (2013): 82–83.
[509] *DN* VI.2. See also *DN* II.9, Suchla 133.

God causes all life, there is no creaturely life whose production, to him, is either contrary to nature or above nature.[510] This response is telling. That Dionysius mounts a defense at all suggests he is aware that, for many, the transformation he has in mind represents a change in substance, or nature. And, importantly, he never *denies* that such a change would not be according to nature—as far as the current cosmos is concerned anyway. If anything, he seems tacitly to accept it. He simply says that God can make man immortal despite that fact.[511] That suggests that Dionysius gives some credence to the idea that humanity is, according to nature, mortal.[512] And that in turn suggests that Dionysius thinks an individual belonging to a particular kind can undergo an ostensibly essential change without ceasing to be.[513] Admittedly, Dionysius never says that a human, so changed, ceases to be *human*, and, while he sometimes suggests humans will be able to think in something akin to an "angelic mode,"[514] he just as clearly maintains that a humanity thus transformed retains its embodiment. Even so, the same basic point remains: Dionysius seems to be countenancing a situation in which a single subject undergoes what would amount to changes in kind without undergoing dissolution, and that possibility strengthens the case that Dionysius thinks the body is something like a bare subject.

[510] *DN* VI.II, Suchla 192: Ὑπὲρ φύσιν δὲ τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς φημι τὴν ὁρωμένην, οὐ τὴν πανσθενῆ τῆς θείας ζωῆς, αὐτῇ γὰρ ὡς πασῶν οὔσῃ τῶν ζωῶν φύσει καὶ μάλιστα τῶν θειοτέρων οὐδεμία ζωὴ παρὰ φύσιν ἢ ὑπὲρ φύσιν.

[511] One can find an echo of this line of thinking in Ephrem the Syrian, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, ed. Edmund Beck. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 186 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1959), I.97 (Beck 11). Ephrem may have had an influence on Dionysius directly or through Evagrius, or the idea of God's acting against his nature in becoming human may simply have been "in the air." For the possibility of a connection between Ephrem and Dionysius, see Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare*, 359–371.

[512] See also *EH* III.Θ.11, Heil/Ritter 90, where Dionysius says that humanity, in the Fall, exchanged the eternal (αἰωνίου) for the mortal (τὸ θνητόν), which exchange he calls a fall in human *nature* (τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν: Heil/Ritter 90,16) This passage *could* be read in such a way that it commits Dionysius to the idea that humans were naturally immortal. But it could also be read so as to suggest that they were naturally mortal but could have, through supernatural aid, become immortal. If anything, the former reading would strengthen my case: it shows a change in nature can occur and that the return from mortality to immortality is, in the present world, something beyond our nature.

[513] Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 192 and Stock, "Dionysius the Areopagite," 371 use language suggesting they see a radical transformation promised here, though they never discuss how it might relate to our humanity.

[514] Note, however, that Epistle X suggests angelic life may simply entail freedom from passions in this life. For a discussion of the angelic life in the monastic tradition, see mention in Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism," in *Man, Soul and Body: Essays in Ancient Thought from Plato to Dionysius* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 155

It is now time to draw this section to a close. If I am correct, Dionysius holds that the body is something like a bare substratum. It has no properties "in itself," though it may well be that it can never exist without *some* properties. It is best understood, I think, as something akin to an "individual" in my sense: the bare subject that is able to enter into relations, be distinct from and united with other subjects, and so forth. I have not shown, obviously, that Dionysius *thematizes* the topic or that he applies his insights on the body to other creatures; but I think I have shown that Dionysius is at least tacitly *aware* that there is a need for individuals in his ontology, and it seems highly unlikely that he would retain individuality for bodies only.

5.2 — Conclusion

In this section, I have claimed (a) that Dionysius admits ὑποκείμενα–2 (logical subjects or participants) in his ontology, which suggests (b) that he takes a positive and non-incidental interest in them even though he never thematizes them directly. When taken together with the conclusions from previous sections—

a) that providence extends to all things in every possible aspect,
b) that, in creating, God operates upon no material substrate but creates from the ground up,
c) that God gives creatures their very εἶναι, or concrete existence, as a gift,
d) that God foreknows and intends his creatures by possessing their παραδείγματα—

the conclusion that there are ὑποκείμενα–2 makes it highly plausible that Dionysius would be concerned with ensuring that God has something like paradigms or wills toward the individual as such. For if everything is a gift and intended through the divine ideas, there must be something

like divine ideas in relation to individuals lest they slip the net and become the single stray element in a cosmos otherwise entirely cared for by providence.

6 — Evaluating Dionysius

In this final, very brief section, I want to evaluate the position I take Dionysius to be putting forward. There remain important difficulties with his view. For one, if the creature is *constituted* by its activities and powers, it is hard to say exactly where God begins and the creature ends—or even what it would mean to call the creature an accessory agent. One can easily imagine a creature who is accessory or co-agent in even such a basic activity as walking: consider the child who cannot walk alone but does, with help, manage something that merits the name "walking." More intricate examples make it even easier in some regards: consider the old parable in which a blind man and a lame man rob a bank together. But what would it mean for a creature to be an accessory in, say, its own εἶναι? (That creatures *are* given their powers to be by God is, as I mentioned earlier, one possible inference from the things Dionysius says in *DN* IX.) If any activity constitutes the creature as a subject, it is surely its own, concrete existence. But if the creature is genuinely *accessory* to its own existence, it would seem one has to assume a subject, distinct from the existence, that is doing the existing, as it were, in cooperation with God. In that case, one falls upon the CFP again: the creature's subjecthood is left inexplicable. Yet the alternative seems little better. If there *is* no distinction between the εἶναι and its subject, then there are two apparent options: God's own contribution does not, on its own, explain the εἶναι, the creature being self-constituting on some level; or God's contribution is the only one, and the εἶναι, as God's act, is partially or fully identical with him. Pantheism then follows, and the other assumption central to the CFP—that the creature is a subject distinct from its idea and

from God—is violated.[515] Incidentally, these difficulties may lend still further plausibility to my reading: in Dionysius as I find myself reading him, one can see Evagrius Ponticus and his idea that the body, insofar as it moves in line with the soul and the intellect, becomes wholly "transparent" to and indistinguishable from them.[516] That is not to say that an Evagrian reading is more plausible in itself. But, combined with independent reasons for reading Dionysius as I do, it does serve to reinforce my reading.

In sum, while Dionysius may come somewhat closer than his near contemporaries to providing a sufficient response to the CFP, he never quite manages it. Even so, he goes very far towards working through the difficulties, and one may be grateful to him for that.

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[515] And so, arguably, Dionysius' view *does* end up verging on a collapse into something like Perl's. One key difference, though, is that Dionysius still seems to care at least implicitly about creaturely individuality. A related discussion has actually appeared from time to time in contemporary theology, in relation to the "Radical Orthodoxy" movement: See Brendan Peter Triffett, "*Processio* and the Place of Ontic Being: John Milbank and James K.A. Smith on Participation," *Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 6 (2016): 900–916.

[516] Evagrius Ponticus, *The Great Letter*, §§22 and 24–26 suggest that bodies are souls become differentiated through sin and intellects souls differentiated still further; §§46–47 suggest how the bodies are to be rolled back up into the souls and the souls into the intellects: by their being brought into such total subjection to their superior as to cease from the activities setting them apart from their superior. To the extent that a nature *consists* in such activities (§§39–46), such cessation, possibly combined with the grace-given ability to accomplish activities proper to the higher rung, makes the bodily or soulish nature entirely united in nature to its superior.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

1 — Final introduction

So far in this thesis, I take myself to have shown that the three thinkers on whom I have focused are concerned with the difficulties involved in the CFP and seek to address it in their philosophical and theological "systems." Proclus holds (a) that the gods possess a non-ontological unity that they bestow on the things they provide for and (b) that the One produces the bare matter that even the gods need as the substrate for that operation. This view is ultimately a basic tweak on the approaches in the earlier divine ideas tradition, attempting to solve the problem by pushing it into the hyper- and hypo-noetic spheres. Philoponus wants to reduce, as far as possible, any conceptual gap between the divine idea and the corresponding creature. If he faces a difficulty, it is in explaining how formally identical individuals are nevertheless distinct from one another and their λόγοι. Finally, Dionysius takes a view on which God foreknows things by a practical knowledge about himself and his own capacities and activities.

I also take myself to have shown that, somewhere between the time of "Middle Platonism" and the time of Proclus, a shift occurs in the divine ideas tradition. Earlier thinkers assume the divine ideas secure divine creative knowledge. In contrast, my three thinkers, perhaps sensing the difficulty presented by the CFP, have sophisticated (if sometimes implicit) accounts of the way in which divine ideas might serve that function. It seems likely that the three are, at least on some level, developing their accounts in an ongoing conversation. Given that Philoponus and Dionysius are responding to Proclus, the former explicitly and the latter implicitly, the fact that they develop philosophical and theological systems in which they address difficulties associated with the same or similar concepts is suggestive. They are likely responding either directly to Proclus or to concerns arising within their shared milieu.

Thirdly and most broadly, I take myself to have shown that Proclus, Philoponus, and Dionysius all share an interest in a certain conceptual nexus: creation, individuality, creaturely constitution, the divine ideas, providence, and creative foreknowledge.

2 — Synthesis and scholarship

Those conclusions are interesting in their own right, and, to the extent that I have successfully established them, I have done what I set out to do in this thesis. But before concluding, I would like to draw a few further conclusions, make some suggestions, and note possible implications for present and possible future research. First, I would like to make some suggestions about why my thinkers are interested in this very particular conceptual nexus and why their interest might manifest in a concern with the CFP. Making a solid case for a particular interpretation goes beyond what I can manage in this final chapter, but I can gesture toward a few possibilities. One is that Proclus and his contemporaries run into difficulties because they, unlike the thinkers who went before, attempt to get into, as it were, the *mechanics* of creative foreknowledge. Platonists and Christians alike are already to some degree interested in extending providence to the individual, so, if I am correct that the CFP naturally arises when one attempts to extend providence to the individual *qua* individual or the other *qua* other, then such a development is entirely plausible. It is simply one direction the Platonic and Christian traditions might naturally develop given their interests and conceptual resources.

There are, however, other, more concrete reasons Proclus and company might have come to think through divine foreknowledge more carefully with especial attention to the individual. One is that both Christians and Platonists had long since absorbed influences from the Stoics, who, motivated by their belief that one and the same individual returns in successive cosmic

epochs, had already begun to think about what constitutes an individual, understood not merely as an instance with certain properties setting it apart from other instances but as a unique subject to which predicates can be attributed.[517] It is entirely plausible that, in absorbing general influence from the Stoics, Christians and Platonists alike found themselves taking on Stoic-inflected concerns with the individual's identity. That is especially true for Christians, who already had a concern with the resurrection. And given that both Platonists and Christians were already committed to the idea that God intends and provides for all things down to the individual, it would be perfectly natural for them, once they came into contact with Stoic thought, to want to explain how God can intend and provide for individuals in something like that sense.

Further, by this point, Christians had become embroiled in at least two debates in which individuality played a key role. On the one hand are the Christological debates around Chalcedon. Johannes Zachhuber has done considerable work to show how, through these debates, the term "hypostasis" comes to have increasingly refined meanings for the different parties involved. For instance, by the late 400s, among some Chalcedonians, it has come to signify something akin to "concrete existent," or "concrete subject."[518] If Zachhuber is correct, they tend to consider the hypostasis a pure existent without an essential reference to the nature or natures that appear in it, while miaphysites tend to consider the hypostasis a numerically distinct instance, belonging to a common nature and having all the attendant natural and accidental properties; but in both camps, there is an awareness that one can consider an individual *qua* individual and not merely as an instance of a nature or bundle of properties. On the other hand is

[517] Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights*, chapter 3; Marwan Rashed, "Alexander of Aphrodisias on Particulars and the Stoic Criterion of Identity," in *Particulars in Greek Philosophy: The Seventh S.V. Keeling Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Robert Sharples, 157–179. Philosophia Antiqua 120 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).
[518] Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 211.

the debate over the resurrection. By the 200s, Christians have already begun to think through carefully what is required for a resurrected individual to be numerically (not merely formally) the same as the individual who died, and the debate was still ongoing by the time my thinkers were active. Philoponus *certainly* knows about these debates, becoming an active participant in them. Dionysius almost certainly does as well. Proclus, as a highly prominent Platonist in an era when debates with Christians are common and Christian pupils have begun to train in the Academies, most likely knows these debates, and it would not be surprising were he to have absorbed some influence from them despite his antipathy to Christian thought. My own suspicion is that *all* the above influences are likely involved in the shift that occurs in the divine ideas tradition and the interest my three thinkers show in the CFP.

If I am broadly correct about the reasons for the shift my thinkers represent, there are a few implications for current scholarship. First, the fact that these thinkers care about the connection between divine creative foreknowledge and the individual becomes further support for the claim that there is an increased interest in something akin to individuality in late antiquity.[519] Indeed, it would be evidence that the interest in individuality is already more widespread than one might suspect based on the texts that deal explicitly with topics such as hypostases, the resurrection, or eternal recurrence. It has, in fact, begun to appear in areas such as general providence, creation, and creative foreknowledge. Secondly, therefore, my work would *also* give reason to broaden the sources on which collections on individuality in late antiquity draw.[520] Thirdly, if I am right that Proclus, Philoponus, and Dionysius are developing their views in conversation, it raises questions about whether and to what extent Christian and Platonist interest in individuality, whether in general or in connection with providence in particular, is

[519] Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zachhuber, eds., *Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).
[520] Torrance and Zachhuber, *Individuality in Late Antiquity*.

shaped by the two traditions' mutual influence. At very least, it raises questions about whether pagan Platonists such as Proclus might have derived their own interest in individuality in part from their interactions with Christians. Fourthly, it would be worth exploring the connections among creation, individuality, providence, and the divine ideas in other thinkers from this period. As I said in the introduction, scholars have done work in all these areas but rarely thematized their connections. It would be worth looking into whether other thinkers also develop their positions on creation in connection with their views on individuality and providence or vice versa. Fifthly and finally, it would be worth seeing whether one can trace connections between debates *besides* Chalcedon proper and an interest in individuality's connection with creation. My own suspicion is that one would see a connection, for instance, between debates around individuality in Chalcedon and the "Origenist Controversies," particularly given the probable connections between figures such as Dionysius and the debates around Evagrian cosmology and eschatology.

Another conclusion to draw from my discussion in the preceding chapters is that the connections my thinkers are wrestling with, namely those among creation, the divine ideas' relation to creatures, and the individual, carry considerable existential import, both for them and in general. If one cannot secure the correct relationship between the divine idea and the creature, one will struggle to justify commitment to the idea that God intends to produce all things down the individual level. And more than a little hinges on such a commitment, as all three thinkers seem to recognize. Even if he denies that creatures exist or have merit before their emplacement in a τάξις, Proclus wants to say that providence gives each creature its due *as* individual, and how God could do so without having the capacity to intend to assign them to their τάξεις is unclear. Dionysius thinks God's justice consists, among other things, in his bestowing and

preserving each thing's ἰδιότητα, suggesting a similarity to Proclus; and the fact that it is on ethical grounds that he insists upon the body's survival through even ostensibly substantial changes suggests that he sees a connection between God's providence over individuality and such deeply existential concerns as the eschaton and the resurrection. Even Philoponus, who talks proportionally less about God's providence than his near contemporaries, connects God's ability to foreknow things to the individual's partaking in providence.

Finally, I want to draw attention to some reasons one might care about this debate from a contemporary philosophical and theological standpoint. The point is perhaps easiest to draw out if one considers the CFP in its connection with (maybe somewhat surprisingly) a problem that has arisen within contemporary Anglophone philosophical theology. Within the past few decades, several philosophers and theologians have made claims whose upshot seems to be that God cannot have intended to produce this or that particular individual (in something like my sense) but only to create *an* individual according to certain specifications. For instance, Robert Adams, in "Actualism and Thisness," argues that possibility is only qualitative. He proffers the following illustration. Suppose you have two individuals that are qualitatively indiscernible. If one has a qualitative property, so does the other. Now, suppose these two individuals do not actually exist; they exist only possibly. That means they can have no "impure" relations—that is, relations between the one or the other and any actually existing things—, so there are no non-qualitative properties to set them apart either, at least none that involve a reference to actual, concrete individuals. Further, therefore, neither can have such actual-relational properties unless the other can too.[521]

If these individuals were actually to exist, there would be ways to distinguish them by reference to non-qualitative properties. One would have relations to other, actual individuals that

[521] Robert Merrihew Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," *Synthese* 49, no. 1 (1981): 8–9.

were lacking in the other; there would be different existence criteria, and one could cease to exist while the other continued. For another example, any unique properties, like being the first in the horse race on such and such a day, would only be exemplifiable by one or the other. But since these individuals are merely possible, there is nothing to distinguish them, qualitatively or otherwise. Consequently, it is be impossible for God to have intended to create this or that particular individual; for any "thisness" the individual has is downstream from or parasitic on her actual existence.[522] Likewise, the "singular" possibilities regarding a specific individual cannot predate her own coming to be, so they cannot have been there "eternally and necessarily at God's disposal."[523] Thus, it turns out that there is no way God could have intended to make this or that specific individual, for his will can only have been directed at *general* contents, which would be indifferent with respect to which individual of a given description is created. Barry Miller puts the dilemma well.

> We begin with [God's decision] to create an individual "conforming to an extremely specific definite description." Now if the description were a pure one (that is, unmixed with proper names, demonstratives, or references to singular properties), it might be applicable to precisely one individual without being restricted to any precise one (for example, to Socrates). In other words, it would be applicable to *any* (though only one) individual that happened to satisfy it. Although Socrates may have happened to be that individual, any clone … would have satisfied it equally well. Such a description, no matter how specific, is therefore not designed to refer to Socrates.[524]

On this picture, we have God having in mind some particular "picture," as it were, a highly specific type or model to which he wants some particular actual individual to conform. If God cannot refer to an individual before its creation, then he can only have been intending to create *an* individual in this way, not *the* individual who, at a later time, in fact began to

[522] Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," 10.
[523] Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," 10.
[524] Barry Miller, "Future Individuals and Haecceitism," *The Review of Metaphysics* 45, no. 1 (1991): 14.

exist. Among the philosophers making this or similar points, Christopher Menzel puts it the most explicitly. Taking A.N. Prior as his example individual, he says that, while "[God] knew the future in all its *qualitative* detail," knowing "[down] to the last detail what *sort* [the] person we now know Prior to have been was to be," "there was at the time no singular knowledge [regarding] *Prior* to be had in any sense."[525]

Notice that this problem, if not exactly the same as the CFP, covers much the same territory: it is unclear how God, whether through his ideas or some other means, is to "refer" to a thing before he makes it without presupposing it. This similarity is important for at least two reasons. First, it shows that the contemporary problem, even if it arises due to distinctively modern commitments, is nevertheless connected with concerns held by historical figures in the philosophical and theological traditions to which they belong. That gives makes the problem less idiosyncratic and weightier than it might at first seem. Secondly, it raises the possibility that one might be able to draw on the way in which the late antique thinkers frame and address the problem in order to thematize, clarify, and address the contemporary one. Such clarification is necessary. While some contemporary philosophers and theologians have addressed the difficulty involved in God's knowing individuals, only a scarce few—Jordan Wessling and Mark Johnston to name two—, have seen that the difficulty has in part to do with the logical relationship between God's creative knowledge and the creature, and they have mentioned it only briefly.[526] Arguably, their own arguments are concerned, as are the arguments made by my late antique figures, with the point where providence connects with referentiality, knowledge, relativity,

[525] Christopher Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 494.

[526] Mark Johnston, "Why Did the One Not Remain Within Itself?" in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 9*, eds. Lara Buchak, Dean Zimmerman, and Philip Swenson. Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 143–148; Vitale, *Non-Identity Theodicy*, 179–180, 190–1; Helen Watt, "Intending Reproduction as One's Primary Aim: Alexander Pruss on 'Trying for a Baby,'" *Roczniki Filozoficzne/Annales de Philosophie/Annals of Philosophy* 63, no. 3 (2015): 148; and Jordan Wessling, *Love Divine: A Systematic Account of God's Love for Humanity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 110.

providence, and creaturely otherness from God. For one reason or another, however, the whole nexus and the implications that might arise from considering it in relation to otherness from God never quite come into focus. For that reason, a return to late antiquity to explore the logical space already laid out by figures such as Proclus, Philoponus, and Dionysius would be well worth the while. In addition to helping clarify the problem itself and filling the logical space out with some initial potential answers, drawing on these thinkers' approach might be helpful in picking out precisely where the problem lies: precisely in the logical relation between divine idea and creature.

But even if one cares not a whit for contemporary philosophical theology as such, the existential stakes remain—and are perhaps even more acute than they would be for the late antique thinkers. For whereas an early Christian or Platonist might want to secure God's creative foreknowledge so as to ensure nothing escapes him, Christians since at least the Middle Ages have an additional reason for wanting to do so. Many see existence—and, indeed, one's very selfhood—as a gift from God, something he gives to creatures in love for them.[527] To give a gift worth the name, however, one usually has to intend a certain recipient be the one to receive the gift; and if the CFP goes unresolved, it is difficult to see how God can have had any such intention. To those for whom the idea that existence is a gift is an attractive and powerful idea, therefore, the CFP—and the way thinkers such as Proclus, Philoponus, and Dionysius address it—matters deeply.

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[527] Thomas Traherne, "The Salutation," in *The Works of Thomas Traherne VI: Poems from the 'Dobell Folio', Poems of Felicity, The Ceremonial Law, Poems from the 'Early Notebook'*, ed. Jan Ross (Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 3. Similar sentiments appear in Bernard of Clairvaux Bernard of Clairvaux. *On the Love of God*. Translated by "A Religious of C.S.M.V." Fleur de Lys Series (London: Mowbrays, 1961. First published 1950), 29–30 and, more recently, Frederick William Faber, *The Creator and the Creature; Or, The Wonders of Divine Love* (London: Burnes & Oates, 1961), 28–30; 120, 123–124.

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