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***Specimen Commentationis Neoplatonicae:
Commentary on the Beginning
of Damascius' De Primis Principiis***

[The references to the text are to pages and lines of C. A. Ruelle's edition].

St. Andrews, 1977

GENERAL REMARK

The first section is devoted to a searching investigation of what the Absolute First Principle is. So D. adopts the descending order in the explanation (i.e. derivation) of reality; for in the sequel, the first principles will be examined which immediately follow the Absolutely first. Not that he disregards the ascending process; in fact, as we shall see, he gives two ἀναβάσεις in this section from what is immediately given to us to what is the ultimate "given" [1] in rerum natura. But whereas the ascent is easier inasmuch as we can more readily comprehend the order of *presupposition*, the descent is extremely difficult as it relates to the order of *derivation*. Even though the two orders must be the observe and reverse sides of one and the same coin, namely of the ontological *dependence* of the lower on the higher, and so of the one obtaining *structure and order* of reality, still to understand B's presupposing A is immensely easier than conceiving B's derivation from A or A's production or generation of B. Accordingly D. makes the ascent the topic of a part of his first section (subserving as this ascent is here, let it be also noticed, to the proper quasi-apprehension of the absolutely first principle), but devotes his whole (incomplete now) work to that all-puzzling descent, choosing to penetrate deeper in each succeeding reality when it is met in the downwards process rather than in the ascent to the ultimate, where he treats the realities encountered summarily and only to the extent that some indication of their nature is required for the proper understanding of the ascent itself.

The general structure of the first section is this:

A) Abstract inquiry on the absolutely Primal Principle

1.4 – 18.25

B) The Ascent

18.26 – 41.20

Aa) Is the Absolutely First Principle beyond everything and every reality whatsoever (τὰ πάντα), or is it part of the sum-total of reality (τὶ τῶν πάντων)?

1.4 – 5.2

Ab) Why is it not the Ev the Absolutely First Principle?

5.2 – 9.10

Ac) In what sense is the Absolutely First Principle absolutely unknowable (ἄγνωστον παντελῶς)?

9.11 – 15.25

Ad) Difficulties in D. 's doctrine about the Absolutely First Principle, and their solutions

15.26 – 18.23

Ba) First Ascent

18.23 – 27.4

Bb) Second Ascent

27.5 – 38.25

Bc) Supplement to the Ascents: Ascent through Wholenesses (Integrals)

38.25 – 41.20

Aa)

1.4-6. Position of the problem

1.4 Πάντα is the sum-total of reality; it includes everything of whatever kind **subsisting** in reality in whatever way. In effect πάντα = the real, but so understood as to transcend the ordinary distinction of true or primary reality and secondary, apparent **reality** [2]. Πάντα = the sum-total of what **subsists in whichever way**, the totality of the subsistent realities [3].

It is the principle (ἀρχή) of πάντα in this sense, that it is the absolutely first principle. And the question is whether this ἀρχή τῶν πάντων is beyond the πάντα whose principle it is, or is a part of the πάντα, in which case it would be like the apex of the πάντα, i.e. of everything that came to be as a reality out of it and after it.

1.5. The προῖόν is that which comes to be present in reality , comes to subsist in it, as the **result** of the subsistence of that from, or out of, which it proceeds. We must keep together these two elements in our conception of προῖέναι, προῖόν etc.: a) presence, manifestation, subsistence in reality, b) resulting from the source of the πρόοδος **which** produces as a result the προῖόν.

1.6-2.7. **Examination of the first theoretically available alternative:** that the ἀρχή τῶν πάντων is beyond the πάντα [4].

Four reasons are, in *aporematic* fashion, brought against the thesis. All follow from the essential nature of παντότης, given an assumption as to the nature of the Absolute first principle which D. in fact denies. I have underlined this assumption in the following formulations.

1) Πάντα include everything; for, that from which nothing is out of it, is the totality of everything subsisting in whichever way, the totality of all subsistence ἅπλως. But if the principle was beyond πάντων, **since it is something subsisting in some way**, then the πάντα would miss it, and therefore they would no longer be πάντα, contrary to the hypothesis. Hence the Absolutely First Principle cannot be beyond τῶν πάντων.

2) Two moments are included in the nature of πάντα; two realities are presupposed by the reality of πάντα; in still other words to the same effect, in order for πάντα to be at all, to subsist at all, there must previously be present as a subsistent reality and therefore metaphysically available two other characters: these are the πολλότης and the πέρας. For πάντα is nothing but πολλά πεπερασμένα [5], πολλά who have been limited so that to give, as it were, a well-rounded (subParmenidean) whole. The many, indefinite in themselves, are limited by a πέρας, and thus become all that subsists as reality, the sum total of reality. And so it is essentially involved in παντότης that it is a kind of ὅρος, of limit, and a certain περίληψις (a certain "containing"); hence that which it applies to must be inclusive of its limits, both lower (i.e. that which is farthest removed from the principle), **and** higher. But the higher limit of a totality is the principle from which it stems. **But this principle is the absolutely primal principle;** therefore the Absolutely First Principle cannot but be included in the totality whose first item, the beginning [6], it is.

3) There is a certain co-ordination not only in the orderly system produced by a principle or cause [7] (and every field in which the operation of **one** principle takes place must eo ipso exhibit a certain order), but also between the very principle and the causatum. For something of the nature of πρὸς τι pertains to a principle, a cause or a first (τὸ πρῶτον), in so far as for something to be a cause it must cause something else and must bear the essential reference to that which it causes; and similarly for the principle and the first. Now wherever there is co-ordination, there πάντα are to be found, as including all the co-ordinated items. **But the Primal**

Principle is subject to that co-ordination, and therefore it must be contained in the all-inclusive totality.

4) Whatever is conceived in whichever way belongs to the πάντα [8]; **but the Primal Principle can be conceived in some way;** therefore it is included in πάντα.

2.7-3.5. Examination of the second alternative: that the First Principle is contained in πάντα.

Arguments against:

1) **2.7-16.** Everything is either a principle or something which subsists in virtue of a principle; for the division ἀρχή - ἀπ' ἀρχῆς is exhaustive. Now if the πάντα include the primal principle they cannot be ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, from a beginning, from a principle in their totality, qua πάντα. But nor can they be a principle; for what would come out of πάντα to set itself beside the absolute totality of everything? So the πάντα can neither be ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, nor an ἀρχή – which is impossible. Everything else being cogent, we can only raise the impossibility by abandoning the hypothesis that the Primal Principle is included in πάντα.

2.8. The τι must be adverbial, construing: οὐκ ἂν ἡ ἀρχὴ εἴη τῶν πάντων = the ἀρχή in this case would not be a principle of πάντα (since it is included in πάντα). But it is tempting to adopt S^a's reading (testified by R): οὐκ ἂν εἴη τις ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων.

2.15. τοῦτο sc. τὸ τῶν πάντων ἀποτέλεσμα. Meaning: even this would have been contained in πάντα (καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν ἂν ἐν τοῖς πᾶσιν).

2) **2.17-3.5.** This part is divided into three unequal subparts. First (a) there is the argument against the second alternative briefly expounded (2.17-18). Then (b) comes a possible rejoinder to the argument (2.18-21). And (c) the rest is occupied with an elaborate refutation of the rejoinder, which necessarily employs some notions that will be fully clarified only later on, in the appropriate section of the work.

a) Some multiplicity and distinction is of the essence of πάντα. For παντότης implies inclusion into one totality of many items distinct among themselves in some way or other. Now if there was no principle **outside** the πάντα and prior to them, πάντα would be the first given reality, the ultimate datum in the explanation of the Universe. But this is impossible [9] (2.18: πῶς οὖν ... ἐξεφάνη; with emphasis on ε

ὑθύς, i.e. without any prior reality being required for the reality of πάντα to subsist); hence, there must be a principle before πάντα.

b) The rejoinder consists in the view that one need not connect always and in every way (πανταχῆ) the πολλά with distinction and multiplicity. For in an orderly system in which there exists a single beginning as the source of everything that follows and of its order, this beginning, like an apex or summit of what follows, need not be infected with the multiplicity which it produces in some way or other after itself; that is, in short, the beginning and principle of multiplicity [10] may well be an absolute One, even if this one is part of the multiplicity; and similarly, the principle of distinction may well be absolutely unified in itself though partaking in distinction inasmuch as it is distinguished from that which follows from it.

2.20. As the text stands we have: “but τὸ ἓν is the summit of the πολλά, and unit (μονάς) of the distinguished is the unified, while τὸ ἓν is even simpler than the unit”. There is of course perfect sense in this. We shall see that with D. the ἡνωμένον lies after τὸ ἓν in the “natural history” of reality; so τὸ ἡνωμένον is not ἓν but rather μονάς, drawing on the distinction between one and unit which can be traced back to Neopythagoreanism and even to Aristotle, if not to ancient, early Pythagoreanism.

But meaningful as the statements are, they present some subtle occasion for worry. Firstly, we might expect to hear that as the one is summit of the many, so the unified **is the summit** (not the unit) of the distinguished. And this we can get by putting a comma after ἡνωμένον. But what then of the following μονάς? In what immediately follows «μονάς» is used clearly to denote quasi-arithmetical unit, or at any rate, the unit of number [11]. So could it not be that it is applied here in the same sense? Hence my suggestion for the insertion of ἡνωμένον <παντὸς δὲ ἀριθμοῦ ἢ> μονάς. And that this is probable seems to be confirmed by what follows: mark the Ἀλλὰ πρῶτον μὲν etc. ...ἔπειτα δὲ... The former disposes of the example (for as such we may construe, if the suggestion is correct, the clause: “just as summit of every number [12] is the unit”), whereas the latter combats the doctrine itself about the One.

That there is a marginal note in this place running so:

τὸ ἓν κορυφή τῶν πολλῶν, τὸ δ' ἡνωμένον ἤτοι μονάς τῶν διακεκριμένων,

apparently identifying the ἠνωμένον with the μονάς (not certainly since ἦτοι which R. reads confidently, is not really clearly seen there), does not tell much against my suggestion since it is by a very later hand.

On the other hand it should be noted that the position of μέν prohibits the above suggested train of thought; for we should have κορυφή τῶν **μέν** etc. And also on the suggestion, the last clause καὶ τὸ ἐν ἔτι etc. has not the perfect point that it has in the text as it stands. So, on the whole the suggestion is to be rejected.

c) Taking the example of the number, D. remarks that the unit contains implicitly and συνεπτυγμένως (not ἐν διεξόδῳ) all numbers, being their principle. In this way, the unit is everything whose unit it is, and this analogy, by implication, then would tell that even in the One which is the summit of the πολλά, the πολλά are already included, and so, eventually we have to hold on to the impossible view that πολλά and πάντα appear right from the beginning in the great chain of being, as part of the ultimate datum.

Then D. turns from the illustration to the illustrated itself (ἔπειτα δὲ etc.).

The basis of the rejoinder is formed by the idea that the One can belong to the multiplicity whose principle it is, just as the beginning belongs to that whose beginning it is and the summit to that whose summit it is. Now in combating this is basis D. does not wish to have recourse to the first argument (1) against the position that the Primal Principle belongs to the totality of reality, but wants to stay within the boundary of his second argument (2), especially because he differentiates between the absolutely Primal Principle and the One, and he intends to keep the matter open in order to explain further his thesis by utilizing a plausible objection to the very differentiation which he maintains, as we shall see in the sequel. In denying the mentioned basis, D. leads to a profound intuition as to the nature of the One, which, again, is preliminarily treated here, since it will become the expressed object of inquiry in the second (and, less directly, the third) section of the work.

The denial consists in this: if x belongs essentially to Y, then it is required in order to complete, or completely make up the Y, in the sense that, should it be lacking, the Y would not be entire. But this is not the relationship existing between the One and the πολλά; for the latter do not "miss" the One [13]; in fact anything that is contained in the πολλά under the aspect of division (μερισμός) is also contained in the One under the aspect of absolute indivisibility (κατὰ τὸ πάντη

ἀμερέξ). Thus nothing is missing, neither from the πολλά, nor from the One; which manifests the fundamental difference in the relationship between the One and the Many on the one hand, and the beginning and that of which it is the beginning, or the summit and that of which it is the summit on the other. In effect D. protests against being misled in the correct understanding of the abstract metaphysical relationships involved here by undue concern with certain less abstract models.

But why, it may be asked, is it as it is said to be in 2.22-25? The answer is given without development in 2.25-3.5, and is of the outmost philosophical importance, being also uniquely, in a certain sense, characteristic of the Damascian system.

A fuller analysis of the answer must await a more appropriate place, when we are at the interior of D.'s theory for good. But we can introduce here the future fuller discussion as follows.

It was noted above that it is extremely difficult to *derive* reality, as opposed to show its presuppositions; we can now perhaps get an indication of where exactly the difficulty lies. Suppose a reality B which metaphysically presupposes A; and suppose that every other reality presupposed by B (if there is such an one) is also presupposed by A [14]. How can now B be derived from A (as it should, dependence and presupposition being according to our explanation but the other side of derivation)? B presupposes A, and this means that B (and B-things) could not be present in the Universe of Reality, if A was absent from it; but obviously the character of B is not identically the same with that of A; and so how did it happen that B came to be present, given that A was? We agreed, there is no possibility of foreign, extraneous influence, no possibility of analyzing B as A modified in a certain way M and then explaining that modification as proceeding from a source distinct from A. The modification must, if at all, proceed from A; but then it must be in A in one way or another; it could not be created ex nihilo; and so, B itself, whose peculiar character (ιδιότης) consists in that modification (since it is this modification which, ex hypothesi, differentiates B from A), - B itself must be somehow included in A.

We conclude from the above schematic development that nothing appears *suddenly* at any place in the Chain of Reality. In order to present itself at any place, it must be already in its superior.

But then what is the distinctive character (ιδιότης) of B vis-à-vis A? It is the mode in which B “has” (or rather “is”) what is already in A under a different mode.

But granted this, the mode under which everything present in A is in B is different from the mode under which the same is in A, since the ιδιότης of B is not, ex hypothesi that of A. And the exasperatingly difficult question of derivation presents itself in a new, and connected, form: for how did the mode characterizing B come about to be present in reality as a reality given the mode characterizing A?

If to this question we reply by positing not only (the content of) B, but the specific mode B itself in A, we only begin an infinite regress. Another answer should, therefore, be sought.

It is premature, as we said, to pursue further these questions which lie right in the metaphysical heart of Neoplatonism. But enough has been said, in order to appreciate D.’s point in the passage in question. The One can be the source of πάντα (πάντα ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ 3.3), just because it itself is πάντα before πάντα.

Thus, for D., the One is not just and only one; it is πάντα; it must be πάντα in order to be able to “generate” πάντα. And so we meet here with a major modification of Neoplatonic doctrine, the full significance of which will become apparent later [15].

2.19. ἐξεφάνη: ἐκφαίνεσθαι is regularly used by Neoplatonists to signify first appearance or presence in reality of a certain character, in most cases in connection with the question: where did X first appear in the Chain of Reality = which is the precise location of the X-reality in the ordered derivation of all reality from the Ultimate Principle down to the threshold to unreality. Cf. the orphic use of the term and the orphic Phanes.

3.1. **Σπεύσιππος.** Here we have a good opportunity of showing, in a specific case, how near the Neoplatonic speculations were (in respect to the kind of problems faced, and in the spirit of the answers given, as well as in many details of the solutions offered) to the controversies in the Old Academy.

Speusippus distinguished the One, the Νοῦς (which was the God for him properly speaking) and the Good [16]. In fact he was prone to multiply hypostases (= levels of being) and their principles; which makes Aristotle complain that in this way no coherent view of the World can be made [17]. Contrary to Plato [18] and other Platonists who found in the One the very nature of the Good, Speusippus separated them [19]. In fact we are fortunately able to know the reason why he did

separate them. Basically, as Aristotle says [20], it was this: if the very nature of the Good consists in the One, then the principle opposite to the One, namely the Multiplicity, must be the Evil; but Speusippus denied that there can be evil, indeed the Evil, in the absolutely first principles. So he made the Good and the Evil to lie at the completion of the derivation of reality rather than at the beginning (like in the fully developed animal rather than at the seed and sperm) – to use the metaphor Speusippus himself may have employed [21].

We know, of course, from Aristotle (and Theophrastus' little metaphysical tract), even if we could not see it already right in Plato's dialogues, that ascending to first principles from the given via the presupposition-ladder, and descending from them in a derivation attempt which aims at covering all reality and locating everything real at its appropriate place in the total Order of the Universe of Subsistence in general – that these procedures were the preoccupation of the older Academy and of contemporaneous Pythagorean circles. But how is this specifically connected with our particular passage in D.?

In fact there were those, who denied any direct connection, and accused D. of misunderstanding. Admirably enough they even pointed at a passage in Aristotle, which, they claimed, was misunderstood by D. [22]. The passage is in Met. N. 1087b.25-33 (esp. b32, see also N. 1087b4-9), where admittedly the clause ἔσται γὰρ τὸ ἐν ὀλίγον matches well, *in all externals*, D.'s clause: οὐ γὰρ ἐν ὧς ἐλάχιστον.

But in fact we have here just that kind of superficial interpretation which mars so much in modern attempts at understanding ancient philosophy in general, and Greek Metaphysics in particular, and most especially Neoplatonism. To see this clearly in the present instance one should firstly notice the extreme frivolity of Aristotle's point here [23]. The argument is this: Some philosophers claim that a pair of contraries (ἐναντία) are the ultimate principles of all reality. Some (notably Speusippus) maintain that this fundamental pair is the One and the πλῆθος. But the contrary to Many is the Few (drawing on the ordinary-language opposition between the few and the many). Hence their One must be the Few. As if one who would propound the view concerning the ultimate nature of the contrariety between One and Πλῆθος, could possibly mean by Πλῆθος the Many, instead of the obviously intended *Multiplicity*, whether large or small.

No philosopher could seriously be taken in by such an argument, nor be misled by it. Least of all a Neoplatonist [24], and less than least D. himself.

It might seem presumptuous to reject an explanation (however futile) of what D. is here referring to, without offering another one in its place. But I do not think that we should at all cost strive to pinpoint the sources of a testimony like the one we meet here in D. To insist immoderately on this is the proximate cause of much superficiality which has found its way into many a historical and interpretative attempt. We may just be unable to reach a definite solution in some cases; crucial evidence may be lacking to us. In view of the hideous lacunae in the transmitted picture of ancient philosophy under which we operate, it needs no extreme modesty to discard superficialities while at the same time confessing inability to reach definitive conclusions.

Happily though, in our case we need not have recourse to such general remarks. For it can be shown that D. had in mind something immeasurably more important than a misunderstanding of a frivolous argument ad hominem.

Speusippus, we saw, distinguished and separated the One and the Good, considering the former as first principle, the latter as final outcome in the derivation or construction of the totality of reality. Now Good implies perfection; and if perfection appears or presents itself at the very last stage of the said construction of reality (as the crowning achievement of the process of production, much as the perfected animal stands at the very end of the line of development whose first inchoate beginning is given with the seed), then the further we are removed from that final stage the less perfect is the state of affairs in which we are. In this way first principles must be imperfect par excellence [25].

But how are we to conceive that imperfection of the first principles according to Speusippus? We have a valuable hint from Aristotle. In *Met.* N.1092a11-15 [26], he says in so many words that for some people (namely Speusippus and (some of?) the Pythagoreans) the first principles are so incomplete and imperfect (ἀτελείς) that the One (one of the Ultimate Principles) is not even ὄν τι – it is not a being, one among the beings [27].

Perhaps then we can amplify the Aristotelian hint [28]. Perhaps for Speusippus (or, at least, for a certain current interpretation of Speusippus' system) the prior has nothing of the posterior which follows upon it, indeed which is derived from, or

produced by, it; the principle in no way is what it generates, the cause what it causes to subsist. So we can better understand the sense in which a principle is more imperfect than that of which it is a principle; ***it lacks that which its product possess***. And if this is so in general, then with an ultimate principle, like the One, we reach the limits of dispossession, of metaphysical poverty; if ***everything*** comes to subsist as a result, ultimately, of the One, then the One must lack ***everything***; far from being πάντα (after its own peculiar fashion of course), it has no character, more or less perfect, whatsoever, since every character comes after it, as a result of it. It is bereft of all full-blown reality, it is a "least". We have here a doctrine of the derivation and construction of Reality diametrically opposed to D's own.

Were our only evidence Aristotle's hint, still the above interpretation would be a fair inference, given the peculiar Speusippean view of the derivation of Reality as a procession ***towards*** perfection. But we possess a striking confirmation of its validity, as it will be shown elsewhere in the sequel.

3.3. The syntax is ὅτι (causal) καὶ αὐτό (ἐστὶ) πάντα πρὸ τῶν πάντων.

3.4-5. We have here, as in 2.20, four Principles: ἓν – πολλά – ἡνωμένον – διακεκριμένον. Their connection and hierarchy will be the subject of the following sections. Here we see that anyone of them is πάντα, all-inclusive of any and every determinate reality; what differentiates them one from another is the different mode under which each one is πάντα.

3.5-13. Τὰ πάντα, the sum-total of definite reality, subsist, and therefore can be conceived, in at least three modes or ways: one-ly (ἑνιαίως) and unitedly (ἡνωμένως) and multipliedly (πεπληθυσμένως). The nature, differentiation and connection of these three modes will be explained later, in following sections of the work. In the lower margin of 2R we have the following note by the first hand:

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------------|----------------|
| a) πάντα | κατὰ μίαν ιδέαν ἀδιάκριτον | ἑνιαίως |
| b) πάντα | κατὰ σχέσιν καὶ σύνταξιν τὴν | ἡνωμένως |
| | πρὸς ἄλληλα | |
| c) πάντα | κατὰ διάκρισιν ἕκαστα | πεπληθυσμένως. |

3.5. In order to gain an adequate notion of τὰ πάντα we must "unfold" our conception (ἔννοια) to cover everything. It is always our conceptual powers which strive to be adequate to the intricate complexity of reality [29].

3.7-8. ἀφ' ἑνὸς καὶ πρὸς ἓν: the Aristotelian technical terms. Like the whole of Aristotelian philosophy, they were in, so to speak, common stock and of everyday use by the Neoplatonists (ὡς *εἰώθαμεν* λέγειν).

3.8. The ordinary (συνηθέστερον) use of « πάντα» is, of course, the one denoting a divided, distinguished multiplicity.

3.10-11. D. closely connects construing on the one hand the One and the United (τὸ ἓν καὶ τὸ ἡνωμένον – which are principles, the one proximate the other mediated, of the Multiple or multiplied, τὸ πεπληθυσμένον) as πάντα, with on the other hand co-conceiving (συλλάβοιμεν) them together with everything else in accordance with their relationship and co-ordination (σχέσιν τε καὶ σύνταξιν) with everything else. And this we explained above: making of X the cause of πάντα, is to bring X into some sort of connection with its products, and this can only be if X already is, in some fashion or other, its products.

3.13-4.5. Here we have the first occurrence of a very important ἀπορία which will be treated more explicitly by D. in the sequel, within the present section. In short the ἀπορία is: ***Is not the One sufficient for the position of the absolutely Primal Principle?*** Here this crucial question is introduced as follows:

D. argued above that since the One is πάντα ἐνιαίως, and since the reality of παντότης cannot appear right at the absolute beginning presupposing as it does something prior to it (indeed two ***at least*** prior realities: πολλότης and πέρας, v. 1.10), there must be something above the One. He already met a first rejoinder (2.19-21) to the effect that the One has nothing to do with πάντα, being prior to them. He supposes now the objector to argue that, granted that even the One must somehow comprise πάντα, yet it is primarily just one and only secondarily πάντα, and hence one need not posit anything above it (3.13-17). To which D. replies that in this way, a certain distinction is surreptitiously introduced into the One (διπλόην [30] ἐν αὐτῷ θήσεται); for we would then be able to distinguish two ***moments*** in it, one being the primary according to which the One is just and only one, the other being secondary, and consisting in the One's comprising somehow τὰ πάντα. But the One in itself is exempt from the possibility of any such distinction within itself; it is only we (i.e. our conception of it) who are distinguished and divided in our desperate attempt to form an adequate notion of it; in itself, the One is πάντα ***just by being One***, and after

the fashion of its one-ness, i.e. in an *absolutely* simple way; hence no moments can be distinguished in it.

But if we now correct the formulation of the said objection, in accordance with the true state of affairs, and say that the One, if it is πάντα at all, it is so by its very, absolutely simple, nature (qua considered as the cause of πάντα), implying thereby that it is fit for the position of the absolutely first principle – if we say this, again we err, because the absolutely first principle must be superior (beyond) even of that all-pregnant absolute simplicity which is the One [31].

4.1. I indicated, with uncertainty, a lacuna, for two reasons:

a) The flow of the passage seems to me being impaired. Without a lacuna we must understand “if someone says this, firstly he posits in the One a distinction, whereas it is we who divide and are doubled and multiplied concerning its simplicity”. But if so, the natural phrasing would be πρώτον μὲν διπλ. ἐν αὐτῷ θήσεται, ἡμῶν ὄντων των μεριζόντων etc., or something similar.

b) The μὲν in 3.17 is not *co-ordinated* to the δὲ of 4.1 – rather the phrase to which δὲ belongs *answers* what is said in the sentence including μὲν. Further the πρώτον in 3.17 cannot be matched with ἡμεῖς δὲ etc., as if this latter sentence was a *second* reason against the objector’s formulation.

(b) is rather weak. For πρώτον μὲν can be taken as continued in εἰ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὅτι etc. 4.3, which really, according to my interpretation above, represents the reformulation of the objection in order to meet what was urged against it in its first and original formulation. (a) is stronger but not conclusive either, given the idiosyncratic, hypomnematic manner of D.’s writing.

If there is a lacuna, then either the suggestion of considering εἰ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο etc. (4.3) as answering to πρώτον μὲν is correct, in which case the lacuna would be short (something like <ἀλλ’ ἀπλούστατον τὸ ἐν,> ἡμεῖς δὲ etc.); or we must expect a second reason (which one?) against the *first* formulation, in which case the lacuna would be longer.

4.4-5. I think « αὐτῶν τῶν πάντων » refers to πάντα as a divided totality (which is the common notion v . 3.8); « ἀπλουστάτης παντότητος » may refer to the ἡνωμένον, the United; « τῆς πάντα καταπιούσης ἀπλότητος » would then signify the One. I suggest this, in order to capture the subtle difference (really trivial for a

Neoplatonist worth his name) between *ἀπλουστάτη παντότης* on the one hand, and *πάντα καταπιούσα ἀπλότης* on the other.

4.6-10. This represents the formal statement of D.'s main thesis in the first section of his work. Such a doctrine can, of course, only be *divined* (μαντεύεται) by our soul, and this again only if she exerted herself to the uttermost of her powers.

The absolutely ultimate ground of the Universe must have no co-ordination whatever, *however slight, however indirect with the Universe of Reality itself* [32].

But if so, then it cannot be even principle or cause; for every principle and cause qua principle and cause [33] is a principle and cause *of* something, and in this way connected and co-ordinated with that of which it is a principle and cause. And similarly, the Absolute Ground cannot be "first" reality, or before everything or beyond everything – let alone *be* everything in whatever way. All these appellations presuppose some contamination of the Ultimate Principle effected through its being brought into a certain kind of relationship with what follows it [34]. *In short the genuinely Absolute Ultimate Principle and Ground cannot be absolute or Ultimate or Principle or Ground.* Consequently, it can by no means be praised, or conceived or surmised.

4.10-5.2. There follows an analysis of the last point, which leads, via a protestation against positing something above the One (5.2-5.14), to the direct argumentation (5.14-9.10) in favour of the main thesis.

4.10. ἐννοεῖν = conceive.

ὑπονοεῖν = sub-conceive, conceive indirectly and after a fashion.

ἐπινοεῖν may have something of the flavor of "invent", i.e. construct mentally, in which sense it may form a fitting contrast to νοεῖν, meant here broadly, = think of directly [35]. But mainly, I think, it conveys the sense "conceive additionally to something (already conceived)", as if applying to a second order conception, or the conception of a feature of something already conceived in a primary conception. Cf. similar constructions, like ἐπιγιγνώμενον τέλος (Aristotle), ἐπιφαινόμενον etc.

Anything that we can conceive is, strictly speaking (καὶ τοῦτό γε ἀληθέστερον), something determinate; to a *definite* conception corresponds a *determinate* content – however *abstract* this content and the concept "intending"

[36] it may be. Now the definite determinateness (however abstract) of a content implies its being **"set against" other** contents equally determinate (though, maybe, more or less abstract), just as its self-identity as that determinate content which it is, is the other side of its otherness from other contents. Thus, evidently, determinateness (alike in contents and in concepts "intending" contents) **presupposes** a multiplicity one of whose members the particular determinateness in question is. Consequently, every proper conception conceives τὶ τῶν πάντων, as D. says, since it conceives a determinate content, which, just in virtue of its bearing (and consisting in) a definite determinateness, contrasts itself to, ultimately, every other ontologically available (= subsisting) content.

But if this is our mind's proper way of conceiving, we can attain to something higher, something of the nature of a principle, by striving towards a διακάθαρσις of our conceptions. This "thorough purification" consists in trying to lay aside precisely that aforementioned definite determinateness which goes together with the conceived content's being **one out of many** (co-ordinated in some way or other) contents. This "purging" from our conceptions of the μερισμός, of the division into parts, which is implicit in our normal understanding of determinateness (and of the realm of reality towards and to which this understanding attaches) leads to conceptions [37] whose intended content (if we may speak of "contents" here) covers the **entire field** of what was apprehended before the κάθαρσις as **partitioned and divided up** into the various determinate contents. Not, of course, that the new, purified conceptions (and the realities corresponding to them) are absolutely indeterminate; in fact the very plural used in indicating them implies that they are distinguished one from another and there cannot be distinction in the totally indeterminate; it is rather that they are not distinguished, and not determinate, in the fashion of the former ones, not, that is, as a part of a whole is contrasted to, and distinguished from, another part of it, but as one and the same whole (i.e. the totality of everything) is distinguished in accordance with various modes and characters of its subsistence. But it is premature at this stage to insist further on this point.

The validity of the above interpretation of purification (διακαθαίρειν) as applied to reasoned philosophy is born out, for example by D.'s remarks on 275.8, 276.9-12. [37a]

The highest point which this process of purification can reach is the One – the simplest subsisting reality, which still (and that was essential in the process) covers everything (and hence *is*, after a fashion, everything), exhausts the field of both being and non-being [38]. For it is, as we shall see, not the One itself but more appropriately specifically and immediately the ἡνωμένον (that is the third First Principle, counting from the One as the first, since the absolutely ineffable Ultimate Ground must be properly left out of the counting) which is the proper principle of being; but in the abstract notion of πολλά, non-being is also included along with being, since a non-being is equally “some-*one*-thing”.

D. connects the all-inclusiveness (of non-being as well as of being) of the One with its absolute simplicity (τῶν δὲ πολλῶν ἀπλῶς, τὸ ἓν (sc. ἔσχατον)· τοῦ γὰρ ἑνὸς ἀπλούστερον οὐδὲν ἔχομεν ἐννοεῖν, τοῦ πάντη ἑνὸς καὶ μόνον ἑνὸς etc.). See 60.5: διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ ἀπλούστατον (sc. τὸ ἓν), ὅτι περιεκτικώτατον. And there is a deep lying metaphysical reason for this connection. Suppose X is the [39] absolutely simple reality; then it must be all-inclusive. For suppose that it is not; then there is “something” which is not X; let it be y. Either X and y have something in common, z, or not; if the former, then X is complex, being a certain modification or qualification of z, another being the y; if the latter, reality cannot be derived in its totality from a single ultimate principle, which is the negation of metaphysical monism, and, in the last analysis, the negation of the interconnectedness of all reality [40]. And conversely, suppose that X is all-inclusive; then it must be absolutely simple. For suppose that it is not; then we can distinguish in it at least two, say, “notes” or characters Y, Z; obviously, then, there can be Z-things which are not Y (and vice versa), and these would not properly fall under X; if it is objected that Y and Z may be necessarily connected so that nothing can be the one which is not the other as well (and that, in fact, at the level of abstraction on which we move, we should expect that this is so), then we reply that in such a case we should ask for the ground of the necessity of that connection (since philosophy is nothing if not the earnest and devoted search for Ultimate explanations); and then that Ground would be the really ultimate principle, not the X as it was supposed.

4.17-18. A textual difficulty is presented by the occurrence of καὶ in 4.18 before κατὰ. The reading and punctuation of A (comma after μόνον) give the following sense (retaining the καὶ): “it is only there (in the One) that these are to be

found, and (there found) in accordance with the One – as it befits the One”. Now this might be possible; for instance the contrast could be meant of the One which is first principle etc., and, on the one hand, of the Ineffable which is beyond even these honours, and on the other hand of anything that follows the One which maybe has these or similar features, but in an inferior way and degree. But the presence of *καὶ πάντα τὰ ἄλλα* makes this interpretation unacceptably strained.

I have adopted in the text the simple expedient of athetizing *καὶ* (perhaps the same word or compendium was transcribed twice, as *καὶ* and as *κατὰ*?). One could propose *ἐκεῖ μὲν <πάντη ἀδιάκριτα vel ἀμέριστα vel, melius, ἀδιόριστα> ταῦτά τε καὶ πάντα* etc.; but the *πάντη ἀδιάκριτον* is the *ἠνωμένον* rather than the One [41]. On the other hand the One is described as *ἀμερεστάτη κορυφή* in 5.1, which indicates that even the One can be called with names which, accurately speaking, pertain more appropriately to realities following it. (See also 52.6-7, but there the dominant meaning is rather different – v. ad loc. [We shall see that this fluctuating use is perfectly all right provided it is correctly understood]). We may also conjecture: *ἐκεῖ μὲν ἐν ταῦτά τε καὶ πάντα τὰ ἄλλα <κατὰ τὸ πάντη ἀδιόριστον> μόνον, καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἕν* – v. 63.2; esp. 80.26-29.

4.20-21. If the X is, say , *γνωστόν*, then it is X **and** *γνωστόν*, hence not absolutely one, but, at least, two.

It is of no avail to protest that it is qua X that it is *γνωστόν*, that being known does not add any character to the object known over and above those which the object already possess. The Neoplatonist reasons very abstractly and absolutely strictly and rigidly; he of course knows the adduced fact, and he knows much more intricate dialectal subtleties by which he could extricate himself from a commonsensically implausible position if he felt that it was not true. But the point is this: it does not matter the least if X is *γνωστόν* qua X; so long as X-ness does not coincide absolutely and indiscernibly from the character (or whatever you might wish to call it) of being known, we have here **two** distinct moments, and **not** one.

4.22. *παντοφυής*: containing the **roots** of everything (in an absolutely indivisible way). In 273.4 the ***πάμφορον*** of the One is distinguished from the One itself as an (immediately) subordinate principle through a subtle reasoning; but with emphasis falling on **"roots"** above, this is consistent, even in detail. Besides, we should always keep in mind that the treatment of all that which follows the Ineffable

is in this section *only* subservient to the elucidation of that, and not carried on for itself.

4.23. It is because the One is πάντα, that everything comes out from the One, devolves from it, winds off from it.

4.25-5.1. There is a nature of πολλά inherent in them, internally constituting them in their diverse multiplicity; and there is a nature of πολλά transcendent to them, externally constituting (i.e. producing) them in their diverse multiplicity. Even τὰ πολλά, *qua πολλά*, have *one* certain nature (and they “are” or, better, is indeed one of the first principles, as we shall see); otherwise they could not subsist at all: ***the primal prerequisite for subsistence (i.e. presence in total reality) is oneness.*** (This should be connected with what we already said about the presupposition and derivation order of reality).

5.1-2. πᾶν and ὅλον are distinct from each other. But of this later, in its appropriate place, where, descending in the structure of reality (i.e. following the derivation–order of reality) we shall meet them.

*

5.2-5.14. Here is the important protestation: if the One is such as (roughly and preliminarily) was described above by D., why is it not the absolutely primal principle? What sense can we give to the claim and there is still “something” [42] else beyond (ἐπέκεινα) the One? Are we not proceeding in the void, having passed the bounds of reality (and sense) and merely indulging in conceptual hallucinations?

The metaphysical ground of the protestation is this. What is neither the One, nor one, it is μηδέν, i.e. nothing. So are we posing the Nothing as the absolutely and ultimately Primal Principle? [43] Besides, what is the necessity forcing the Reason to accept such a principle beyond the One? We have as certain datum the Many. We ask for their cause or principle. Such a cause cannot be the Nothing – for Nothing can beget nothing. Nor can it be that the πολλά are self-caused; for they cannot constitute either *a* cause of themselves as such, or *many* causes of themselves as such; from which it follows that they are *no* cause of themselves.

Proof of the *first* point: *qua πολλά*, qua indeterminate multiplicity, they are disordered, un-ordered (it is their proceeding from the One, that imposes on them some form of co-ordination ***necessary for them in order to subsist even as πολλά***); so in no wise can they be *a* cause of themselves; for multiplicity as such and

in its elf (apart from the ordering influence of the One functioning as regulating principle) is not some-*one*-thing *ex hypothesi*.

Proof of the *second* point: they can not be many causes (of themselves). For since in their pristine, uncontaminated condition they are totally un-coordinated (a chaotic mess – if one can speak even of *a* chaotic mess), it is not possible that “anyone” [44] of them can be a cause of any other; and the same is proven by the consideration that were it so, we would end by making “one and the same” item simultaneously cause and effect in the same respect [45]. So, if at all, each one would be cause of itself. But their multiplicity as such would still remain uncaused; and we were investigating about the cause of πολλά, qua πολλά.

So that cause is neither the Μηδέν, nor the Πολλά. It has, therefore, to be the One.

This exactly was the procedure – urges the objector. From which it is clearly seen that there is no need of anything else than the One, as cause of the πολλά (Ἄλφου γὰρ οὐδενός.. ἢ τοῦ ἐνός 5.6); therefore only the One is cause above the πολλά – and nothing else (διὸ *μόνον* τὸ ἐν αἴτιον τῶν πολλῶν 5.6-7); in fact this was the reason for which we at all posited the One as αἴτιον to begin with, these are the only and sole credentials for the sovereignty of the One (διὸ καὶ τὸ ἐν πάντων αἴτιον, ὅτι τῶν πολλῶν αἴτιον δεῖ μόνον εἶναι τὸ ἐν 5.7-8). So what are the credentials for a principle beyond the One? What necessity necessitates us to posit such a further principle [46].

5.9. There is an awkward textual situation here (see my textual note ad loc.). Perhaps we might read: ἢ γὰρ ἀσύντακτα, [καὶ] πῶς ἐν αἴτιον ἔσται τὰ πολλά; Or indeed: ἢ γὰρ ἀσύντακτα (for verily they (the πολλά) are un-coordinated), καὶ πῶς etc. Perhaps also, but I do not think it is likely, there is a lacuna here, to be supplied so as to give the following sense, “The πολλά cannot be an ultimate cause; for either they are coordinated or not; if the former, then there must be something which coordinates them, for in themselves they cannot generate order; if the second, how can they be *one* αἴτιον, since they are totally and absolutely unconnected, so that there is no sense in which they possess a unity of whatever kind or degree”.

5.14-9.10. Here is D.’s reply to the objection urged above that the One suffices as an ultimate principle.

He begins by acknowledging the force of the objection (5.17-18). He himself puts in the mouth of the objector, what he evidently thinks is a strong point, namely that if the One is the very limit at which our conceiving powers (and these when utterly strained for that matter) can reach, how can we entertain at all the notion of something beyond the One. Obviously D. is far from Mysticism, in the modern European sense of the term, he is a thorough Greek Rationalist. [47]

The formulation in 5.17-20, leaves no doubt that the issue was deeply felt by D.: "We must begin with what is nearer to us and more graspable by our mind (ἐκ τῶν ἡμῖν γνωριμωτέρων) [48], and building on this secure for our understanding foundation, we must accustom (ἀνεθιστέον) our mental unformulable travails, the anguish and pangs of a birth which cannot come to pass, to the ineffable awareness or apprehension of that proud, sublime Truth" [49].

5.19-20. οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως εἶπω qualifies the συναισθησις: that sublime truth is not the object of sensation, perception, imagination, reasoning, conception, intellection.

There follow three arguments for the principle beyond the One: A. 5.20-6.7; B. 6.8-17; C. 6.17-7.8.

A. 5.20-6.7. For Neoplatonism, it takes power to possess uncontaminated purity; to be able to secure separate existence, to preserve one's own precious self-identity apart and distinct from what is similar or dissimilar to itself, to keep clear from what other claims oneself as its own or from what else aspires to one and therefore attempts to draw it down to fructify, as it were, the aspiring receptor, to be capable of "affirming" one's own nature so as to guard it unmolested from extraneous mingling; untouched by foreign influences – these are marks of power, of eminence, of value, of priority [50]. This is so everywhere, in this World and in things transcending this World, in men and in nature. Thus, in general, in each and every case, before the related and co-ordinated lies the relationless and un-coordinated, before that which in its own nature involves an ontological *reference* (be it strong or weak) to something else, there always lies that which, being dissevered from anything else in the field examined, enjoys an unmolested, referenceless purity.

But now this general metaphysical principle can be applied in two stages: firstly we recognize and posit by reason of it the principle or cause of any given ordered field as something over and above the field itself and its immanent order, as

something whose immediate product, and, so to speak, reflection, the immanent order (and hence the field as a certain determinate field) is. In this way, we raise above the *ὁμοταγή* (things which co-belong to a certain order) the principle of them; this does not have the connectedness displayed by the *ὁμοταγή*, this lacks *their* way of ontologically referring to each other, and is so, in virtue of the said theorem, "higher" from them, lying "above" them. But though this principle (and here we prepare for the second stage of the application of the theorem) is immune from the inter-referring of the items belonging to the field whose principle it is, yet is not completely absolved from any referring whatsoever; for if a principle, it is a principle *of something*, if higher, it is higher *than something*; if first, it is first *with reference to what follows it, if a cause, it is a cause of the caused thing*. Thus *reference-being* still infests such principles as are seen through the first application of our theorem. We thus, again in conformity to it, must pose that which is totally immune from any reference, relation or connection and co-ordination whatsoever; and as the One, which is higher [51] than everything else, has that relationship to be higher than, and a principle of, everything else and thus this minimal co-ordination with everything else; so that reality which our second application of the aforementioned theorem requires, must be above and beyond the One with an above-ness and beyond-ness which transcends any conceivable and formulable above-being or beyond-being [52].

We shall compare in detail this doctrine with that of Proclus later, when enough material has been gathered from D.'s development. But we may point here, preliminarily, its metaphysical significance.

Suppose, for brevity's sake, that two reality-contents X and Y are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive in a certain field, in the sense that any item belonging to the field must be either X or Y, but cannot be both; suppose also that they *essentially* divide the given field between them, i.e. they are not merely accidental properties of what belongs to the field. By field we mean a system of items obeying a certain order, this obeying being constitutive of it as that specific field, i.e. an essentially co-ordinated system of items. Since X and Y pertain essentially to one and the same field, they themselves are *ὁμοταγή*, coordinated, they are on the same level, namely that of the field in question (which may be picturesquely portrayed as a horizontal cut of reality). Hence, they cannot be connected as the primary to the

secondary, as the eminent to the inferior (in degree or kind), as the possession to the privation: they are rather both positive natures, perfected to the same degree each in its own kind and manner, pitched, as it were, one against the other on the same tone; they correspond to each other, they are not subordinated the one to the other.

The field, qua the field which it is, must have a transcendent principle, the cause of its immanent principle of ordering. And since X and Y *essentially* divide the field, being thus a cardinal component of the prevailing order, their so doing, and therefore their natures enabling them to so do, must equally well proceed from the said principle. This principle being beyond the initial field, and thus exempt from the order which it creates, cannot be either X or Y. X and Y, as disjoint but connected reality-contents, appear for the first "time" in the chain of reality on the level of that initial field. But still they must come from somewhere; and, further, they must already be in that from which they come in order to be able to come at all and manifest themselves *primarily* and for the first "time" in the said field [53]. Consequently, since the principle of the field must be X and Y, but cannot be so in the divided way in which the field itself is X and Y, it must be X and Y in an *undivided* fashion, it must possess X and Y in their unity which is seen thus to be presupposed by their separated subsistence. X and Y, we said, are present in the initial field as divided by intrinsically connected reality-contents; here, in the principle of the field, the division disappears, and the intrinsic connection is transformed into undivided unitedness, which is really but the cause of the connected separatedness.

So we have the field, whose formal expression (in so far as its structure is concerned, and with reference to what was assumed as an essential feature of that structure, namely the specific interconnectedness of X and Y), may be given as "*either X or Y*". And we have the field's principle, whose corresponding formal expression we saw must be "*both X and Y*" [54]. Is there anything else in the present connection to which we must proceed in however dark a way?

D.'s contention is that there is; that beyond the principle which is both X and Y at once, there must be another which can be said to be neither X, nor Y, nor even X *and* Y, which therefore, in a certain sense must be *neither X nor Y*, exhaustive though X and Y are, as we assumed at the beginning. Three reasons are given here for this necessity – but the significance will gradually become more and fuller and

clearer, as the system is further developed and articulated and the insight deepens accordingly.

This much however can be indicated here: if to be a principle of a field essentially divided by X and Y, is to be undividedly X and Y at once, clearly to be a further "principle" (i.e a further necessary link in the chain of reality) but neither X nor Y, is to be no proper principle at all, but beyond a principle. We thus reach absolute transcendence.

6.5-7. The two different fundamental ways of co-ordination (that of the interconnected items of an ordered system, and that of the cause to its effect) are clearly indicated here.

B. 6.8-17. The second argument hinges on what we have already said above about the relationship of πάντα to *their* principle. If the One is still πάντα ἐνιαίως, it cannot be the absolutely primal ground of all reality; for whence did the πάντα come which the One is ἐνιαίως? Τὰ πάντα, we saw, cannot be something absolutely ultimate. Thus, the One (which is, after the proper fashion, πάντα) is not yet something absolutely free from, and beyond, the πάντα – which, as we saw, the absolutely primal ground of all reality must be. Further, if the One is the simplest reality in whose absolute simplicity everything is "resolved" or reduced and thus encompassed, then it is the summit, the top point of the πολλά, and we again have seen (in the discussion of the problem posed at the very beginning of this work) that this cannot be the case with the ultimate ground which must be absolutely beyond the πάντα.

6.9. διακρινόμενα: about the triad ἡνωμένον – διακρινόμενον – διακεκριμένον and its significance, cf. the fourth section. This triad is in an important sense the fundamental form of the universal structure of reality according to D.

6.9.-10. We have here an intimation of the derivation: ἓν – πολλά – ἡνωμένον – διακρινόμενον, which will occupy us very much at later stages of the development.

6.10. subject of διακρίνεται, τὰ διακρινόμενα; subject of ἐξελίπεται, τὰ πολλά.

6.11-12. Τὰ πολλά are said to be *after* the One and not *in* the One; the One is said to be, in a certain way, τὰ πάντα. No tension really exists: τὰ πολλά are to be distinguished from the πάντα. In fact, as we shall see, πολλότης (multiplicity as such)

is one mode of the subsistence of the πάντα characterizing the second reality after the One, just as ἐνιαίως (one-ly), is another such mode constituting the characteristic peculiarity (ιδιότης) of the One, and ἡνωμένως (united-ly) is still another defining the third principle, the ἡνωμένον or ὄν.

6.13. Both the One and the United (ἡνωμένον) are πάντα, the former possessing in an absolutely unitary and simple way the very *nature* of πάντα in their totality (since it is the first principle – the absolutely primal ground beyond it not being counted – of the πάντα simpliciter), the latter involving in absolute unitedness the whole *structure* (σύνταξιν) of the πάντα in their totality (since it is the proximate principle of their devolution, of their making explicit their orderly system of derivation) [55].

6.13-17. The argument thus follows: But the πάντα, in neither of the two mentioned aspects can be a really primal and ultimate principle: Not in the second, because as a structured totality, τὰ πάντα *include* the last offspring of reality (whatever this is) and therefore can be a principle of nothing, hence they are not a principle at all. Nor in their first aspect can the πάντα be an ultimate principle; for under that aspect τὰ πάντα is the One – and from here follows what we said in general above about this second argument.

6.14. εἰ μὲν κατὰ σύνταξιν sc. λαμβάνονται or νοοῦνται or θεωροῦνται (τὰ πάντα) = if they are taken in their structured totality.

6.14. and **15.** ὅτι: causal conjunction.

6.14. σὺν αὐτοῖς sc. ἐστι.

6.15. αὐτῶν sc. τῶν πάντων.

6.15-16. And if they are taken in the aspect which is proper to the One (that is, *in a certain sense*, to one among them), then (they are not ultimate principle even in that acceptance) because the One (to which they are identical in that acceptance) is both one and πάντα-in-the-fashion-of-the-one, etc.

In the higher margin of A (f. 3v) the first hand has written:

πάντα	ἐν κατὰ φύσιν	πολλὰ
πάντα	ἡνωμένον κατὰ σύνταξιν	διακεκριμένα.

which means: the πάντα taken in their very nature (in one comprehension) as the all-inclusive totality pertain to the One, which gives as proximate product the πολλά (multiplicity as such); the πάντα taken in their united structuredness pertain to the

ἡνωμένον, which generates the divided, distinguished realities (διακεκριμένα) which follow further below in their orderly devolvement from the unitedness of the ἡνωμένον [56].

C. 6.17-7.8. The One is reached by a last strained effort of our conceptual powers, by the utmost thorough purification of our “suspecting” or divining, rather than properly intellectually conceiving, powers. But the absolutely ultimate Ground must be absolutely unreachable, incomprehensible by any of our divining or conceiving faculties. From such absolutely *ineffable* principle everything must be *ineffably* produced.

We may ask “Why?” is that. More than that, we are entitled to ask “why?” in accordance with Neoplatonic Principles. For if I am right in construing Neoplatonism (and *especially* Athenian Neoplatonism) as a methodologically Absolute Rationalism (indeed as the unique system in the History of the World determinedly pushing to the very last consequences what is implied by such Rationalism), then there must be, according to Neoplatonism, an adequate and sufficient reason for everything including that which transcends in absolutely all ways Reason.

The answer to our *legitimate* question, is then this. We ascend from the already given or reached to its presupposition, from the derivative to its principle, from the secondary to the primary, from the effect to its metaphysical cause. And we repeat the process again and again, to the extent that Reason necessitates us to do so. And Reason constrains us to do so in all cases where the presupposed cannot be taken as the ultimate Datum, as not itself requiring a presupposition, as not standing in need of a further ontological explanation of its presence in the Universal Reality. We can only stop, we are rationalistically entitled to suspend further movement, when we have ascended to something, in which Reason acknowledges the Platonic ἀνυπόθετον.

Retracing then thus the derivation-chain upwards we reach at the end the One. This is presupposed (in a structured and orderly way) by everything else which we can in whatever direct or devious way conceive. But does it presuppose in its turn something else? Or have we come to the rock bottom of the Universe, the ultimate foundation of all reality, the absolutely unpresupposing reality?

To answer this crucial question let it be asked: Is the One “given” in reality in such a way as to require no explanation of its presence there? Is the question “Why

is there at all an One to begin with?" totally devoid of meaning? To be sure, *if* what is immediately given to us (say, this sensible World) subsists in one way or other, *and if* its subsistence and nature ultimately presuppose the subsistence of the One, *then* the One must subsist; further, if everything presupposes the One, while the One presupposes nothing else (nothing which we can form some sort of conception of), then the One *must* be given as the fountainhead of all reality, as the beginning and the first link in the chain of reality. But why should there be a sensible World at all? Why there should be anything at all to begin with? True, if anything exists, the One must subsist as the firstly given reality. But this does not answer the question "Why and whence and How does the One subsist?" We, as Neoplatonists, do not doubt of its subsistence. But Reason demands an explanation for it.

When we have thus clearly seen that to ask for an ontological explanation of the subsistence of the One is not to doubt its subsistence; and when we have also properly understood the associated point that such a demand for the One's presupposition and derivation cannot possibly be answered by an appeal in the certain existence of its products and effects (since this settles the question about the real subsistence of the One, and not that about the "Reason" or ground for its subsistence); then we also see that the One is not the painfully sought after ultimate datum. Reason compels us to proceed further.

But to proceed further whereto? We assumed that every conceivable reality depends on the One, without the One depending in any one of them. Therefore no conceivable reality can in any way whatsoever provide the explanation for the subsistence of the One. But "something", as we have argued, *must* account for that subsistence. From which two propositions there necessarily and rationalistically follow, that the ultimate ground and ontological explanation of the One and of everything conceivable is "Something" absolutely inconceivable; and since every conceivable derivation leads back to the One, the production of everything from that inconceivable reality must also be inconceivable. Hence the most significant statement, 6.26-7.2: "And if we inquire about a "use" for that ultimate ground inconceivable, then this is the all-necessary "use": that everything must proceed from thence as if from a sanctuary, from the Ineffable in an ineffable way" etc. εἰ δὲ χρείαν αὐτοῦ τινα ἐπιζητοῦμεν, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ πάντων ἀναγκαιοτάτη χρεία, τὸ ἐκείθεν, ὡσπερ ἐξ ἀδύτου, πάντα προιέναι, ἔκ τε ἀπορρήτου καὶ τὸν ἀπόρρητον τρόπον.

We find in this here a good instance of the importance and reasoned originality of D. in the context of Greek Metaphysics.

6.18-19. We argued above for the intrinsic connectedness between ἀπλούστατον and περιεκτικώτατον, of the most-simple, and the most-comprehensive.

6.20-21. Well rendered by Chagnet (p. 11): "...puisque, même dans les choses d'ici-bas, ce qui, en s'élevant en haut, échappe toujours à nos pensées est plus digne de notre vénération...".

6.22-23. The absolutely ultimate ground, so construed, dangerously approaches the absolute Nothing. And there is an important connection between the two, as we shall soon see.

6.26. ὡς φησι καὶ Πλάτων: *Sophist*, 238C.

7.2. ὁμοίως; i.e. not in their orderly structure according to the prior and posterior. The ineffable principle does not produce the various realities as occupying their definite positions in the structured system of reality; for if it were so, that principle would have to produce first [57] this and then that, in which case it would involve and pre-contain the universal order of reality, and also in that case the previously produced would be nearer to it than the subsequently produced. But the ineffable principle is absolutely beyond the real and its order, and a fortiori has no definite location in the chain of Reality, not even at its beginning (where the One reigns supreme); it rather engulfs the chain indiscriminately. More of this in the sequel.

7.3. περιτρέπεσθαι [58] has a special force in D. as we shall often have occasion to notice. ***It means that in ascribing an attribute to something we violate that very notion of it which the attribution was meant to convey***. It is precisely this predicament which occasions the long development beginning at 9.11. For instance if we call the Ultimate Ground ineffable or unknowable in order to express its inconceivability, then we eo ipso assert its conceivability as inconceivable. There is much more to this trouble than the dialectical quibble which prima facie appears to be, as we shall see in commenting on 9.11 sqq.

7.6. ἀδύτου. The idea of the ineffable principle as the sacred sanctuary of the universal Temple of Reality is crucial to our correct understanding of it.

7.7-8. Neoplatonic metaphysics and theology is not for the πολλοί.

7.9-9.10. The Ultimate Ground was found to be ineffable and inconceivable. But our anguish in trying to grasp, in however enfeebled a way, the One leads in the same result; our attempts are like birth-pangs without birth; they suffer περιτροπή (as it was explained above): the One must also be ineffable – and this is supported by highest authority.

But if so, in positing a reality higher than that of the One are we positing something beyond the ineffable which the One is? Are we not mistakenly striving for a squared so to speak ineffability?

D. counters this objection by 1) interpreting the *Parmenides* passage (brought forward as evidence *for* the objection) in a way consonant with his view (7.15-8.17); and 2) explaining that the inconceivability and ineffability of the ultimate ground is absolute, whereas that of the One is in a certain (very important, of course) sense. This second contention naturally leads to the long development beginning on 9.11 about the precise sense of the absolute unknowability of the Ultimate.

7.11. *Parmenides* 141e- 142a. Rightly Chagniet (p. 12, n. 4) corrects R. 's absurd reference to *Parm.* 160b.

7.15-18. D. 's interpretation of *Parm.*, differs in many respects from the Neoplatonic Orthodoxy finally formulated and established by Proclus [59]. One such difference, affecting the overall scheme and setting D. quite apart from all his predecessors [60], is D. 's contention that the first Parmenidean Hypothesis does not relate to the absolutely primal principle, but only to the One. In a sense D. agrees with all his predecessors; but this agreement, seen in the context of his positing a Principle superior to the One, turns to be substantial disagreement.

We shall come back again to this point in commenting on 37.26 sqq. below. But we reserve the detailed comparative treatment of the main Neoplatonic answers to the question about the highest Principles (those above Being) for the third section of this work.

According to D., Plato wishes us (without explicitly stating it) to apply his procedure for arriving at the One, in order to transcend the One itself. By the negation of every definite determinate reality he led us to the One; he expects us to

fully see his point, and to take, through the negation of the One itself, the ultimate step towards the Ultimate.

7.18-19. Only the posited, can be raised. Only the affirmed at a stage, can be negated at another. Thus D. after saying that Plato expects us to arrive at some intimation of the absolute Ultimate by the negation, the raising of the last reality which our strained efforts can after proper conceptual purification attain to in an obscure way, i.e. by the cancellation of the One, he subtly remarks that even the One represents an ontological affirmation, a certain "position" or "**positedness**" which reflects its **presence** in reality, however this all-comprehending presence is to be distinguished from the "rude" positedness or presence of every **determinate in its limitation** as subordinate reality (**something or other** among the πάντα).

Θέσις in D., when technically used, bears this sense of position or presence in reality.

The reference is to **Sophistes**, 245b: πεπονθός τε γὰρ τὸ ὄν ἐν εἶναι πως οὐ ταύτῳ ὄν τῷ ἐν φαίνεται. But consult the entire development 242c-245e, the offshoot of which is precisely to show that we must distinguish τὸ ἐν from τὸ ὄν, and that the ὄν is one not by being **the** One, but by "suffering" (πάσχον) the action, as it were, of the One – in this sense being dependent, and thus "inferior", to the One, which in its turn need not such supporting influence from the ὄν in order to subsist (= be present in reality).

D. correctly understands the real meaning of Plato's argument there [61]. Otiose as such a claim may sound amidst the prejudices of the modern age, it can be supported, but without going into the details of the habitually strangely misunderstood Platonic Theory of Participation. Countless cases like this, relate the same story: modern scholarship as a result of a complete alienation from the true spirit of late (at least) Hellenism, more often than not blinkers even in its understanding of Classical Greece.

7.19-8.5. According to D.'s interpretation, Plato is **not** speaking in the **Parmenides** at all about the Ultimate Ground; he reverently stopped at the πρόθυρα of the ἄδυτον, i.e. by the One.

8.3. παρακινδυνευτικώτατος ὁ λόγος; cf. **Sophistes**, 245 b: φέρε δὴ, τίνα ἀρχὴν τις ἂν ἄρξαιτο παρακινδυνευτικοῦ λόγου; This was said just at the beginning of the development, whose conclusion was referred to by D. above.

8.3. ἐκπίπτων εἰς ἰδιώτιδας ἀκοάς: sublime truths are only for the initiated, not for the laity, as it were, for the πολλοί. Any doctrine passing the ordinary capability of ordinary men's understanding is certain to be laughed at by the multitude. This profound triviality is explicitly stated by Plato in his Second Epistle: 314a1 -c6. Cf. also: op.cit. 312d7: φραστόεν δὴ σοι δι' αἰνιγμῶν, ἴν' ἂν τι ἢ δέλτος ἢ πόντου ἢ γῆς ἐν πτυχαῖς πάθῃ, ὁ ἀναγνούς μὴ γνῶ [62].

This characteristically Platonic view, which is echoed and reflected with greater or lesser explicitness in numerous passages in the Platonic corpus, and which is further borne by the momentous fact of Plato's professing views (according to the explicit testimony of, of all philosophers, Aristotle) which are never explicitly formulated and articulated by him in his edited works, is of course very near the heart and mind of every Neoplatonist, such as D.

8.4. καὶ τὸν περὶ τοῦ μηδαμῆ μηδαμῶς ὄντος (sc. λόγον) ἀνακινήσας: (sc. ὁ Πλάτων): D. refers again to a passage in the *Sophist* [63], namely to the development 237a sqq., that is to the ἀπορία and argument about the μὴ ὄν which is made by Plato to precede that about the ὄν (both ἀπορίαι being connected by him, v. 243b-c).

8.4. περιετράπη (sc. ὁ Πλάτων): Plato himself emphasizes the περιτροπή suffered by his argument. V. 238d-239c: in saying that the μὴ ὄν is ἀδιανόητόν τε καὶ ἄρρητον καὶ ἄφθεγκτον καὶ ἄλογον, not a being (ὄν) and not a something (τι) – in saying these one affirms that the μὴ ὄν is something and is said after all, and is somehow conceived (i.e. as inconceivable) etc.

D. faces a similar περιτροπή, but with reference to the μηδέν which transcends even the maximum, *the One* – not in connection with that which fails to be even the minimum, i.e. *an one*, some-*one*-thing (cf. 6.22-26).

8.5. εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀνομοιότητος πόντον, cf. Plato *Politicus*, 273d sqq.: διὸ δὴ καὶ τότε ἤδη θεὸς ὁ κοσμήσας αὐτὸν (sc. τὸν Κόσμον), καθορῶν ἐν ἀπορίαις ὄντα, κηδόμενος ἵνα μὴ χειμασθεῖς ὑπὸ ταραχῆς διαλυθεῖς εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀνομοιότητος ἄπειρον ὄντα πόντον δύῃ, ... etc. The ἄπειρος πόντος τῆς ἀνομοιότητος is, of course, the receptacle, ὑποδοχή – matter as space in its intrinsic disordered state, with order and form being imposed by the Demiurg, in the shaping of the Κόσμος.

NOTES

[1] Not quite “given” though! But of this, more in its proper place below.

[2] Apparent reality is, of course, to be sharply distinguished from appearance in the modern sense of the expression, in which it means the way something appears to a percipient being. We can use the word “appearance” in such contexts provided we understand it objectively, as signifying a, usually inferior or degraded, manifestation (partial from the very reason that it is *a* manifestation) of a reality as distinct from the full indivisible reality as such and in itself. It is, as it were, the outward projection of the interiority of a reality. (In modern philosophy compare with Hegel. And cf. Heidegger’s analysis of the concept of *phaenomenon*).

[3] We provide here only the rudiments for the correct understanding of the basic notions (like that of totality) which we shall encounter in the present context. These are the subject of profound disquisitions later in this work, as they are met with, in following the great project of the derivation of all reality.

[4] Τοῦτο in 1.6 refers of course to the proximately mentioned alternative in the *second* formulation of the question: καὶ τὰ πάντα σὺν αὐτῇ λέγομεν εἶναι, ἢ μετ’ αὐτὴν καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτῆς;

[5] The syntax in 1.10 is of course: τὰ πάντα (subject) βούλεται εἶναι πολλὰ πεπερασμένα (predicate).

[6] ἀρχὴ as beginning and principle.

[7] We shall have ample occasion to revert to an explanation of αἴτιον, of something, that is, whose both abstract and real nature in ancient philosophy in general usually eludes modern commentators.

[8] It would require a monograph to correct the faulty impressions that a certain type of modern mind is likely to gather from such a proposition. Let it suffice here to say, that for the objective thinking of the ancients, one cannot really conceive what is totally non-subsistent. Therefore the above proposition does not blur the boundaries between the conceptual and the real. ***Indeed it presupposes that the truly conceptual is but a replica of the real***. The conceptual is objectively and ontologically, not subjectively and epistemologically understood.

[9] The why will be explained in detail in the second and third sections. In brief it is that every multiplicity presupposes oneness, and every distinction unification.

[10] I say “of multiplicity” and “of distinction”, not “of *a* multiplicity” or “of *a* distinction”, because at the level of abstraction on which we move we have to do with multiplicity or distinction or whatever *in general (ἀπλῶς)*, in their abstract nature, and not with a particular multiplicity or distinction etc. Evidently in order for there to exist a specific multiplicity, the subsistence of multiplicity in general must have been ontologically secured, as it were, in advance.

[11] “At any rate” since the ἀριθμός may be any specific multiplicity in accordance with standard Neoplatonic usage.

[12] Of every number = (in Neoplatonic parlance) of every multiplicity which is subjoined to a principle from which it flows as the number *s* flow from the unit. Not = of every number, like 3 or 4.

[13] Of course they include one *s*, but not the One; they even include *the* one (not the *One*) as *opposed* to the two or three, say; but not the One which is even above this *opposition* of the one to any determinate or indeterminate multiplicity. This again will be treated fully later.

[14] This in effect means that there is no other dependence of B apart from the one passing through A. And this is, ultimately, always the case with strictly Monistic Systems. (By Monism I understand the view according to which there is only one *ultimate* principle – not the view that there is ultimately only one sort of subsistents or realities or entities or things). We shall have more to say on the philosophical meaning of Monism later on.

[15] I emphasize the singularity of D.’s position. But of course we are aware of its systematic connection with cognate attempts to solve the same problems. For instance, to refer only to the obvious, it is normal Proclean doctrine that what is in the result καθ’ ὑπαρξιν is in the cause καθ’ αἰτίαν; and there seems to be just a difference in formulation between this and D.’s view. Certainly I am the last to wish to argue from possibly accidental differences in formulation to real disagreement in doctrine. If I insist on the matter, it is because I believe to be able to back the apparent difference by assigning a different “mechanism” for ontological derivation to D. and, to remain within the example chosen, Proclus. But of this later.

On the other hand, it should be noted that D does not seem to propound this view in opposition to other Neoplatonists. He contrasts it to Speusippus’ conception – and even this in a qualified way (*ἔδοξε* λέγειν 3.1). But again we must equally not

forget that, for the time being, we are moving at the preliminary tackling of those questions which will be exhaustively investigated in the sequel, at the points where their respective natural position calls for, under the appropriate sections of the work.

[16] V. "Aetius" apud Stobaeum, Fr. 38 (ed. Lang).

[17] V. *Metaphysica* Λ, 1075b37- 1076a4 (cf. also N , 1090b13-19). Note esp. his rebuke: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἢ ἑτέρα (sc. οὐσία = hypostasis here) τῆ ἐτέρῃ συμβάλλεται οὐσα ἢ μὴ οὐσα. Neoplatonism precisely tries to avoid this rebuke: everything distinguishable must be distinguished but the absolute connectedness in the total derivation of reality must be, of course, preserved. Of course this was also Speusippus' point (as well as of Plato and the Old Academy). Bonitz judiciously remarks with reference to Aristotle's accusation in Met. Λ, 1072b30 sqq. and Z 1028b21 sqq.: Haec enim diversa rerum genera Speusippus putandus est non prorsus seiuncta inter se posuisse, sed profecto perfectiora ex simplicioribus et imperfectis repetiit, veluti geometricas magnitudines ex arithmetiis sim., unde prope necessario eo est deductus, ut postremo demum ideoque perfectissimo in genere rerum bonitati suum assignaret locum. (In his Commentary to *Aristotelis Metaphysica*, p. 503).

[18] Specifically for Plato, see A , 988a14 (in the context), and Aristoxenus *Elementa Harmonica*, B30, ὅτι ἀγαθόν (fort. leg. τὰγαθόν) ἐστὶν ἓν.

[19] See, e.g., *Metaphysica* Z , 1028b21 together with Λ, 1072b30. Cf. in general Frs. 33a-33c and 34a sqq. (Lang).

[20] See the very illuminating chapter 4 of Book N (1091a30-1092a17). And also note what the ancient commentators say ad loc., brief notices of which are conveniently given by Lang pp. 67-70.

[21] See, e.g., Frs. 34a-34b Lang.

[22] V. Zeller p. 1001, 2.

[23] I do not mean to shock any serious student of Aristotle with this expression, for it is as far from my mind as anything can be to imply that Aristotle was trying here to refute "scientifically" his opponent, and that he failed, coming forth with a frivolity meant by him as serious argument. In fact I believe that in this, and in very many other similar cases, Aristotle is refuting *dialectically* (in *his* sense of the word), not *scientifically*. We must take seriously his careful statements distinguishing sharply between arguments drawn ἐξ ἐνδόξων (= commonsensically plausible views on various matters, which are unparadoxical for the ordinary people)

and scientific arguments proceeding from what is in itself prior (πρότερον τῆ φύσει). In his writings both types of argumentation are intertwined continuously , although again, they for the most part fall under his aporetic and scientific treatment of the issues involved correspondingly . And arguments like the present one are *intended* by him as nothing more than pieces of “dialectics” – always in his sense of the term.

[24] Compare for instance the disparaging and just criticism that Syrianus levels on such “dialectical” tricks (which dupe nobody, and least of all the all too subtle thinking of a Neoplatonist) in his Commentary on B, M, and N of Metaphysics. (Γ is more positive and hence less affected by such “dialectical” fervor – at least in so far as opposition to positions dear to a Platonist is concerned).

[25] See esp. Fr. 34e Lang. Also Fr. 34a – and all the 34’s and 35’s Lang. It is of great importance that, according to the express testimony of Aristotle, at least some Pythagoreans were thinking along the same lines, which of course comes as no surprise given the intimate relationship of the old Academy to Pythagorean Philosophy. “Plato, the best Pythagorean” was considered as a commonplace in Platonic tradition.

[26] The already mentioned Fr. 34e Lang.

[27] Perhaps, we may interpret « τί» adverbially. But this does not affect the philosophical meaning of the sentence.

Ross (Commentary to Aristotle’s Metaphysics, p. 489) unaccountably suggests that in moving from the proposition that the One is imperfect to the proposition that it is not a being, “Aristotle draws a consequence of his own probably not drawn by Speusippus”. This is a most extraordinary statement: at least he should, in conformity with his suggestion, athetize t he « φησὶν» in 1092a14! Aristotle begins *his* answer with: εἰσὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα etc. in 1092a15.

But perhaps Ross’ strange notion is the desperate child of discomfort at what he thinks is entailed by μηδὲ ὄν τι. Because he (loc. cit.) takes this as “(the One) is not”. If so, we have here but one more of the innumerable instances where misunderstanding of « ὄν» leads modern thinkers to awkward solutions. This is not the place to explicate the ancient metaphysical notion of being; but let it be said that when Plato, even in his published works, made the Good beyond οὐσία and εἶναι, he did not presumably wished to maintain that the absolutely First Principle is non-existent, in the sense of unreal, totally absent from Reality, Nothing.

[28] The interpretation given to this crucial clause (1092a14) by Ps. Alexander seems to me very weak – though, no doubt, there is truth in it, if properly construed.

[29] The danger lies not (according to the Neoplatonic viewpoint) in our subtle conceptual operations overstepping, as it were, reality and operating in vacuum (to use Kant's formulation), but rather in our faculties and apparatus, oversubtle and hairsplitting as they can be, not being really sufficiently sensitive and varied to cope with the wonderful richness of articulation in reality. Reason, when correctly followed, cannot possibly overpass reality substantiating and projecting his figments unto her; so marvelously and inexhaustibly delicate reality is. ***Mind cannot outwit reality***. The real problem is that it all too often ***cannot cope*** with it.

This very important view, implicit as it is in the Neoplatonic methodology, is explicitly stated by Simplicius in his Commentary on Epictetus (p. 99 Didot) with reference to the crucial for Neoplatonism ascent towards the first Principles: οὐδὲ γὰρ εὐλαβητέον μὴ κενεμβατώμεν (a word much employed by D.) μείζονά τινα καὶ ὑπερβαίνοντα τὰς πρώτας ἀρχὰς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐννοοῦντες. Οὐ γὰρ δυνατὸν τηλικούτου πηδῆμα πηδῆσαι τὰς ἡμετέρας ἐννοίας ὡς παρισωθῆναι τῇ ἀξίᾳ τῶν πρώτων ἀρχῶν, οὐ λέγω καὶ ὑπερπητῆναι.

We feel here the healthy breeze of pure Hellenic Rationalism blowing. The morbid and checkered thinking of those who are continuously afraid lest thought overpass reality in its innate drive towards the ultimate had not yet then infested mankind. The view is that of reality possessing riches beyond measure, over there for Reason to appropriately express them by identifying itself to the essence of existence – not that of a poverty-stricken reality shamefully overstepped by Reason in almost any one of his bolder enterprises.

[30] διπλόη: The Neoplatonic technical term for any possible distinction which something is capable of suffering, a subdivision within itself. The first distinction is a bifurcation.

[31] The reason why, will become clear in the immediate sequel.

[32] This was the outcome of the discussion of the initial question whether the Principle of ***Everything*** can be ***anything*** (i.e. something or other of those which in their totality make up the extent of 'everything'). And this will also be more directly argued for in the sequel (5.17 sqq.).

[33] It is essential that this should be added, as the causal relationship is constitutive of the essence of a cause as such, not a more or less accidental or extrinsic feature of it.

[34] We shall see that we cannot determinately even say that anything *follows* from it.

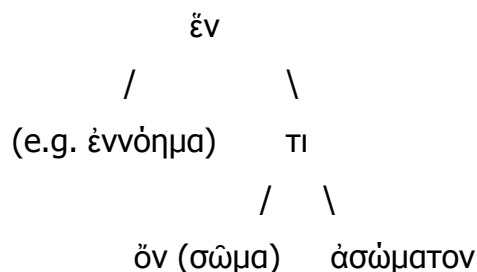
[35] I do not think that Chaignet's rendering "car, tout ce que nous concevons, soit par intuition, soit par réflexion, etc. » is particularly happy.

[36] In the medieval scholastic sense of "intentio".

[37] These conceptions (esp. the higher ones) are not the proper content of our mind; rather we, operating at the limits of our faculties, get some intimation of the corresponding realities, and are thus able to form some sort of notions articulating those intimations.

[37a] 275.8 : οὐ μέντοι ἀλλὰ διακαθαίροντες αὐτάς (sc. τὰς ἐπιβολὰς ἢ ἐννοίας) καὶ συναιροῦντες εἰς τὸ δυνατόν etc. 276.9-12: τρίτην δὲ τούτοις ἐπάγομεν διακάθαρσιν ἐννοιῶν, οὐσίαν τε ἐκεῖ καὶ ζωὴν καὶ νοῦν θεωροῦντες οὐχ οὕτω μετὰ διακρίσεως ἐπὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων τούτων ἔχειν δοκεῖ. ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν μίαν τοῦ ἠνωμένου φύσιν, αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ μόνον προβαλλομένου κατὰ τὴν δοκοῦσαν ὕφεσιν.

[38] This is, of course, standard Neoplatonic doctrine. It bears some rather external (contra Chaignet, p. 8 n. 2) similarity to the Stoic doctrine of τί as covering both being and non-being, with the crucial difference however that Neoplatonism far from identifying being with being a body, considers true being as ἀσώματον. On the other hand it is interesting to take notice of a certain Stoic development recorded by Alexander Aphrodisiensis, *in Topicorum*, 359, 12 Wallies (Fr. II 329 v. Arnim). There a division seems to be entertained like this



It would be perhaps interesting to pursue further this subject, especially when connected with certain testimony usually left to pass unnoticed or unregarded, for instance Fr. II 168 and Fr. I 65.

[39] It can be shown that there cannot be more than one absolutely simple reality. For if there were, they would have to be totally and absolutely unconnected. For if they entertained any communion at all, if they had anything in common, then that would be isolable as a moment in their natures, since it could not exhaust the entirety of their nature, otherwise they would coalesce into one and the same entity and they could not be more than one. But then, with an identifiable component in their nature, they could be no more absolutely simple. And for the absurdity of conceiving of them as entirely disconnected, see following note. Farther, arguing a posteriori, it can be shown that there is just one absolutely simple reality, the One.

[40] If reality is going to have even the weakest and minimal coherence and connectedness, if realities are going to entertain some sort of communion one with another, then the Ultimate Principle *must* be *one* single reality; otherwise we would be able to conceive of two (or more) absolutely severed and totally unconnected Universes – not merely spatially separated (like, say, Epicurean Worlds) or temporally distinct (like, say, Stoic Worlds), but with *absolutely* no common feature, let it be abstract (like “being”, or “one”, or “identical”) whatsoever.

This view is indicated by Proclus, in *Theologia Platonica* II 2 p. 15.10-14 and sqq. ed. Westerink and Saffrey. And see, on this subject in general the three first chapters of the second book of that work.

For Proclus there is another, less abstract, line of proof of Monism, consisting, mainly, in our actually seeing that anything whatsoever, being or non-being in whatever way and mode, *does have in fact* something in common with anything else – namely that it is one. This is what is presupposed in particular in the development in Ch. 3 of the mentioned second book.

[41] V. e.g. 4.14. But v. 71.23 where the παντελής ἀδιάκριτος αἰτία is the One.

[42] Not really “something”, as we shall see!

[43] It is one of the profoundest thoughts in Metaphysics, and it is D. ’s own, that in a certain sense, yes, there must be an absolute Nothing at the absolute commencement of Reality, as there is at its end. See what is soon to follow.

[44] In catachrestic use.

[45] This is the sense of διὰ τὸ κύκλω 5.10. The force of the argument relies on our keeping in mind that we have to do with *undifferentiated* πολλά qua πολλά; so if they can be cause of one another, there is no sufficient reason that this would

not apply *universally* to them, i.e., that *each* one of them should be a cause of any other; and similarly there is no sufficient reason why anyone of them in particular should be such as everyone else depended on it without its depending on anything else. We must concentrate on the fact that anyone of them is considered merely as what goes in to make up the indiscriminate and indefinite plurality which the πολλά ἢ πολλά constitute.

[46] Simplicius, who esteems D. highly (our Damascius, «ὁ ἡμέτερος Δαμάσκιος» as he says, they were colleagues during the last days of the Platonic Academy in Athens, when Damascius was in fact the last head of the venerable institution), emphasizes that, in the investigation of the very difficult problem of τόπος, he wanted to find out the nature of τόπος ἐκ τῆς χρείας αὐτοῦ (e.g. *In Phys.*, 625.3 Diels; and v. 5.6 χρῆζει, esp. 6.26-7!) – that is, from its role or function in the structured system of reality. So, we may infer that D. was particularly sensitive to point out everywhere the pragmatic reason, in a functionalist acceptance, why we are impelled to posit this or that principle, this or that reality.

[47] It is crucially important that this should be clearly seen, in view of the fact that D. (like his great predecessor, Iamblichus) accepted all kinds of *mysterics*. At last we must sharply distinguish between *mystic* and *mystery*.

[48] This is the constant Aristotle's injunction, not commonly taken sufficiently into account by his modern interpreters. Cf. *Metaphysica* Z, 2 ad fin. Cf. *Physica* 184a16 sqq.; *Ethica Nicomachea* 1095b3.

[49] It is interesting to see how "Herennius" put this passage: ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐκ τῶν ἡμῖν γνωριμωτέρων, +ἀνερεθίων+ (sic; ἀνερυτέον?) τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν ἀρρήτους ὠδῖνας εἰς τὴν ἀρρητον συναισθησιν τῆς φανοτάτης (!) ἀληθείας. Mai p. 5 70. Ἀνερυτέον might perhaps be a variant on ἀνεθιστέον, with its moment of purifying (warding off, and thus keeping the purity of something).

[50] One may object that, on the contrary, it is rather a proof of real power to have one's own when strugglingly *immersed* in a commotion, esp. when one is able to subject it to his sway. But, *firstly*, in such a case, and to the extent that one succeeds in subduing a field and rendering it subject to the power of one's nature, to such an extent does one raise oneself above the "conquered" field. And, *secondly*, keeping aloof does *not* entail being inert, uncausative and unproductive – on the contrary, it is a mark of impotence to be able to "govern" a field only mechanically by

being immersed in it, handling it with one's own hands as it were; supreme power is wielded only when one "governs" and "causes" ***by doing nothing in particular in the relevant respect***. This all important Neoplatonic notion, will be fully analysed later on. It, of course, connects with the Neoplatonic theory of Causality. And it marvelously coincides with a basic doctrine of Taoism, esp. in its primary application to the ultimate ground of all reality.

[51] "Higher": in the sense delineated in the Preliminary Note.

[52] Since we cannot really say that that principle is "higher" than the One, in any positively conceived sense.

[53] For a systematic metaphysical analysis and proof of this last point, consult the two last chapters of my "Things and Predication".

[54] We commit a simplification here in that there can be distinguished two different ways of that "both X and Y" corresponding to what D. terms ἡνωμένον and διακρινόμενον (the latter as distinct from the διακεκριμένον), or to what Proclus calls μονή and πρόοδος. But of this later, in sections three and four.

[55] My parentheses are intended to explain the difference in the aspect under which the One on the one hand, and the ἡνωμένον on the other, are both πάντα.

[56] Chaignet fails to understand the point completely – v. p. 11 n. 3.

[57] Of course metaphysical dependence, priority and posteriority is here meant. Temporal priority is not applicable even in the productions of principles far below the Ineffable Ground.

[58] Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 95b.

[59] Cf. in this connection *Simplicius, In Physica Commentaria*, ed. Diels p. 795.

[60] With the exception of Iamblichus whose articulated exposition has not unfortunately survived to us. It is possible to reconstruct his views from what Proclus and Damascius argue in connection with , and in reference to, them; such a reconstruction will be attempted in the third section.

[61] Chaignet, expectedly, fails to see the point. V. p. 13, n. 2.

[62] Cf. also the well known passages of the VIIth Epistle, esp. 341a-342a.

[63] The *Sophist* was one of the Platonic dialogues in the Iamblichean Canon. V. Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy c. XXVI. Westerink's reconstruction of the

corrupt passage ("Anonymous Prolegomena etc." p. XXXIX-XL) is the correct one (excepting some doubts concerning Politicus).