

The Metaphysics of Providential Causality in the *ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ* of Proclus

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Although the word ‘providence’ (*πρόνοια*) and its various forms (*προνοεῖν*, *προνοητικός*) appear in but a few of the propositions of Proclus’s *ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ*, it may truthfully be said that the entire treatise is an extended exposition of the notion and reality of divine providence, a doctrine both systematically and historically definitive of Neoplatonism, which took pride in assailing Peripatetics for their dismal view of a distant first principle that neither knew nor cared what went on in the world of its effects. Emerging clearly for the first time in Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Laws*, the doctrine of providence was faithfully preserved and elaborated in the Neoplatonic school of Plotinus, and came thence, through Porphyry and Iamblichus, to Proclus himself, in whose thoroughness and logical order the Neoplatonic tradition reaches its peak. In the present study we shall consider the metaphysical foundations and implications of divine providence as it is presented in the *ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ*, with the goal of expounding the metaphysical coherence and foundational status of *πρόνοια* in the theology of Proclus. Although he does most of the work for us, Proclus does not trace out to its logical conclusions the connection that exists between his doctrine of participational causality and the providential office of the bonifying cause. It is not our intention therefore to focus on each usage of the word *πρόνοια* and its various forms, nor to explore the Proclean account of the henadic pantheon as providential agents; rather, we aim to clarify

the basic metaphysical principles of Proclean theology by developing the notion of providence latent in Proclus's text.¹

CONCERNING PARTICIPATION AND INEFFABILITY

In propositions 1 and 2, Proclus establishes that every being, every thing that is, is both one and not one. As one, it imitates the One and is, to some degree, self-sufficient. As not-one, it is needy and depends upon its cause for all that it has. The cause *is* what the effect *has*. In proposition 3, Proclus introduces the *process* of unity, the process of a thing coming to be one. This coming-to-be one is, in essence, what reversion or *ἐπιστροφή* will be shown to consist in. Anything that must become what it is, i.e., anything that becomes unified, cannot be the One which neither becomes nor exists (prop. 4; prop. 115). The productive cause is superior to its product (prop. 7). The cause is therefore responsible not only for the being of the effect, but for all that belongs to its perfection or fullness as the kind of effect it is. Thus when we speak of the providence of the higher for the lower, we mean it 'looks out for' the good of those to whom it first provided being and then whatever belongs to that being's perfection. Indeed, to give being and its fullness is the very act of providing, or, if we substantize the activity, the providence of the cause.

A perfect cause perfectly provides for its effect. As Proclus argues in proposition 121:

If it [all that is divine] has the function of exercising providence towards the universe, then

¹Throughout we shall use the text edition and translation by E. R. Dodds of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963). When literalism would better serve a nuance in the Greek original, I shall modify without notification this otherwise superb translation.

it has a potency which dominates the objects of its providence, a potency past all resisting and without all circumscription, in virtue of which the gods have filled all things with themselves; all things are subjected to them, since every cause which originates and dominates other existences by superfluity of potency is naturally originative and dominative.²

If there seems to be a lack in what is provided, then the cause of the lack must be on the part of the effect, or, in other words, the effect in some way impedes the providence of the cause. Yet when we are speaking of vertical causality, the cause as such is in power over its effect; it precontains all that the effect has in a lower mode.³ Therefore if there is a failure of reception, there cannot be a *cause* of this lack. Nothingness or lack has no proper cause. Thus insofar as the effect falls short of the cause, this falling short has no other cause than the ontological status of the effect qua effect. This conclusion reinforces the truth that the effect cannot be equal to its cause, as Proclus proves in proposition 7. In proposition 143 Proclus explains what follows from the ontological gap between cause and effect:

For the divine principles are always more comprehensive and more potent than those

²See also prop. 145.

³By “vertical causality” is meant the doctrine of the *eidōs* or *paradeigma* as total formal and final cause of the effect that participates it (thus, dogness or caninity is the formal and final cause of a dog); this cause is simultaneous with and thoroughly interior to the effect. Such “vertical” or ontological causality is to be contrasted with a chain of univocal agent causes (a dog begetting a dog, etc.), where the agents work in a “horizontal” line of temporal succession.

which proceed from them, and it is the unfitness of the participants which occasions the failure of the divine light, obscuring by its weakness even that radiance. When the light is obscured, another principle appears to assume dominion; yet it is not by its own potency, but through the impotence of the participant, that it has the appearance of revolting against the divine form of illumination.

The same point comes out more generally in proposition 122, in which Proclus states: “whatsoever is able to participate them [the gods] enjoys such good things as it is capable of receiving according to the limitations of its own nature, whilst they radiate good to all existents in virtue of their very being, or rather their priority to Being.” “But whatever is divine keeps the same station for ever,” Proclus argues in proposition 142,

and is free from all relation to the lower and all admixture with it. It follows . . . that the variation [in degrees of perfection] can be due only to the participants; in them must lie the lack of uniformity, and it is they that are present to the gods diversely at different times and diversely one from another. Thus, while the gods are present alike to all things, not all things are present alike to them; each order is present in the degree of its capacity, and enjoys them in the degree of its presence, which is the measure of its participation.

What he says of the mean term between time and eternity can be adapted to illustrate the same truth: “In virtue of its coming-to-be [it] is attached to the inferior order, while in its perpetuity it imitates the eternal nature” (prop. 55). Thus in proposition 8 Proclus proves that all things are subordinated to the primal

good, because that which participates is in a state of dependency —what it has is not its own, and in this not-being or not-owning lies precisely its inferiority and causedness. “You are not your own, you have been purchased at a great price”: the price, that is, of the very being of the superior which is poured out for the life of the inferior. “All things are bound up in the gods and deeply rooted in them, and through this cause they are preserved in being; if anything falls away from the gods and become utterly isolated from them, it retreats into non-being and is obliterated, since it is wholly bereft of the principles which maintained its unity” (prop. 144).

Providence is thus the inverse of participation. As participation expresses the dynamic relation of effect in reversion to its self-giving cause, providence names the flowing forth of good out of the cause into the effect, making it to be and to be perfect, so far as the effect can receive this stream of being and its various perfections. The cause *provides* to the extent that the effect receives or participates its being and unity, just as the effect *returns* to the extent that it seeks and finds its truest being in the source whence it ‘always already’ proceeds. Thus the One or primal good is supremely provident in and for its effects, it *is* for its effects and it is not for itself, its providential outpouring of goodness and unity depends in no way upon any other end or means. (“Now that the One is God follows from its identity with the Good: for the Good is identical with God, God being that which is beyond all things and to which all things aspire, and the Good being the ‘whence’ and ‘whither’ of all things,” Proclus magisterially states in prop. 113.) Proposition 9 carries this analysis further by insisting that the “self-sufficient” agent, which derives its well-being from itself, is “nearer to the giver of its desire” than any being which “demands another’s help” and “needs an extraneous cause of good and has its existence or its activity completed only by reception from without.” Note what he says: the self-sufficient is *nearer to*, not identical with, the Good, because it “falls short, in that it participates good and is not itself the primal Good.”

Even the self-sufficient, when seen from a higher vantage, is not its own goodness, its own cause of being good; its goodness is participated, its essence is co-caused by itself and the Good. "For not all the gods together may be matched with the One, so far does it overpass the divine multitude," Proclus observes when speaking of the gods as qualifiedly good in proposition 133.

Pursuing this line of thought, Proclus proves in proposition 10 that even self-sufficiency or completeness according to kind is inferior to the ineffable Good, which, to use scholastic language, belongs neither to a species nor to a genus. Fulfillment only pertains to those things which, being empty in themselves, can be filled full. Even if the emptiness of the self-sufficient is, as it were, self-filled, the *content* of this filling is itself the good beyond all whatness or process. The complete being must needs be *completed*, and, moreover, completed in the way suitable to its nature. Thus only a finite (or 'relatively infinite') being can be brought to its completeness as a *what*, and this process, be it ever so immanent and self-actuated, is nonetheless, ontologically speaking, a movement from effect (or being) to ultimate goodness which fulfills the nature in its perpetual striving and attaining. "Accordingly those substances which are complete in themselves, while 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" (prop. 64). When we say 'process' of fulfillment, we do not mean of course a temporal succession of empty to full, but rather a metaphysical state of always being-made-to-be-one, which is a description of anything that derives its fullness from a superior by drinking perpetually of its unified plenitude.

Thus the very fulfillment of the self-sufficient secondary cause bears witness to its dependency on or participation of the good beyond fulfillment. This ultimate principle of the fullness of all things must, quite obviously, be single, even though both being and singularity are said of it *per analogiam*, in order that we may stumblingly speak of it, rising from known beings to the

unknowable font of being. For “if the accumulation of causes may be continued to infinity, cause behind cause for ever, thus . . . all things will be unknowable. For nothing infinite can be apprehended; and the causes being unknown, there can be no knowledge of their consequents” (prop. 11)—an absurd conclusion that underscores all the more the reality or better the super-reality of “the first cause of all existing things,” which stands as far above the enclosed sphere of reality as a total and exhaustive cause above its absolutely unqualified effect. If all our knowledge rests within or hangs upon this first cause, then it follows that everything we can haltingly say of the unsayable is traced back to the totality of the *logoi*, the principles of being, by which the One is unfolded in emanation. The goodness and knowability of things proclaims their dependency on the primal good which, as first and divine, is also unknowable: “All the gods are named from the principles which are attached to them, because their diverse natures, otherwise unknowable, may be known from these dependent principles: all deity is in itself unspeakable and unknowable, being of like nature with the unspeakable One; yet from the diversities of the participants may be inferred the peculiar attributes of the participated” (prop. 162). Or, as Proclus states in the enunciation of proposition 123, “All that is divine is itself ineffable and unknowable by any secondary being because of its supra-existential unity, but it may be apprehended and known from the existents which participate it.” At the end of 123 he explains how we may have knowledge of the divine: “From the beings dependent upon them the character of their distinctive properties may be inferred, and with cogency,” for “to each cause is attached, and from each proceeds, that effect which is akin to it.”

The vertical cause in so far as it is cause is always unlimited and infinite with respect to the effect it produces: “What renders it [true Being] indivisible makes it also infinite; and a being is more infinite in proportion as it is more one and indivisible” (prop. 86). “Among things which have Being each is determinate both to itself and to all principles prior to it . . .

the infinitude in such things is infinite only to inferior principles, above which it is so supereminent in potency as to escape the grasp of any of them," Proclus explains in proposition 93.

For though they extend themselves toward it with whatsoever reach, yet it has something which altogether transcends them; though all of them enter into it, yet it has something which for secondary beings is occult and incomprehensible; though they unfold the potencies contained in it, yet it has something unattainable in its unity, an unexpanded life which evades their explication.⁴

All the more, then, is the first cause intensively infinite and beyond even infinity, that is, utterly outside and utterly within all things. That which is beyond being and its finitude is both in and above everything and, containing everything, is contained by nothing. Knowledge, however, attends to the limited and finite, attends to being circumscribed by whatness. Therefore beyond attainment of knowledge stands the first cause, the being of all things which is beyond being. It, which neither is nor is an 'it,' is absolutely unknowable though known in all things. In this way the One is both self-effacing and self-creating, created in all things that are and effaced or hidden in the finitude and multiplicity of beings.

THE GOOD AS PRINCIPIUM AND SAVIOR

In proposition 12 the various conclusions of the first eleven propositions culminate in a proof of the Good's principial and primary causality. No cause is superior to the Good. Having shown in proposition 11 that all things proceed from a single

⁴See also prop. 150: "The divine infinitude is an infinitude of potency; and the infinite is incomprehensible to those for whom it is infinite."

cause, he establishes in proposition 12 the identity of this cause with the Good in the very terms of providence: if *per impossibile* there be something superior to the Good, “does it or does it not exercise some force upon things and upon the nature of things? That is does not would be a strange view: for thus it would forfeit its title to the name of cause.” Granting that a single cause stands at the head of reality, we must analyze the ‘nature’ of this cause by looking at what causality means. “For something must in every case pass over from the cause to the effect; and especially must this be true of the first cause, from which all things depend and to which all things owe their several existences.” What greater or higher ontological character could the effect participate in than goodness or that which all things desire as their fulfillment and perfection? “For by the very term ‘higher’,” Proclus astutely reasons, “we mean that which in greater measure participates good.” (“Even things devoid of intelligence have appetite of providential care and seek to receive some portion of good; for whereas even of the beings fitted to participate intelligence not all desire it, towards the Good all things have desire and all endeavor its attainment,” Proclus notes in prop. 134). Thus by inquiring into what is meant by cause and effect—viz., that which gives what is good for beings, and those beings which receive this ultimate gift in all of its manifestations—it becomes evident that the Good is the first cause. The last line of proposition 12, almost an afterthought, summarizes the whole: “if the Good is that from which all things depend, the Good must be the principium and first cause of all things.” Although he uses tight argumentation in the body of the proof, Proclus can establish his point simply by unfolding the meaning of the word ‘good.’ Though it has invited dispraise and sometimes mockery, the scholastic and technical appearance of the *Elements of Theology* is quite misleading. At heart, Proclean metaphysics is a dialectic of *eros* and *erotos*, lover and beloved, the good-seeking and the Good.

In proposition 13, therefore, we see the immediate ramification of the all-encompassing causality of the Good: “it belongs to the Good to be salvific of all that exists (*σωστικὸν τῶν ὄντων*).” The Good saves or preserves the being of all things, it is the Savior no less than the principium of reality. Here, then,

is the root of the doctrine of divine providence. The good unifies all goodness, the one bonifies all unities. Whatever good is in being flows from the One, whatever unity is in being flows from the Good. For a being, to be one is to be good and vice versa. A thing only *is* to the extent that it is *one*; and if its being and activities are good for it, then no less is its unity good for it. Thus unity and goodness make things to be, and conversely, by being, things are one and good. The meaning of 'cause' and 'effect' then becomes clearer. To cause is to make being by introducing or supporting unity, the desiring-attaining of primal goodness; to be caused is to come into being by receiving unity and the goodness that consists in unification. As Proclus puts it in proposition 117, "all manifolds are in their own nature indeterminate, but receive determination through unity; and that which has the character of unity tends to measure and delimit the subjects in which it is present and by its virtue to bring the indefinite to definition." Evil is dispersion or loss of unity; multiplicity where unity should reign is the lack of good for the thing so multiplied against itself. Schizophrenia offers a psychological model for evil: a 'one', split within itself and against itself. All things strive to be unified and bonified, seeking the highest completion or compactness of their formal nature, the deepest fructification of their being's actuality. To this notion of fruitfulness we shall return in a little while, because it offers a key to understanding the Proclean vision of reality.

The Neoplatonist does not drive a wedge between the One and reality so as to put the unifying and bonifying causality called providence exclusively on the side of the Good, and the benefiting one-manys on the side of the products of the Good. To do so would be a betrayal of the cardinal tenet of Platonic metaphysics, viz., that the likeness of the cause is present and operative in the effect, indeed that the cause is the very life and substance of the effect, the effect being the cause spread out or flowing forth to the full extent of its potency. The effect *has* what the cause *is*; the lower is nothing but the content of the higher as it expresses itself in the multiplicity of its effects and their ontological dependency. This 'nothing but' is deceptive: the effect is the cause gone forth from itself, sojourning in its effect under a disguise of metaphysical distinction. Because the effect

is precontained in the cause, the full reality of the effect emanates from the cause and hangs suspended from it, "linked by upward tensions" (prop. 23). The cause's full power for being is manifested in its being received by the effect, albeit in the lower mode proper to what is derivative and dependent. It follows quite readily that whatsoever the cause on its part performs towards the effect, the effect in turn imitates both for itself and for those subordinate to its more limited efficacy. Thus all things imitate the One because they *are* the One being multiplied, being in its multiplication. To be a being is to be a likeness or manifestation of the supreme causality of the Good, which constitutes things in being by bestowing itself, and therefore its causative power, into them. Emanation is, in a certain way, self-imitation; how could it be otherwise? Can the cause make something utterly unlike itself? If the cause as such is cause through and through, if it only *is* as a be-cause, then to cause is to make causes, to provide is to make providers and self-providers. Such conclusions are far indeed from the simplistic monism to which historians of philosophy have often consigned Neoplatonism.

The full force of these considerations emerges in proposition 18, where Proclus lays out what we have just discussed. Because "whatever is productive of anything is superior to its product" (prop. 7; conversely in prop. 24 he will show that the participant is inferior to the participated), the producer bestows upon its product a quality or perfection inferior to its own essence, which *is* the property not as property but as full and primitive being. The product, on the other hand, shares in the fullness of this cause only so far as to *have* the property which the producer *is*. "Thus the character [i.e., property, perfection] 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 one by derivation" (prop. 18). Proclus stresses here that the giver is not identical with the property bestowed, since the latter precisely as a perfection *communicated* to the effect exists by derivation, whereas the giver in itself is, primitively and therefore essentially, what the inferior only participates. According to proposition 97, "the effect receives the character

of the cause “with remission (μετὰ ὑφέσεως), that is, with the declension (προσηκούσης) appropriate to secondary existences . . . the identical element is derived by the manifold from the one, and not reversely; so that the distinctive character peculiar to the series, which pre-exists primitively in the unitary term, exists in the manifold by derivation.”

In proposition 18 as elsewhere in the *Elements*, Proclus subjects the notion of causality to logical scrutiny and educes its necessary consequences. Of great importance among these consequences is the exaltation of the effect’s dignity implied by its participation in the essence of its cause. If the recipient is by derivation what the giver is primitively, then it follows that the effect is the very being of the cause, its intrinsic fullness and life, coming to dwell away from its home, changed in appearance by expansion and diminution but none the less really itself for that. Speaking of “the eternity of the world-order” (prop. 34, cor.), Proclus writes: “It proceeds eternally, and is eternal in its being; it is eternally reverted, and is steadfast in its own station.” The effect is not anything in addition to or apart from its cause; it is the cause having been immovably and infrangibly multiplied into manifold participants that reproduce in all the ways they can the beautiful nature of their generator. “Because the procession is from unity to a manifold, his [the god’s] character is continually multiplied; yet in the procession identity is preserved, because of the likeness of the successive terms of each series to its sovereign primordial cause” (prop. 125). There is no sharp split between the effect’s reality received and the cause’s prior and superior reality given. The given and the received are as tightly correlative, indeed as intimately wedded, as cause and effect, giver and recipient, being and expression-appearance. No sooner is there an intelligible word than it bears a transtextual meaning in its midst; no sooner is being received than it houses in its core the reality of the cause.

ΧΩΡΙΣΤΟΣ, TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE,
CAUSAL FERTILITY

In case we did not understand the profound implications of this teaching, Proclus tells us something about them in proposition 98. The cause as cause is, of course, separate from its effect; the participant cannot be identical in being to the participated (prop. 135: "The participant must be like the participated in one respect though distinct and dissimilar in another"), no more than an individual tree can capture the infinitely multiplicable and diversifiable reality of treeness. The point is forcefully made in proposition 75: "Every cause properly so called transcends its resultant. . . For if such a cause were immanent in its effect, either it would be a complementary part of the latter, or it would in some way need it for its own existence, and it would in this regard be inferior to the effect." But the cause is not separate from the effect after the manner in which two bodies are spatially separate; such would be a crude understanding of the *ἀίτιον χωριστόν* a Platonist has in mind. The separation is one of power and purity, by which the cause immanent in the effect is also (and for the selfsame reason) wholly transcendent to the effect: the cause "exists at once everywhere and nowhere," "in order that as cause it may be present in all that can participate it while as a separate and independent principle it is prior to all the vessels which it fills" (prop. 98).

Explaining this paradoxical bivalency, Proclus notes first that "by the communication of its proper potency it is everywhere: we mean by 'cause' that which fills all things naturally capable of participating it, which is the source of all secondary existences and by the fecund outpouring of its irradiations is present to them all." Whatever the secondary has is the result of the potency of its producer, and this potency fills the effect full of causal essence by constituting it in being. Proclus then balances this first assertion with its complement: "But by its mode of being, which has no admixture of the spatial, and by its transcendent purity it is nowhere: for if it is separate from its effects it is enthroned above all alike and resides in no being inferior to itself." (Proposition 156 expresses the same truth: "the divine purity isolates all the gods from inferior existences,

and enables them to exercise providence toward secondary beings without contamination; whilst divine protection has, besides, the further task of maintaining all things in their proper being and of founding them securely upon the higher principles.”) No effected being contains the cause; on the contrary, the cause precontains all effects, being enthroned above them, i.e., in complete apprehension and dominance, residing nowhere save in itself, yet by this self-inherence constituting all things that flow from its blessed fecundity. For in this self-abiding transcendence it is “omnipresent in that sense in which causes are capable of immanence in their effects, namely by unstinted self-bestowal.” In the last part of the proposition, Proclus, confirming the strength of his account, makes bold to answer the objections raised by the aged Parmenides at the beginning of the Platonic dialogue bearing his name.⁵ The cause is not “dismembered and

⁵In fact, Proclus himself seems to raise the same difficulty in prop. 23, where, in order to prevent the diremption of unity in the source of perfection, he posits a mean term called ‘participated substance’ between the unparticipated monad and the participating particulars. Although he offers a defense of this novelty, it would seem to represent a decisive break with the logic of Plotinian metaphysics. Similarly in prop. 64 Proclus argues that “every original monad gives rise to two series,” the complete and the incomplete, descending in parallel lines, as it were, from their origin, and expressing two different aspects of the monad. One might ask why one and the same causality should diverge into genera having contrary properties, thus doing violence, it would seem, to the simple potency of the cause as well as the being of the effects as sympathetic likenesses of the cause. The problem reaches epidemic proportions in prop. 81, where the alarmed student learns that “a potency or irradiation, proceeding from the participated to the participant, must link the two; and this medium of participation will be distinct from both.” Fortunately Proclus amends the rather strange conclusions of props. 23, 64, and 81, among others, in the proposition we are now considering, 98.

disparted from itself,” for “it is entire everywhere, and likewise nowhere.” “Whatsoever can participate it at all attains it in its entirety and finds it present as a whole: yet it is also transcendent as a whole. . . . Because it is separate it is not pinched in its self-bestowal if the number of participants be increased; because it is omnipresent the participants never fail of their due portion.” This conclusion is true of every cause, truer as the cause is greater; indeed, the One is infinitely transcendent and infinitely immanent, closer and more intimate to each thing than the same thing to itself, further beyond than the highest being above its least effect.

Proclus expresses the unfolding of the One in the language of fertility, of ecstatic self-giving that fecundates being, the gift of unity and goodness without which reality could not be born and nurtured, the potency through which subordinate causes are imbued with seminal virtue to disseminate their perfections into vast generations. “For to increase the number of processive terms by drawing them from their secret embracement in their causes and advancing them to generation is surely the peculiar office of the gods’ infinite potency,” Proclus writes in proposition 152.

Thus the especial office of generative divinity is the governance of potency, a governance which multiplies and renders fertile the potencies of the generated and spurs them to beget or constitute still other existences. . . . [A]ssuredly the fertile always implants in its consequents the succession of fertility, and so mirrors that Infinitude which is the primordial parent of the universe, whence proceeded all the generative potency whose transcendent prerogative it is to diffuse the divine gifts in their unailing succession.

Sterility is the opposite, the nadir of metaphysical reality; whatever abides sterile is its own death and shrinks into non-being. For though Proclus says of matter, “the principle most remote from the beginning of all things,” that it is “sterile and

a cause of nothing” (prop. 25, cor.), nevertheless even matter in its appetite for form is striving to be fertilized, as it were, that it might

contribute its receptivity to the generation of appearances: “Matter, which is the basis of all things, proceeded from the cause of all things” (prop. 72, cor.). “For even privation of Form is from the Good, since it is the source of all things” (prop. 57); and “the last being [matter] is, like the first, perfectly simple, for the reason that it proceeds from the first alone; but the one is simple as being above all composition, the other as being beneath it” (prop. 59). In proposition 74 Proclus goes so far as to say that “in the resultants, privations are in some sense existent although they are not Forms; for through the unitary power of Being they too have received some feeble irradiation of existence.” The sterile as such, to give a name to sheer negation, is in this sense inferior to the matter or privation burdened with sterility but open to the influx of fertilizing being.

Thus to be ontologically sterile is to be nothing, or rather, not to be at all. Its very name evidences that the sterile (*ἄγονος*) is deprived of causal power and cannot ground a lineage of effects. “If the monad abode sterile within itself, there could be no order and no series” (prop. 21). The hierarchy of beings that testifies to the illimitable good-bestowing of the One could not *be* if its cause were stricken with the negativity of barrenness. In proposition 204, for example, Proclus defends the conclusion of his argument (viz., every divine soul is sovereign over many souls) by the method of *reductio ad absurdum*: because any ontological principle as such is life-giving and salvific, that such a principle should be “lowest, sterile and incapable of perfecting and exalting further beings” is patently self-contradictory. Speaking of the unparticipated out of whose bosom the participated flows forth, Proclus says: “Either it must remain fixed in sterility and isolation, and so must lack a place of honour; or else it will give something of itself, whereof the receiver becomes a participant, whilst the given subsists as a participated term” (prop. 22). Prescinding from Proclus’s

occasional obscure devices for separating the ultimate forms from the effects that should be considered their direct participants, we may say that in his metaphysics fertility or generous bestowal of being necessarily accompanies causality; causation *is* the fecundity of the higher generating the lower, the “breath of God fecundating the waters of the abyss.”

Pairing this truth with what we have already seen about providence as the bonifying and unifying causality of the higher on behalf of the lower, it would be no leap of logic to identify causality, providence, and fertility as three ways of referring to the same reality. The complete “is by nature productive within the limits of its power” (prop. 25), Proclus argues, and making the necessary adjustments we may extend this truth even to the One beyond nature and completeness (“completeness is a part of the Good, and the complete, *qua* complete, imitates the good”), for the One is the *pater omnipotens*, the *principium omnium* which “because of its own goodness is unitarily constitutive of beings.” “For by itself it produces the substantive existence of the secondary principles, the totality of their powers, and their being, in virtue of a single unspeakable transcendence: whence indeed it is named ‘paternal’, as manifesting the unified and boniform potency of the One and the constitutive cause of all secondaries” (prop. 151). The cause provides or looks out for its effects by unbegrudgingly generating their being and the perfections appropriate to their being. In fact, the reality of the cause as cause is exactly this ecstasy of giving, by which the cause no less than the effect is constituted in its proper mode of existence, the cause as cause, the effect as effect. The cause would be no cause without its effect, having no ‘because’ by which to justify its being. Of the One, this conclusion is true in a very special sense: the One *is*, the One can be said to be, only *because* of its effects, only in its effects. With lesser or secondary causes, the case is different: the totality of their being is not identical with the causality they exercise, inasmuch as a *caused* cause depends for its effectiveness upon the One, the giver of all gifts (including the gift of causality).

These reasonings enable us to see a most important truth. The cause, if it is truly higher than the effect, is not parceled out or transformed, it is not internally emptied, by its exercise of providential self-giving. The enunciation of proposition 122 speaks clearly to the point: "All that is divine both exercises providence towards secondary existences and transcends the beings for which it provides: its providence involves no remission of its pure and unity transcendence, neither does its separate unity annul its providence." In the body he adds: "Thus in exercising providence they assume no relation to those for whom they provide, since it is in virtue of being what they are that they make all things good." By its very being divinity makes things good, as proposition 120 asserts:

If the office distinctive of the providential character is the bestowal of good things upon the beings which are its objects, and if every god is a goodness, then either the gods will communicate themselves to no recipient, and there will thus be nothing good in the secondary existences (whence should they procure participation of things good, if not from the principles which have these characters primitively?); or, if they communicate anything, what they communicate is good, and in this way they will exercise providence towards all things. Providence, then, resides primitively in the gods.

Even in horizontal causes, Proclus notes in proposition 27, the producer does not lose his integrity in the begetting of his offspring. Much more, then, with the vertical cause: "For the product is not a parcelling-out of the producer. . . . Nor is it a transformation: the producer is not the matter of what proceeds from it, for it remains as it is, and its product is a fresh existence beside it." It would be better to say that in emptying itself the cause remains full, indeed its ripe fullness as a cause

providing itself to its effect is its very causality: to be a cause is to be overfull of being, life, and intellect, and to impart these by outflow to the generated is to be founded ever more strongly in the perfections one multiplies by generosity. “Thus the engenderer is established beyond alteration or diminution, multiplying itself in virtue of its generative potency and furnishing from itself (ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ) secondary substances.” Causality as the overflowing of a more than ample goodness comes out very strongly in proposition 131.

Neither deficiency nor mere fullness is proper to the gods. Whatever is deficient is imperfect; and being itself incomplete, it is impossible that it should bestow completion on another. And that which is full is sufficient merely to itself, and still unripe for communication. Hence that which fulfils others and extends to others its free bestowals must itself be more than full. If, then, the divine from its own substance fulfils all things with the good which it contains, each divinity is filled to overflowing; and if so, it has established first in its own nature the character distinctive of its bestowals, and in virtue of this extends to others also communications of its superabundant goodness.

THE EFFECT AS LIKENESS OF THE CAUSE:
ΠΡΟΟΔΟΣ AND ΕΠΙΣΤΡΟΦΗ

Although we have not yet made explicit how the effect is a *likeness* of the cause, surely this will not be difficult to see in light of all that has preceded. Proposition 18 established that “everything which by its existence provides to others itself primitively is that which it communicates to the recipients.” Whatsoever the recipient receives must be derived in its totality,

then, from what is in the cause in a higher mode. The recipient therefore has in its own way the primitive itself. In proposition 21 we discovered that “in every order there is some common element, a continuity and identity in virtue of which some things are said to be co-ordinate and others not,” wherefore “the identical element is derived by the whole order from a single originative principle.” Thus the element that makes all recipients co-ordinate in being is a certain continuation of the identity of their origin. Proposition 25 demonstrated that “whatever is complete proceeds to generate those things which it is capable of producing, *imitating* in its turn the one originative principle of the universe.” Putting these main elements together, Proclus can argue in proposition 28 that “every producing cause brings into existence things like to itself before the unlike.” His approach to the proof is well worth observing. Reiterating that cause (producer) and effect (product) cannot be “identical without qualification or equal in potency,” he sets up an exhaustive disjunct: “either they are altogether distinct from each other or they are at once united and distinguished.” Take the first option. “If they be altogether distinct they will be incapable of association (*ἄσύμβατα ἔσται*), and there will be no sympathy (*συμπαθές*) between effect and cause. Accordingly the one will not participate the other, if they be completely diverse: for the participated bestows upon the participant communion (*κοινωνία*) in that which it participates. But it is necessary that the effect should participate the cause, inasmuch as it derives its being from the latter.” Participation *means* association of effect with its cause, a sympathetic bond of communion between participant and participated, insofar as the former derives all that it has from the latter and therefore depends entirely upon it. Separating the two in such a way that they are ranged as distinct antagonists jealous of their individuality, or, worse, as mutually indifferent entities who go their several ways, terminates in the absurdity of denying the reality of participation, indeed the very reality of being and order and beauty, which has already been set upon firm foundations in earlier propositions.

The other disjunct remains: that cause and effect are both distinct (because they are not identical) and united (because they cannot be wholly dissociated or divorced). It is impossible, continues Proclus, that the effect “would in equal degrees participate the cause and fail to participate it, so that it would both derive and in like manner not derive its being from its cause.” Likewise impossible is a scenario in which the effect were *more* distinguished than united, for “the engendered would be more alien from the engenderer than akin to it and less adjusted than maladjusted; its capacity for sympathy would be less than its incapacity.” Yet as we have seen, the characteristic mark of participation is the adjustment or proportioning of effect to cause and the effect’s total reception, according to its capacity, of all that the cause bestows. “Inasmuch, then, as derivative principles are in their very being cognate and sympathetic with their causes, inasmuch as they are by nature dependent from them and desire to be conjoined to them . . . it is plain that products are more united to their producing causes than they are distinguished from them.” The relation of effect and cause is therefore proved to be a *κοινωνία* of both without confusion or corruption of their truly distinct natures. “But things which are united to, more than they are distinguished from, those principles with which they are most closely united,” Proclus concludes, “are like them more than they are unlike.”

In fact, because that which is totally unlike the cause cannot in any way be produced, Proclus’s enunciation of the proposition (“things like before unlike”) has to be understood to mean: the producer ceases to produce when, or insofar as, the likeness ceases; the effect as effect, no matter how lowly it be, always bears some impress of the presence of the cause. A fuller explanation of this comes in proposition 140:

Nor, again, is the fit participant baulked of its participation; so soon as a thing is ready for communion with them [the powers of the gods], straightway they are present—not that in this

moment they approached, or till then were absent, for their activity is eternally unvarying. . . . Thus they extend downwards even to the uttermost existents; and hence it is that even in these appear reflections of the first principles, and there is sympathy between all things, the derivative pre-existing in the primal, the primal reflected in the derivative.

The cause irradiates the effect by communicating itself (and thus both presencing and differencing itself) to the effect, and the having-been-irradiated *is* the likeness whereby the effect shows its generational kinship. Furthermore, by bearing the likeness of the cause the effect draws upon itself the love and providence of the cause, which naturally and unstintingly preserves in being all things that participate it.

In proposition 29 the first implication of proposition 28 is unfolded. Because “it is likeness which generates the product out of the producer,” therefore the procession of effects from their cause, “since in declension it preserves an identity betwixt engenderer and engendered, and manifests by derivation in the consequent that character which the other has primitively, *owes to likeness its substantive existence.*” Once Proclus has demonstrated that likeness is the very being or “substantive existence” of the proceeding effect, several important conclusions follow. Proposition 30 explains more precisely how the product both remains steadfast in the principle and goes forth from it. Again Proclus exploits a *reductio ad absurdum*. If something of the cause came out of it entirely in the activity of production, this hypothetical something would no longer maintain its diffused identity with the cause, thus destroying the unity and priority of the cause and the sympathy of effect and cause. If on the other hand the power of the cause were not to go forth into effects and constitute the effects as different (“a new thing. . . distinct and separate”) from the cause, the cause would be sterile and unfulfilled as a cause, indeed would not

deserve the name. Procession without remaining would be sheer difference, remaining without proceeding would be sheer identity. To proceed and withal remain, to remain and yet proceed, is precisely what participation means. "In so far, then, as it has an element of identity with the producer, the product remains in it; in so far as it differs it proceeds from it. But being like it, it is at once identical with it in some respect," namely as the full expression of what the cause primitively is, "and different from it," namely as the displaced or lowered being of the cause standing outside itself in its effect; "accordingly it both remains and proceeds, and the two relations are inseparable." Proposition 125 gives consummate expression to this dialectic of identity and difference:

All procession, operating through remission, multiplies its first characters in declining to derivative terms; but these latter receive a rank in their own order determined by their likeness to their producing causes. So that the entire procession is in a sense one and identical, although that part which proceeds is distinct from that which remains steadfast, appearing to differ from it in kind because of the remission, but continuous with it and therefore not losing its identity with it, existing as its analogue in the derivative order and so maintaining the unbroken bond of common quality which links the series.

From this conclusion it is not hard to see that the effect can only exist to the extent that it mirrors the cause with unblemished clarity, or better, strives upward to imitate the cause in the most perfect likeness that an inferior can attain. Thus proposition 31, placing proposition 30 in the larger context of the causal hierarchy emanating from the Good towards which all things strive by appetite for their perfection, shows that whatever proceeds from a principle "reverts in respect of its

being upon that from which it proceeds,” for “each attains [the Good] through the mediation of its own proximate cause.” The appetite for the universal Good whose potency fills all causes with being necessarily translates into an appetite for every subordinate cause upon which a thing depends, since there is no metaphysical opposition, nay there is seamless continuity, between the all-encompassing power of the One and the power it bestows upon subordinate causes through its generous self-giving. “Through that which gives [the effect] being,” therefore, “it attains its well-being; the source of its well-being is the primary object of its appetite; and the primary object of its appetite is that upon which it reverts.” The effect’s existence, its procession from the cause, *is* the effect’s *ἐπιστροφή* or return to its causes; the effect exists only by participating and (to speak dynamically) going back evermore to its cause in virtue of the constitutive likeness it bears thereto. As Proclus explains in proposition 32,

That which reverts endeavours to be conjoined in every part with every part of its cause, and desires to have communion in it and be bound to it. But all things are bound together by likeness, as by unlikeness they are distinguished and severed. If, then, reversion is a communion and conjunction, and all communion and conjunction is through likeness, it follows that all reversion must be accomplished through likeness.

Thus as the superior produces by multiplying or irradiating itself into likenesses which have their faces turned towards their unity or sun, the inferior attains union with its origin of light (and thus comes into being, remains in being) by turning towards, rushing to embrace, the cause in which it first and best and eternally exists. “This reversion of the end upon the beginning makes the whole order one and determinate, convergent upon itself and by its convergence revealing unity in multiplicity” (prop. 146).

With proposition 35, “Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it,” Proclus elegantly binds together many separate threads of his work. As we have shown in different ways, this threefold relation arises from the very nature of causality and participation. Here Proclus proves the point by running through six logical combinations (remaining without proceeding or reverting, proceeding without reverting or remaining, etc.), showing that whenever one of the three elements is withdrawn, the metaphysical structure of reality crumbles into unintelligibility. One would have an effect that never leaves the cause, or fails to communicate sympathetically with its cause, or reverts upon an alien principle, or lacks a natural tendency to its perfection, or enjoys no part of the reality of its cause, or returns without having ever left—all of which are patently absurd because they attempt at once to maintain the reality of the effect and to deny something essential to and constitutive of the effect. Although Proclus seems to arrive at his conclusion by a process of elimination, in fact he has paved the way for it by defending the procession and remaining of the effect in proposition 30, the reversion in propositions 31, 32, and 34, and the cyclical activity of procession and reversion in proposition 33. In the propositions that follow 35, especially 38 (“that which requires mediation in its procession requires it also in its reversion”), he emphasizes the orderliness and cooperation of terms within the larger hierarchy of intertwined causes and effects. It is as though he wishes several times in succession to underscore the importance of this threefold view of causality, so central is it to grounding logically (and thus ontologically) the metaphysical order of goodness and unity in the universe.

Procession and reversion, therefore, are the same relationship viewed dynamically from the opposite poles of cause and effect, and remaining or immanence is the same relationship viewed in stasis. The cause bestows itself on the effect, the effect desires and assimilates the cause, and the effect rests in the cause just as the cause precontains the effect. The effect’s appetite for fullness of being is the desire of salvation (preservation), a desire

no less caused and dependent than the being that desires. The reversion of the lower to the higher is the providence of the higher for the lower; the cause turns the effect back to itself because the effect desires union with the cause of which it is a likeness. In vertical causality the very appetite of the effect is effected by the object of its appetite. Thus the cause is itself the source of the desire and, when the cause has been in some way attained through union, it is also the source of fulfillment to the one desiring. Just as procession is multiplicative and need-making, reversion is unifying and fulfilling, and remaining is resting in the identity of precontainment, in the principles of one's being. The entifying power of reversion is *eros epistreptikos*, the desire to be united to the principium from which one comes and on which one depends. Providential love, the procession of the cause into its effect and thus the return of the effect to its cause and its steadfast abiding there, is, as Ps.-Dionysius will later show, the divine and metaphysical substance of *eros*.

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