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TURNING TO GOD: SOME ASPECTS OF THE NEOPLATONIC CONVERSION

Abstract. – The paper examines the concept of *epistrophé* in the Neoplatonic metaphysics of procession and causation, pagan and Christian, focusing on Plotinus, Proclus, and pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Plato's and Aristotle's invitation to turn to the Good, as well as the Stoic ethics of turning towards oneself, have been adopted and elaborated into a mystical doctrine of ascent to the first Principle. At the moral level, *epistrophé* has anagogical significance and is linked to memory, contemplation, and love. At the metaphysical level, *epistrophé* is identified as the self-constitutive act of the first reality proceeding from the One (i.e. the Intellect-Being). Since this, the newly generated reality imitating the One, is turned to itself while converting to the One, the conversion, at the level of Intellect, coincides with self-conversion. Already in Plotinus, but principally in Proclus, conversion is integrated into the Neoplatonic emanation process, giving it its unique character and triadic structure of abiding, proceeding, and returning (*moné*, *próodos*, and *epistrophé*). It also sets new rules of causality, according to which the highest Cause must always remain immutable and transcendent, even when giving itself forth. In the pagan metaphysics of Plotinus' Neoplatonism, *epistrophé* is presented primarily as an act of creative (self-)contemplation of the Cause, as well as of the thing caused, while in the Christian theology of pseudo-Dionysius, it manifests itself as a mutual turning to each other, i.e. as the inclination of God sending his light through all of creation, and as the ascent of that creation loving its Maker.

Introduction

In his work *Exercices spirituelles et philosophie antique*, Pierre Hadot says that all ancient philosophy was essentially a process of conversion,[1] stressing the dual meaning of this term, which in French (and similarly in English) can mean either 'reverting' to one's origins (*epistrophé*) or 'converting' in the sense of a spiritual transformation (*metánoia*), with the two meanings often intertwined.

For a thorough presentation of the historical background of the term *epistrophé*, I refer the reader to the seminal study of P. Aubin, *Le*

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[1] Hadot, *Exercices spirituelles et philosophie antique*, 232.

problème de la "conversion", which concludes with the survey of its use in the 4th century. Without presuming to supply comprehensive research for later periods, in these short pages, the present paper will focus on some of the Neoplatonic thinkers that were unmistakably inspired by the rich implications of the concept. Relying on Aubin's research, according to which the philosophical meaning of the term *epistrophé* becomes prominent in Plotinus' thought,[2] my presentation, after a brief survey of the pre-Plotinian background of the concept, will first examine various aspects of Plotinus' metaphysical conversion in the sense of 'turning back/returning' to the Principle: 1. The constitution and existence of plurality proceeding from the One; 2. The knowledge of the Principle and the self-knowledge; and 3. The relationship with the Principle expressed in terms of contemplation, memory, and love. I will proceed by presenting the echoes and the development of the concept in the thought of two prominent figures of pagan and Christian Neoplatonism respectively, focusing on the role of *epistrophé* in Proclus' causal system and in the mystic imagery of pseudo-Dionysius, particularly in his works *On Divine Names* and *Celestial Hierarchy*.

1. Plato's Turning to the Truth and Some Examples of Pre-Plotinian Conversion

To honour our three Neoplatonists, we must first 'convert' to Plato, who, in fact, offers some good examples of interlacing the two above-mentioned meanings of conversion. Unfortunately, these instances are not signalled by the consistent use of the Greek term *epistrophé,* which appears only rarely. The reason for this spare use lies, according to Aubin, in the fact that the Greek verb *epistréphein* (and the noun *epistrophé*) mostly expressed a common meaning of physical turning to, or mental focus on, something, rather than the philosophical or ethical conversion that is implied by the modern term.[3] Nevertheless, we find in Plato clear indications of the later Neoplatonic meaning. Firstly, there is the idea of turning (*trépein*) to the Truth of the ideal world (the Sun) in his allegory of the cave, where this turnover depends on the anagogical power of philosophy. The liberated captive turns his neck to look at the light and, when it scorches his eyes, he momentarily averts his gaze (*apotréphein*) until his eyes become adjusted to the light. He ends up returning to the cave in order to illumi-

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[2] And, before him, in the philosophy of Epictetus who, however, focused primarily on the ethical connotation of 'turning towards oneself' (Aubin, *Le problème de la "conversion"* 49s.).

[3] Aubin, *ibid.* 17–31 and 181–190. The author distinguishes between "philosophers" (meaning pagan authors) and Christian writers, where the use of the term *epistrophé*, before Plotinus, is either limited to the more literal meaning of the word or is consistent with its religious meaning in the Scriptures.

nate the other captives and lead them up (*anágein*) to the Sun (*R.* 515d in 517a). Another instance of philosophical conversion can be found in *Phaedo*, where Socrates states that those people who care about their soul commit themselves to philosophy and turn (*trépein*) to where it leads them (*hyphegeîsthai; Phd.* 82d). But there is an even more powerful, though maybe less obvious, allusion in Aristophanes'– half philosophical, half comical – myth in the *Symposium* on the cut-off human halves who want to leave behind (*apeltheîn*) their unsatisfying existence by turning to each other (*trépein*) and try to regain the lost unity of their original natures, with Eros leading the way (*ágein; Smp.* 191e in 193c). The myth fully brings out the anagogical role of Eros, who in the later story, told by Socrates, is identified as a philosopher. The idea is spelled out in the inscription placed around the depiction of Plato's androgyne on a 17th-century medallion: *PHILOSOPHIA DUCE REGREDIMUR.*

Aubin points out another aspect of conversion that approaches the literal meaning of physical turning ((*epi*)*stréphein* and *trépein*) in the *Timaeus*: the Soul construed according to the mind of the Constructer is "revolving within herself", and this movement is imitated by the movement of heavens and of celestial bodies.[4] Aristotle later argued that the circular movement is perfect and therefore precedes the rectilinear one, as can be observed in the revolutions (*stréphein*) of the heavens (*De caelo* I.2.268b–269b). According to

Frontispiece. Reverse of medal of Passeri, from I. P. Tomasinus, *Illustrium virorum elogia*, Padua, 1630 (photo: Warburg Institute)

later Platonists, the world Soul revolving within herself mimics the stability of the Intellect, and by this intelligent movement creates the sensible world: Plutarch, for example, claims that the circular movement of the Soul results from the presence of the Intellect turning the Soul towards itself (*De procr. an. in Ti.* 1024c–d[5]), and further that the Soul attracts matter and "converts its motions" (*Plat. Quaest.* 1003a). Here, the metaphysical revolutions and conversions have cosmological consequences, which is an important source of Neoplatonic metaphysics and cosmology.

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[4] Among those, the fixed stars are "revolving uniformly in the same spot", but the others (the planets) "keep swerving and wandering" (*Ti.* 36d and 40b).

[5] Some of the older translations understand the subject of the expression *eis heautòn epistréphei* to be Intellect turning towards itself (Ricard, and also Aubin, *Le problème de la "conversion"* 51). However, it seems more plausible that the higher reality attracts and converts the lower one (as the Soul attracts the matter in *Plat. Quaest.* 1003a), therefore I prefer to read the text "(the Intellect) makes her (the Soul) turn around to him" with Cherniss and Ferrari-Baldi.

Plato's ideal of turning to the Truth stems from his general conviction that all things naturally tend to and yearn for the Good. This same conviction is behind Aristotle's ethical ideal of virtue and happiness.[6] In the context of Platonic dualism, this ideal led to the abandonment of the sensible world and a return to the intelligible one. In ethics, turning away from the sensible world outside us is often understood as turning *within* oneself. This attitude results in the contempt of the sensible life and is based on the conviction, that philosophy leads the man from earth to heaven, his true home. It is expressed in the motif of "flight of the mind", which was common in stoicism and used to be attributed to the Middle-Stoic thinker Posidonius, although it has been demonstrated that the motif precedes not only Posidonius but also Plato, and can be traced to testimonies as early as Pindar's poems.[7] The idea is linked to an even older belief in the power of poetic imagination travelling the earth and the sky, which is an allegory of the spiritual ascent and illumination. Parmenides' poem presents one such example of soul-travelling. Dodds has linked these spiritual experiences with the spreading of the shamanist movement in ancient Greece, referring to Aristeas, Epimenides, and Pythagoras as three principal figures of Greek shamanism.[8]

These three legendary sages are also named by the 2nd-century rhetorician Maximus of Tyre in his dissertations on the liberation of the soul which turns from the earthly existence to the spiritual life, as if awakened from a spiritual slumber (*Or.* 9.6 in 10.1–3).[9] At the cosmic level, there is a similar motif in the work of the Middle-Platonic philosopher Alcinous, who claims that God created the world Soul "by awakening and turning towards himself both its (*sc.* the Soul's) intellect and itself, as out of some deep coma or sleep" (*Didasc.* 14).[10] This thought is believed to be inspired by Plutarch's interpretation of Plato's cosmic Soul,[11] whose prudential part is said to fall asleep occasionally, which, according to Plutarch, is a sign of its inherent evil (*De procr. an. in Ti.* 1026e–f and 1024b). Already, the concept of conversion displays the double meaning of spiritual progress and means of cosmic demiurgy.

In the centuries dividing Plato and Plotinus, Platonism imbibed many ideas from other philosophical schools, Stoicism among them. It

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[6] See Plato, *Phlb.* 20d, and Aristotle, *EN* 1094a 3.

[7] Jones, "Posidonius and the Flight of the Mind through the Universe", 97–113.

[8] Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational,* 139–146.

[9] Cf. also *Or.* 11.10. Trapp in: Maximus of Tyre. *The Philosophical Orations,* 87, n. 8 and 104, n. 36, mentions the connection between the motif of the soul's flight and the philosophical concept of *epistrophé.*

[10] Transl. by J. Dillon

[11] Jones, "Posidonius and the Flight of the Mind", 108, and Loenen, "Albinus' Metaphysics. An Attempt at Rehabilitation", 48s.

is in Epictetes' ethics that we can observe the more frequent use of the word *epistrophé* with its technical meaning of spiritual conversion. The term is applied not so much to the Platonic abandonment of the sensible world for the intelligible one, but to the human conversion as thorough transformation and liberation.[12] Although the Stoic concept is essentially different from the Platonic one, they share the Socratic postulate of self-knowledge.

2. Plotinus and *epistrophé*

With Plotinus, the term *epistrophé* acquires new metaphysical dimensions, which are hard to trace to a direct source.[13] Plotinus relies firmly on the conviction, expressed by his predecessors, that all things strive for the Good, to which "all things direct their activity" (V 6(24).5.18).[14] This striving, or desire,[15] is now transferred to the highest ontological level, where the conversion, or reversion to the One/the Good, is a necessary condition for the second hypostasis, Intellect, to come into existence. For Intellect only "becomes" Intellect when the indeterminate reality, also termed the pre-Intellect or inchoate Intellect,[16] turns back to the One, from which it emanates (V 4(7).2.4, V 2(11).1.7–13 in VI 7(38).37.20). The process is repeated at the level of the third hypostasis, Soul, which in turning back gives birth to a separate reality, Eros, which Plotinus denominates as Soul's eye (III 5(50).3.13). Soul is also the first reality that, by averting its "eye" from the world of intelligible forms, disturbs the eternal stillness and sets time in motion. At this level, we are already speaking of the world Soul, which is also turning back, gazing at the intelligible world, while it imparts life and being unto the entire cosmos, which came to life with the Soul's "descent" as a beautiful image of the beautiful intelligible archetype. This process of procession and reversion continues right to the end of the ontological ladder. At the end of it, there is matter, which is non-being and incapable of similar reversion, and it therefore remains dark and formless. However, even matter is credited with some unspecific, and rather bold yearning for the being and the

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[12] Aubin, *Le problème de la "conversion"*, 49 and 62s.

[13] *Ibid.* 184s. Witt, in his article on possible connection between Plotinus and Clement of Alexandria, broaches the subject of *epistrophé* in Clement's *Stromata* ("The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria", 202–204). The author mentions possible common sources, Platonic and Stoic (Posidonius among them), and Clement's particular reference to the Pythagorean demand "that the man must become one" (*Strom*. 4.23.151.3). He concludes, however, that there is not enough evidence of a direct influence on Plotinus.

[14] See also VI 7(38).26.7 and 42.13, VI 8(39).13.13 and I 8(51).2.3.

[15] See VI 8(39).13.13. On this topic, see the seminal study of Arnou, *Le désir de Dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin.*

[16] For the early stage of the genesis of the Intellect, see Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect,* 11s. and 69–78.

Good, which is why it offers itself as the receptacle of forms in Plato's sense of the term (I 8(51).14.35 and III 5(50).9.53).

The One. Since for Plotinus, everything imitates the thing prior to itself, it is reasonable to assert that in turning toward the Good, Intellect imitates the Good itself. As the latter has nothing prior to itself to which it might turn, it can only turn to itself. One of the great challenges of Plotinus' metaphysics is, in fact, coaxing out a clear view regarding this reflexive act of the absolutely simple first Principle. [17] In an early treatise (V 4(7).2.16ss.), Plotinus speaks about a "self-consciousness" and a "manner of thinking different from the thinking of Intellect". Elsewhere, on the other hand, he denies the One any self-consciousness or self-thinking: e.g. in III 9(13).9.13ss., V 6(24).5.1–5, and 6.30, where he comes to the conclusion that the One needs knowledge of neither itself nor another; it does not even need itself (VI 9(9).6.21). In V 3(49).13.23s., Plotinus says that self-consciousness "is a consciousness of something that is many",[18] and in VI 7(38).37, he explicitly rejects the Aristotelian idea of the self-thinking first Principle. Behind this aversion to any auto-reflexive feature of the One lies the conviction that the absolute Simple cannot turn to itself (V 3(49).1.3s.), and that asserting the opposite means introducing a duality into the One. On the other hand, however, there are sections in the *Enneads*, where Plotinus does speak, though reticently, of the One being in some way directed to itself: either he allows for a "kind of" (*hoîon*) self-consciousness of the One, as in V 4(7), or he speaks of self-knowledge, will, and even love of itself (VI 8(39) 15 in 16). Opinions as to the reflexivity of the One differ, particularly when the One's reflexive *epistrophé* seems to result in the genesis of the new reality, Intellect. Two passages seem particularly controversial, namely V 1(10).6.18 and 7.5. Due to Plotinus' inconsistent use of reflexive pronouns (*hautós/autós*), two different readings are possible that are not necessarily mutually exclusive; they are, however, important as evidence (or as a lack thereof) of the One's reflexivity. The first interpretation makes the One turn to *itself* when producing the Intellect; but according to the second interpretation, it is the pre-Intellect that turns towards *it* (*sc.* the One), and thus becomes Intellect proper.[19] An over-

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[17] See Santa Cruz, "L'Un, est-il intelligible?", 75–79, where the author analyses various expressions of the first Principle's reflexivity in Plotinus.

[18] All passages from Plotinus cited in this paper are taken from Armstrong's translation of the *Enneads.*

[19] The first reading is defended by H.-S.[2], Harder, Bréhier, Trouillard *La procession Plotinienne*, 71, Rist *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 267s., n. 44, Hadot "Review of H-S2", 94, and Perl in: Plotinus. *Ennead V.1.*, 125s. The second one is sustained by Atkinson *Ennad V 1*, 135–140, and O'Brien "Immortal and Necessary Being in Plato and Plotinus", 44–46. There is also a third interpretation that applies the first reading (the One turning to itself) to 6.18, and the second one (the Intellect turning to the One) to 7. 5, and that seems to me very plausible. It was already adopted by Ficino and re-proposed and defended by

view of the debate is given by Bussanich, who favours the idea of some kind *epistrophé* of the One.[20] However, I prefer the formulation of P. Hadot, who believes that any self-orientation of the One should be viewed merely as "a state of self-immobility".[21]

The Intellect. Since the generation of Intellect implies a certain progression from unity into plurality, it is easier to distinguish between the conversion towards the Principle and conversion towards itself, although this distinction, too, is only theoretical. Apart from what we have read in V 1(10).7.5 (and possibly in V 1(10).6.18), Plotinus also claims that "it is necessary that Intellect exists in its thinking, and that the best Intellect, the one which does not look outside itself, thinks what is before it; for in turning to itself it turns to its principle" (VI 9(9).2.33ss.). Turning towards the One, the Intellect is also turning towards itself, for it is in this self-conversion that it sees the One. Intellect is not the One, but is *other* than It, and is therefore incapable of seeing It as the absolute One. The Intellect's vision is multiplied in the plurality of ideas that it keeps, as if locked inside itself, and by contemplating these ideal forms within itself, it contemplates itself. Through itself, it sees the One that is not a direct object of its contemplation but that remains transcendent, at the same time as It is immanent in the unity-plurality of the intelligible world.

Unfortunately, Plotinus is not always clear on this point, either. This is how he describes the progression from the One in a passage that reveals the importance of conversion:

> The One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back <*epestráphe*> upon the One <*eis autó*> and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it <*pròs autó*>. Its halt and turning towards the One <*pròs ekeîno*> constitutes being, its gaze upon the One <*pròs autó*>, Intellect. Since it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it becomes at once Intellect and being. (V 2(11).1.9–13)

Here, we have a problem, first of not being certain that the pronoun *autó* (it) truly refers to the One, since the One is undoubtedly marked by *ekeîno* (that) in the next line. More importantly, some older

Igal in "La génesis de la inteligencia en un pasaje de las *Enéadas* de Plotino (V I.7.4–35)", 135, and supported by Armstrong in Plotinus. *Ennead V*, 35, n. 1, Lloyd "Plotinus on the Genesis of Thought and Existence", 159s., and partially also by Rist, who admits the possibility of applying the second interpretation to V 1(10).7.5 (*ibid.*).

   [20] Bussanich, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, 37–43.
   [21] *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 320s., n. 4. Cf. Plotin V 4(7).2.20–23. See also Lacrosse *L'amour chez Plotin*, 114.

editions have *hautó* (itself) in lines 10 and 12,[22] which supports the supposition that the passage describes two (conceptually) distinct moments of conversion, giving birth to Being (by turning towards the One) and Intellect (by looking towards itself). The point-counterpoint construction *mén… dé* in lines 11 and 12 (*he mèn* (*pròs ekeîno*) … *he dè* (*pròs (h)autó*)), also clearly indicates two different stages in the genesis of the second hypostasis. This interpretation is defended by Reale.[23] Beutler and Theiler agree that affirming the existence of the Intellect through its self-contemplation is perfectly consistent with Plotinus' philosophy.[24] Nonetheless, they defend the reading of the text that according to their opinion preserves the unity of the object of the Intellect's conversion, namely the One. In agreement with this, I would add that it seems more probable that the *he mèn* and *he dè* distinguish between the "turning" that constitutes "being" and the "gaze" that constitutes "Intellect", rather than between "it" and "itself".[25]

Still, the self-conversion of the Intellect is not to be dismissed, as is evident from another passage, where Plotinus talks about the dual Intellect: the Intellect "in love", "drunk", and "out of its mind" when contemplating the One; and the other one "sober" and "in its right mind" (VI 7(38).35.24–34). Of course, it is always the same Intellect, which is capable of thinking and of not thinking (ll. 29s.). The "double Intellect" here, reflects the Intellect's double orientation, upwards and inside (to use spatial expressions), as is evident from what follows: "For when it (*sc.* the Intellect) saw *him* (*sc.* the One), it had offspring and was intimately aware of their generation and existence within it; and when it sees *these* (*sc.* offspring, the forms), it is said to think" (ll. 30s.). As we have seen, for the Intellect, contemplating the forms within itself equals contemplating itself.

Plotinus uses different expressions to determine the relationship of the Intellect with the One: not only *epistrophé,* in V 2(11).1, but also gaze/look (*blépon, theá*), and stillness and pure being (*stásis* and *éste pròs autó*), which all highlight the motionless, eternal nature of Intellect and Being. The *epistrophé* of Intellect to the One and to itself can also be replaced by the terms of thinking, intellectual vision, desire,[26] and even love. The first stage of the Intellect's existence is marked

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[22] Creuzer-Moser's, for one (p. 308), reconciling the text with Ficino's translation of *autó* as *seipsum*; *cf.* also Bouillet's translation.

[23] In Radice, *Plotino. Enneadi*, p. 1196, although Radice's translation there does not exactly follow the Greek text with *hautó* in l. 10 and 12.

[24] I b, 512; cf. VI 7(38).35.24ss. above.

[25] Most editions (H.-S.[2], MacKenna-Page, Igal, Harder-Beutler-Theiler, Armstrong, Bréhier, Gerson (ed.)) keep *autó*. Kalligas' recent commentary (261s.) does not even consider the former option.

[26] See V 6(24).5.9. This desire can also be seen as double (see Lavaud, "Désir et pensée", 122ss.). Cf. III 8(30).11.22.

as indeterminate sight, as it "did not see the Good, but lived towards it and depended on it" (VI 7(38).16.10–16).[27] This vision becomes clearer when it is filled with what it is looking at.[28] The intelligible world is also presented as a living being directing its life to what is its source and end, "for that from which its life comes (*ex hoû*) is also that to which it goes" (*eis hò zêi*; VI 6(34).18.19).[29] In Plotinus, then, we also have the circular "movement" of the Intellect, whose end is at the same time its beginning. We notice that Plotinus often does not even bother to use the verb (*epistréphein*) but prefers to indicate this orientation with prepositions alone.[30]

The soul. The conversion of the soul seems to be another matter. Even the highest one, the Soul-hypostasis, is never capable of the same self-absorption that characterizes the One and, to a lesser degree, the Intellect. Its desire for the One is impressed with privation,[31] and its turning back to the Good requires a mediator, an organ of sight, so to speak, which is love (*éros*). It is not the "drunk" love of the Intellect, but a deeply rooted need. Here, Plotinus was undoubtedly inspired by Plato's metaphysics of love from *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. In VI 7(38).31, the soul's *epistrophé* is accompanied by passionate love and affection, which lead the individual soul to Beauty and the Good. Erotic *epistrophé* has an unmistakably anagogical character, as it marks the ascent of the soul to the Good. *Éros* – the eye – is also the instrument of contemplation of the soul imitating the Intellect. Consequently, the contemplative *epistrophé* of the soul results in creation, but a more "projective" type, for while the Intellect's self-contemplation results in the world of intelligible forms contained in it, the soul "appears outside"; it gives birth to its reflection, thus creating the sensible world.[32] Unlike the Intellect, the soul can and does avert its loving gaze away from its origins, turning to other realities that it has created, giving the word *epistréphein* the distinct meaning of 'paying attention to something'. Thus, our individual souls pay attention to lower things, which is something that the world Soul, or the Soul-hypostasis, never does (IV 3(27).4.24s. and 12.12.). Its course of action creates an ontological distance between itself and higher hypostases, and this distance requires additional effort from the soul converting to them.

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[27] Cf. V 1(10).7.5, V 2(11).1.7–10 and III 8(30).8.33

[28] V 4(7).2.5 and VI 7(38).37.21s.

[29] Cf. V 3(49).16.35–39.

[30] Mostly with *prós* (see e.g., VI 7(38).27.9, III 7(45).6.2 and I 7(54).1.9); the meaning is confirmed by passages where the verb *epistréphein* is used with *prós* (as in V 3(49).16.38 and I 7(54).1.23).

[31] Although the Intellect's desire for the One implies a certain privation, its need is instantly satisfied (see III 8(30).11.40ss.). The Intellect is the god Kronos, "intellect in satiety" (*noûs kóroi*; see V 1(10).4.8ss. and 7.35; cf. Plato, *Cra.* 396b).

[32] V 2(11).1.19–21, III 9(13).3 and V 8(31).12.9.

    This effort manifests itself also as *memory*. As psychic activity and representative faculty of the soul, memory also bears the connotation of a mental focus on something. From Plotinus' reflections on memory,[33] it appears clear that the act of memory, which, according to his words, pertains to the soul alone (without the body; IV 3(27).26), also leads the soul in its ascent to the Good. In this "turning up" (*anastréphein*), love has an important role as the force that sustains the soul's primal yearning for the Good; but the soul's progress depends on its capacity to remember the higher reality (III 5(50).3.35s.). Once it gets there, the soul has no memory left, for "when it is turned (*strapheîsa*), it has nothing between, but comes to Intellect and accords itself to it, and by that accord is united to it without being destroyed" (IV 4(28).2.27s.). But as soon it "puts its head outside", as Plotinus says, it acquires memory (IV 4(28).3.2s.). Its memory is double (the lower and the higher one), and it can lead the soul either way: "In general, the soul is and becomes what it remembers" (*ibid.* l.6).

    The soul also imitates the circular movement, or self-orientation of the Intellect, contemplating itself. The movement of the soul is more dynamic: Plotinus compares it to a choir whose members sing and dance around their leader. Their performance is truly beautiful only when they turn inside and towards their leader (*epestrépse*ᵢ; VI 9(9).8.37–44). This image not only invites a search for one's spiritual centre, but also calls for the restoration of our original unity. At the same time, it explains perfectly how the soul's conversion to its Principle coincides with its conversion to itself. This self-conversion also brings self-knowledge (V 3(49).8.30). This is, as Plotinus says, a "reasoning which really belongs to the true soul: for true reasoning is an operation of acts of the intelligence, […] so in spite of everything the soul will be at peace, turned to (*prós*) itself and resting in itself (I 1(54).9.18–24).

    The conversion of the Intellect and the highest Soul to itself, therefore, coincides with their turning back to the One.[34] As for the individual soul, its turning inside is more often than not understood as turning *away* from the sensible world. Thus, its conversion acquires the anagogical character which counterbalances any possible turning downwards and fall. But this is only the first step on its way, leading up to the Good. Unlike in the case of the eternal hypostases, the ascent of the individual soul takes place in time, and for that reason its self-contemplation cannot automatically coincide with its mystical union with the One.

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[33] IV.3(27).25–IV 4(28).9 and the treatise *On Sense-Perception and Memory* (IV 6(41)).

[34] Gerson *Plotinus*, 192. Cf. Bertozzi 2020, 252, who distinguishes between self-reversion towards oneself and reversion towards the generator and sees this self-constitutive *epistrophé* as a sort of double movement.

3. The Causal Triad in Proclus

Plotinus' theory of procession from and corresponding reversion to the abiding first Principle was adopted and refined by Proclus, who, in applying his triad *moné-próodos-epistrophé* to every level of reality, deviates from his predecessors, among whom the said triad was already in use, but in a less systemized manner. In this trinitarian structure, conversion counterbalances a previous dynamic of rest and procession. At the level of Intellect, procession and conversion coincide since there is no 'before' or 'after' in the eternity. In this triad, *epistrophé* represents the conversive aspect of a unitary "movement" that cannot be disjointed, for it is a "unity [that] can be differentiated, but not divided".[35] Proclus, as well as Plotinus, avails himself of the image of a circle whose centre, radius, and circumference are sensible manifestations of the intelligible triadic structure of rest, procession, and conversion.[36]

In the *Elements of Theology,* the triadic structure is applied to his theory of causation, according to which everything produced remains in its principle, proceeds from it, and reverts to it.[37] The metaphysical rest, *moné*, refers to both terms: not only does the producing cause remain the same when producing something (thus when imitating the One, see *Prop.* 26), but the thing produced also remains and proceeds "as the two relations are inseparable" (*Prop.* 30):[38]

Prop 30: All that is immediately produced by any principle both remains in the producing cause and proceeds from it

Prop 31: All that proceeds from any principle reverts in respect of its being upon that from which it proceeds.

Prop 32: All reversion is accomplished through a likeness (*homoiótes*) of the reverting terms to the goal of reversion.

Props. 30 and 32 complement each other's argument, for the reverting thing's likeness to its principle must result from the fact that the thing produced somehow remains in its cause. Likeness, in fact, combines sameness and otherness,[39] for saying that A is like B simul-

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[35] Beierwaltes, *Proclo. I fondamenti della sua metafisica,* 202.

[36] See Beierwaltes, *ibid.* 166s., who argues that the circle as the image of Intellect (*eikón noû;* see *In R.* 2.46.18 Kroll) is not to be understood metaphorically but metaphysically, i.e. as the actual thinking dynamism of the Intellect, manifesting itself in rest (the centre), procession (radius) and conversion (circumference).

[37] Cutino, *Proclo – Lo stile e il systema della teologia,* 92, observes that the same triadic structure is also applied to Proclus' argumentation in the *Elements,* where the proposition of the thesis (*moné*) is followed by proof (whose formulation requires a certain distance from the thesis, *próodos*), which eventually leads the argument back (*epistrophé*) to the initial thesis (see e.g., *Prop* 30).

[38] See also *Prop.* 35. All English passages of the *Elements* are taken from Dodd's translation in: Proclus*, The Elements of Theology.*

[39] Beierwaltes, *Proclo*, 174.

taneously conveys the idea that A, regardless of the extent of similarity, must, to some degree, be different from B. *Prop.* 31, moreover, discloses the driving force of the conversion, namely the appetition (*órexis*) for the cause. Here, again, is the idea of all things yearning for the Good, but the reference to likeness can be traced back to a similar conviction that like is drawn to like.[40] Every productive cause is at the same time the final cause, for not only does A, from which B is produced, remain intact, but B in a way is still A, which would mean that B, by turning to A, is also turning to itself. Maybe this is the reason that Proclus does not feel the need to distinguish between the conversion to the Principle and the conversion to itself, just as he does not distinguish between the turning and *re*turning to the Principle.[41] When we speak of bodiless realities, the subject and the object of self-conversion are the same (see *Prop.* 15); but even in turning back to one's Principle, which clearly implies a separate object, the two can be brought together ontologically by the fact that the thing produced also *remains* in its cause.

The appetitive nature of Proclus conversion is further explained in the *Platonic Theology*. Here, he recalls various Plato's attributes of the Divine and presents the triadic constitution of the divine nature, which is good, knowing, and beautiful.[42] The first element of the triad, the Good, is also triadically structured, for it is desirable, capable,[43] and perfect (*ephetón, hikanón, téleion;* I.22 Saffrey-Westerink).[44] The first attribute makes all things turn to the Good, but at the same time, the *ephetón* reflects the transcendent nature of the Good which is desirable only as long as it remains unattainable. Thus, desire is not only a consequence of the separation of the proceeding reality from the first Principle, but is also evidence of that Principle's transcendency. *Hikanón,* on the other hand, indicates the creative power of the Principle, which is not confined in its transcendency but which gives itself forward. Here, Proclus speaks of the generosity that, at the lower levels, manifests itself as a Platonic "love of procreation" (*Smp.* 206e). The divine perfection (*téleion*), in its turn, unites the two, namely the reversive power – which makes all things turn to and circle around their principles, and thereby brings the infinite procession to a halt – and the creative power, which is naturally released in everything that has attai-

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[40] See e.g. Plotinus, VI 9(9).11.33 and II 4(12).10.3. The idea is linked to the "ancient opinion" (Democrites, DK 68 B 164) that like is known by like (cf. Philolaus, DK 44 A 29, and Empedocles (31 B 109).

[41] For the ambiguities of the concept of reversion in Neoplatonism, and particularly in Proclus, see Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism,* 126–128.

[42] *Cf.* Plato, *Phdr.* 246e.

[43] Also "sufficient" in Taylor's translation. I follow Saffrey-Westerink's French translation (*capable*).

[44] *Cf. Phlb.* 20d.

ned perfection.[45] The divine goodness therefore evinces the dual nature of the *epistrophé*: anagogical, powered by the desire for the unattainable transcendent Principle, and creative, reflected in the constitution of being around this Principle.

The *Elements* proceeds to distinguish among three kinds of *epistrophé,* each upgrading the previous one (*Prop.* 39). The most basic is the conversion that secures being (*ousiodôs epistréphei*); the second type is the source of life as well as being (*zotikôs*), and the third type of conversion also brings in knowledge (*gnostikôs*). What drives the conversion is *órexis*, appetition, but this appetition is different for each group of beings: in the first case, the appetition is limited to a bare existence, while in the second one, the "vital appetition" manifests itself as "movement towards the higher". The third group of beings has "cognitive appetition, which is a consciousness (*synaísthesis*) of the goodness of their causes". But what is the reason for these differences? In his commentary, Dodds explains that the three types of conversion belong to three levels of reality in the sensible world (body, living being, and soul), and to another three levels of reality in the intelligible world (being, life, and thinking).[46] He refers the reader to *Prop.* 101, where Proclus names being, life, and intellect as three respective causes (*aítia*) of things that exist, those that also have life, and those that not only exist and live but are also capable of thinking. Clearly, the differences between them spring from their different causes, which are given in order of priority: being before life, and life before intellect. This sequence does not betray their value but points to the quantitative proportion of their effects: being comes first, because most things merely exist; fewer things also have life, and even fewer are beings that can also think. The priority of being is therefore purely existential, since it is clear that the intelligent beings are superior to other living beings, which are, in turn, superior to beings/things that merely exist. The triadic structure of the intelligible world is consequently reflected in the hierarchy of beings in the sensible world, where each group of beings stemming from each of these causes is capable of a different conversion with a different object in view, which is either lifeless existence, unreasonable life, or intelligent life.

Proclus' theory of conversion can be compared to Plotinus' doctrine of contemplation, which represents, as we have seen, one of the conversive aspects of his emanation. For Plotinus, contemplation is a creative activity resulting in a hierarchically structured reality. The hierarchy in the world of sensible beings is a result of different degrees of their separation from the higher world, as well as of their participati-

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45 Cf. Plotinus (V 4(7).1.27 in V 1(10).6.38): when a thing comes to perfection, it produces.

46 Dodds in: Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 222.

on in it. Their powers of contemplation, in fact, greatly depend on their relationship with the realities that precede them: Nature's contemplation is therefore less clear than the soul's contemplation, which itself is, again, different and less powerful than that of the Intellect, in which the subject of contemplation coincides with its object, and where being, life, and thinking are one.[47] In Plotinus, as in Proclus, different abilities, or types of conversion (contemplation, in Plotinus, appetition, in Proclus) result in a hierarchy of being in the sensible world. The difference in Plotinus is that, despite the clearly discernible triad of being, life, and intellect, at the level of the second hypostasis,[48] the Plotinian triad does not presuppose a hierarchy of *causes*.[49]

The creative aspect of *epistrophé* is not self-evident. Lloyd, in fact, problematizes the Neoplatonic doctrine (Proclus' in particular), according to which the reversion to the principle is necessary for establishing the identity of the reality progressing from it: "Will it (*sc.* the newborn reality) not precisely have lost this identity — its newly won, if indeterminate identity, which is due to its having proceeded from, and therefore *not* being, what is above it?"[50] The author believes that the creative character of reversion is incompatible with the concept of reversion to the cause, and should be limited to self-reversion.[51] This objection is valid if we understand *epistrophé* in the strict sense of returning to the cause. However, that would miss the point, particularly in Proclus' causal system, where the "turning back" should be understood rather as a "modification of the procession",[52] which is not separated from the metaphysical rest and progression by time or space, but is immediately integrated into the process of the genesis of plurality from the One. But even if we did understand *epistrophé* in the anagogical sense of return to the principle (rather than in the self-constitutive sense), this return can never be complete.[53] A complete return would make time revolve back into eternity, which would annihilate the existence of all things, including time itself.[54] But how can time no

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[47] See Plotinus III 8(30).4–5 and 8.

[48] Contrarily to Dodds' opinion that it was Plotinus' successors who replaced the dualism of his being-intellect with the triad being-life-intellect (in: Proclus, *Elements of Theology,* 252), Hadot has demonstrated that this triad was already formed in Plotinus' philosophy, and pointed to its Platonic origins ("Etre, vie, pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin", 107–157).

[49] There are some exceptions, where being is said to be prior to Intellect, but not as a higher cause (see V 9(5).8.10–12 and VI 6(34).8.18–20).

[50] Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, 128.

[51] *Ibid.* 129.

[52] Beierwaltes, *Proclo,* 175.

[53] As Aubin points out, *epistrophê* is not a "procession in reverse" (*Le problême de la "conversion"*, 200).

[54] The idea of such *epistrophé,* or rather *anastrophé*, is also rejected by Plotinus in his tractate *On Eternity and Time* (III 7(45).12.2–10).

longer be? Just as a baby cannot return to the womb it came from: what is born cannot become, again, unborn.

4. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite and the Return to God

In the thought of pseudo-Dionysius, we perceive the difference between pagan and Christian philosophers that Aubin has pointed out. The Christian *epistrophé* implies a certain degree of God's inclination towards creation,[55] which manifests itself as God's love for His creation, culminating in the Incarnation. To a lesser extent, this inclination betrays itself as some sort of involvement in the creative process. In pagan Neoplatonism, this involvement is a certain transcendent immanence,[56] for even though Plotinus' first Principle transcends all reality, it is still "good" in the sense of Plato's demiurge, which is "devoid of envy".[57] In Plotinus, this "goodness" is represented as the unlimited and unstoppable power of the Good; but in Proclus, it is at the core of the procession from the Good (see *agathótes* in *ET, Prop.*25), and is believed to lie at the root of the Medieval maxim *bonum diffusivum sui.*[58] In pseudo-Dionysius, God /the Good still remains the same during the process of creation, but at the same time, He is the force that "illuminates, creates, gives life, conserves, and perfects all that is empowered" (*De divinis nominibus (= DN)* IV.4.697C[59]). God's power is also behind every attempt to ascend to Him, while in Plotinus' belief, this *ascent* is the result of a rigorous philosophical application. In the *Celestial Hierarchy,* man's ascent to God follows three paths (of purification, illumination, and perfection; *De caelesti hierarchia = CH* III.3), which themselves are gifts from God,[60] who is Himself purification, illumination, and perfection. It is God who purifies, illuminates, and perfects us.

In Neoplatonism, the conversion to the Good, fuelled by an innate desire for it, is a necessary condition for the existence of everything coming out, and turning back to it. In Proclus and pseudo-Diony-

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[55] Aubin, *Le problême de la "conversion"*, 191–193.

[56] Or, as Hadot put it, an "absent presence" (*Traité 9*, 32).

[57] *Ti.* 29e (Bury's translation).

[58] For the history of this maxim, which used to be traced to pseudo-Dionysius, see Peghaire, "L'axiome *'bonum est diffusivum sui'* dans 1e neoplatonisme et le thomisme", 5–30 who points out that the concept of the self-giving Principle, relying on the above-mentioned passage of *Timaeus*, is already present in Plotinus' conception of the Good unable to remain locked in his perfection, as if envious (*ibid.* 11; cf. Plotinus, V 4(7).1.35ss.). Beierwaltes, however, attributes the origin of this conception to Proclus (*Proclo,* 173; thus, also De Andia, *L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite,* 125). The reluctance to attribute a personal generosity to the pagan first Principle (particularly Plotinus') stems from the consistent differentiation between the undesigned emanation from an impersonal Principle and the organized creation of the loving God. See also Kremer, "*Bonum est diffusivum sui.* Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Neuplatonismus und Christentum", 994–1032.

[59] Jones' translation.

[60] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 41.

sius, it is pointed out, the Good gives a *good* existence.[61] The concept of divine goodness as God's essence is brought up in the *Divine Names*, where it is said that "by being, the Good (as "essential" Good) extends goodness into all beings" (*DN* IV.1.693B). In the word *diateínei,* Peghaire[62] rightly discerns the *diffusio* of the above-mentioned maxim; but this "reaching" implies more than giving itself, for the Good actively *epistréphei,* i.e. "returns all to itself" (*DN* IV.4.700A).[63] Since pseudo-Dionysius has also adopted the creative dynamics of procession and conversion, we are not surprised that all things turn and ascend to the Good. We shall briefly examine next the dynamic of pseudo-Dionysius' conversion in the context of three important concepts of his metaphysics: Light, Spiral and Eros.

The Light. For pseudo-Dionysisus, the divine light is not just a metaphor, but an intelligible archetype of the sensible light and the reflection of the Good itself (*DN* IV.4.697B–C). In this metaphysics of light,[64] "every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights", as says the opening line of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, taken from Scripture (Jas 1.17). "But there is something more" continues pseudo-Dionysius: "Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and, in its power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It *returns us back* to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in" (*CH* I.1.120B).[65] God sends us His light, which permeates through all creation from the highest to the lowest, thus providing the triad of purification, illumination, and perfection for all beings (*CH* III), which respond to it according to their merits and within their order (hierarchy[66]). The path of illumination in particular displays an anagogical character (*CH* III.3.165D). Pseudo-Dionysius does not seem to distinguish between turning and *re*turning, since he says that, "through the angels which act as good guides, they (*sc.* the souls) are led upward (*anágesthai*) to the good source of all goods, whence they come to be by … participation in the emanating illuminations according to their

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[61] See Proclus *ET, Prop.* 31, and pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* IV.1.696A. This emphasis is not found in Plotinus, although it is evident that the Intellect imitating the Good must also be good, or Good-like (*agathoeidés;* see Plotinus V 6(24).4.6, III 8(30).11.17, VI 7(38).15.8–10, and I 7(54).1.10–18).

[62] Peghaire, "L'axiome *'bonum est diffusivum sui',* 7.

[63] *Cf. CH* IV.177C. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena,* 225, distinguishes in the Christian conception of *epistrophé,* between the "reversion of the effect" expressed by the middle-voice form *epistréphesthai*, and the "reversion of the cause" expressed by the active form *epistréphein*.

[64] For this concept, see Beierwaltes, "Lichtmetaphysik", 289, and for a brief history of it, Katsos, *The Metaphysics of Light in the Hexaemeral literature,* 1–7.

[65] Luibhéid's translation (with my emphasis).

[66] The word in pseudo-Dionysius has the meaning of active transmitter, conveying the divine light to the creation (Louth, *Denys the Areopagite,* 40).

logos" (*DN* IV.2.696C).[67] Everything turns to this light of God (as in nature, all things turn to the sun), desiring it as their principle, their preserver, and their goal. God himself is prior to and beyond every light, wherefore He transcends at the same time as He comprehends all things, in which He manifests Himself as the intelligible light (*noetòs phôs*). Contrarily to ignorance, which divides beings, the intelligible light connects, unites, and converts (*epistréphei*) the plurality of opinions to the single apprehension of Truth. The conversion, here, also bears epistemological significance, as the path of pure knowledge and wisdom (*gnôsis*; *DN* IV.6.701A–B).

The Spiral. In the *Divine Names* (IX.9.916C–D)*,* the spiral movement is one of the three types of metaphysical (i.e. not bodily) movement attributed by pseudo-Dionysius to souls and intellects, which by this triple movement imitate the "motion of the unmoved God". With caution and piety (*eusebôs*), pseudo-Dionysius addresses the topic of God's "motion", which is straight, circular, and spiral. Straight and circular movements reflect all generation from and conversion to God, who "returns to Himself" everything that emanates from Him. In Chapter IV.8.704D–705A, we find a similarly structured movement of the divine intellects, which through the straight, providential motion proceed (*proíasin*) to the lower world. At the level of souls, linear motion reflects primarily their turning outward, which in the second phase becomes turning *up*. On the other hand, the circular motion of the intellects signifies their union to the illuminations stemming from the Good, while the souls' circular movement designates their turning inwards, a kind of spiritual recollection (*epistréphousa kaì synágousa;* IV.9.705A), imitating the Good/the One. The spiral motion is a combination of the two and, by that, it implies the duality of movement and rest.[68] Therefore God's Spiral "must be understood as the steadfast procession and the productive rest" (IX.9.916D). The God that gives Himself in "providential processions and activities" (IX.9.916C) is less reserved than Plotinus' self-absorbed Good. This is evident from the frequent use of the term 'providential', which is never applied to Plotinus' Good. Nonetheless, pseudo-Dionysius' God remains unchanged, in accordance with the triadic dynamics of *moné, próodos*, and *epistrophé*, which is why the emphasis is on His steadfastness. The cause must remain unchanged, otherwise the caused thing

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[67] Jones' translation, my emphasis. Similar to Proclus' tripart conversion (intelligent, living, and existential, see above) is pseudo-Dionysius distinction between the *four* ways of desire for the Good: angels and men desire it knowingly (*gnostikôs*), living beings devoid of reason in a sensorily perceptible manner (*aisthetikôs*), plants by the movement that is inherent to their life, and inanimate things by a certain tendency to preserve their existence (*katà tò eînai*; *DN* IV.4.700B).

[68] This geometrical schema of the Neoplatonic triad *moné-próodos-epistrophé,* announces itself already in Proclus' works (*In Eucl.* 103.21ss. in 180.8ss; see Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena,* 72–76).

drawing its existence from the cause would no longer exist, at least not unchanged. As Jones has observed, in this triad, abiding stands for the hiddenness of the cause in the thing caused, while procession and conversion reflect the manifestation of the cause in it. All three form a paradox of Divine unity and diversity.[69] At lower levels, this paradox reflects itself in the ambiguity illustrated by the intelligible and psychic "spiral movement". Thus, divine intellects continue to circle around God while providing for their inferiors. On the other hand, the psychic spiral reflects the souls' discursive and logical apprehension of divine truths, compensating for the soul's inability to intuit them simply.

Eros. De Andia points out the difference between the turning to the One, and the yearning for the Good.[70] This differentiation arises from two different aspects of conversion, just as the denominations 'One' and 'Good' reflect two aspects of God's essence. In *DN* IV.10.708A, the Good coincides with the Beautiful as an object of desire, and even of love (*ephetón kaì erastón*). Not only is God the object of love, but He is also the cause of love among things created, overcoming their differences and uniting them. Thus, Eros comprehends the whole dynamism of the *moné-próodos-epistrophé* triad, for it encloses the providential love of the superior for the inferior, the conversive love of the inferior for the superior, and the conjoining love among equals (*DN* IV.12.711D). Pseudo-Dionysius thus proceeds to the ultimate step of Eros' divinization: Love is one of the names of God, who "loves all, produces all, completes all, conserves all, and returns all" (*DN* IV.10.708B). Here again, we find the active, transitive form of the verb *epistréphein* used to express the loving act of a providential Power leaning towards the things that have been born from It and leading them back towards Itself (*DN* IV.10.708A; cf. *DN* IV.12.709D.

Pseudo-Dionysius is aware of his boldness in using the term *éros* as one of the Divine names,[71] but he insists that the word is perfectly appropriate for naming the unifying power (*dýnamis henopoiós*) that pre-exists (*pro-hyphístesi*) in the Good (*DN* IV.10.708B[72]). Here, if anywhere, we find the justification of positing a generous and good

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[69] Jones, "Introduction" in: Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Divine Names. The Mystical Theology,* 44–46. Cf. *DN* II.11.649B.

[70] De Andia, *L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite,* 123. The two conversions are presented as a circle within a circle: the turning to the Good is "inside of" the turning to the One.

[71] The term *agápe* seemed to be preferred by Christian authors, principally on the ground of the connotation of privation that accompanies the concept of Platonic Eros; see Nygren's study on the subjects, although his distinction between the two terms was called into question by later scholars who brought up the diffusive and generative/creative nature of Plato's Eros (see, e.g., Markus, "The Dialectic of Eros in Plato's Symposium").

[72] *Cf.* IV 12.709D.

first Principle driven by Love, which does not allow the Good to remain sterile, locked in itself, but prompts It to creation (IV.10.708B). Pseudo-Dionysius proceeds to explain the ecstatic nature of the divine Eros. This nature is the result of God's loving abundance (*hyperbolé*), for the lover does not belong to himself anymore, but to the beloved. Pseudo-Dionysius allows himself another audacity by claiming that the Cause of all lets Itself be "as it were, charmed by goodness, *éros*, and *agápe* (IV.13.712B).[73] However, while this metaphysics of Love promotes the idea of God lovingly giving Himself to his creation, it nevertheless insists on His transcendent immutability, since His *ekstasis* does not imply a separation from Himself. Above all, *éros* is only one among God's names, and is not identified as God Himself. When pseudo-Dionysius speaks of Love not letting the Good remain sterile, or when he states that Eros belongs to the Good and the Beautiful, he always talks about a separate reality that exists *in* (*en*) the Good. Addressing the doctrines of "some theologians" who identify God with Eros/Agape,[74] he explains that these ideas result from the fact that God is at the same time the cause of love and, since He is lovable, its object. The divine Eros is thus presented as an eternal circle tracing the unchangeable circular path of "abiding, proceeding, and returning" (IV.14.713A), directing all beings to the paths of providence, communion, and conversion (IV.15.713B).

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[73] On the origins of the concept of ecstatic divine Eros in pseudo-Dionysius, see Nygren, *Agape and Eros,* 576–584.

[74] Allegedly pseudo-Dionysius is referring to the *Erotic hymns* of his teacher Hierotheus. However, it is possible that he uses this name to take some distance from his own daring argument (*tolmetéon*; IV.13.712A). Another opinion considers the text to be not a direct quote from Hierotheus' *Hymns*, but a commentary of his, most probably to the Song of Solomon (thus Bellini in: Scazzoso, *Dionigi Areopagita. Tutte le opere*, p. 562, n. 227, supporting the opinion of Pera in: Pera-Caramello-Mazzantini, *Thomae Aquinatis In librum beati Dionysii de divinis nominibus expositio*).

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