

The First Principle in Late Neoplatonism
A Study of the One's Causality in Proclus and Damascius

Jonathan Greig



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Abstract

DEUTSCH

Eine der Hauptfragen, die den Neoplatonismus in der Spätantike des 3. bis 6. Jh. n. Chr. dominiert, betrifft die Natur des ersten Prinzips, das 'das Eine' genannt wird. Seit Plotin wurde das Prinzip als die Ursache aller Dinge charakterisiert, da es die Pluralität der intelligiblen Formen hervorbringt, die die rationale und materielle Struktur der Welt konstituieren. Ausgehend hiervon begegnen die Neuplatoniker einem Problem, das darin liegt, dass das Eine, insofern es erste Ursache ist, alle Dinge transzendieren muss, die durch Pluralität charakterisiert werden – und trotzdem muss das Eine, weil es auch die Ursache der Pluralität ist, die Pluralität in sich selbst antizipieren. Dies ist die Hauptmotivation dafür, dass der Fokus dieser Untersuchung auf zwei späte Neuplatoniker konzentriert, Proklos (5. Jh. n. Chr.) und Damaskios (spätes 5., frühes 6. Jh. n. Chr.): beide versuchen dieses Problem in zwei recht verschiedenen Wegen anzugehen. Der Lösungsversuch von Proklos beinhaltet die Setzung von zwischengeordneten Prinzipien (den „Henaden“), die die Natur des Einen spiegeln, als 'Einheiten', aber direkt Ursache von Pluralität sind. Dies bewirkt, dass das eine nur noch Ursache von Einheit ist, während die Erzeugung der Pluralität durch die Henaden vermittelt wird, die es hervorbringt. Damaskios glaubt, während er sich Proklos' Theorie aneignet, dass dies nicht genug ist: wenn das Eine als Ursache von allen Dingen gesetzt ist, muss es in direktem Verhältnis zur Pluralität stehen, sogar dann, wenn seine Kausalität durch die Henaden vermittelt wird. Daher spaltet Damaskios Proklos' Eins in zwei Entitäten: (1) das Unsagbare als erstes „Prinzip“, das absolut transzendent ist und in keinem kausalen Verhältnis steht und (2) das Eine als die erste „Ursache“ von allen Dingen, das aber im Vergleich zum Unsagbaren nur relativ transzendent.

Frühere Studien, die Proklos und Damaskios vergleichen, tendieren dazu sich Entweder auf das Unsagbare zu fokussieren oder auf den Skeptizismus in Damaskios, aber es gibt kaum Untersuchungen, die sich mit den kausalen Rahmenkonzepten beschäftigen, die den Positionen beider Denker zugrunde liegen. Daher schlägt die vorliegende Untersuchung vor, sich auf die kausalen Rahmenkonzepte der beiden Denker zu konzentrieren: wie und warum versucht Proklos zu erklären, dass das Eine eine Ursache ist, während

es gleichzeitig seine Wirkung transzendiert? Was bringt Damaskios dazu, einen Kausalitätsbegriff für das Eine vorzuschlagen, der es in gewissem Sinn der Transzendenz in dem Sinn beraubt, in dem ein höheres Prinzip, wie das Unsagbare, transzendent ist? Die vorliegende Arbeit wird diese Fragen in zwei Schritten beantworten. Im ersten werden die Kausalitätsbegriffe von Proklos und Damaskios untersucht, soweit sie auf alle Bereiche des Seins angewendet werden. Im zweiten Schritt wird die Kausalität des Einen entsprechend beider Denker untersucht: für Proklos wird die Kausalität des Einen in ihm selbst und die Kausalität der zwischengeordneten Prinzipien betrachtet; für Damaskios, die Kausalität des einen und in welcher Weise das Unsagbare gebraucht wird, um das Eine zu erklären. Das Ergebnis dieser Untersuchung wird zeigen, dass Proklos' Theorie in einer inneren Spannung resultiert auf die Damaskios mit seiner Interpretation des Einen reagiert. Obwohl Damaskios' Lösungsversuch selbst einige Spannungen beinhaltet, löst er zumindest ein Problem.

ENGLISH

One of the main issues that dominates Neoplatonism in late antique philosophy of the 3rd–6th centuries A.D. is the nature of the first principle, called the 'One'. From Plotinus onward, the principle is characterized as the cause of all things, since it produces the plurality of intelligible Forms, which in turn constitute the world's rational and material structure. Given this, the tension that faces Neoplatonists is that the One, as the first cause, must transcend all things that are characterized by plurality—yet because it causes plurality, the One must anticipate plurality within itself. This becomes the main motivation for this study's focus on two late Neoplatonists, Proclus (5th cent. A.D.) and Damascius (late 5th–early 6th cent. A.D.): both attempt to address this tension in two rather different ways. Proclus' attempted solution is to posit intermediate principles (the 'henads') that mirror the One's nature, as 'one', but directly cause plurality. This makes the One only a cause of unity, while its production of plurality is mediated by the henads that it produces. Damascius, while appropriating Proclus' framework, thinks that this is not enough: if the One is posed as a cause of all things, it must be directly related to plurality, even if its causality is mediated through the henads. Damascius then splits Proclus' One into two entities: (1) the Ineffable as the first 'principle', which is absolutely transcendent and has no causal relation; and (2) the One as the first 'cause' of all things, which is only relatively transcendent under the Ineffable.

Previous studies that compare Proclus and Damascius tend to focus either on the Ineffable or a skeptical shift in epistemology, but little work has been done on the causal framework which underlies both figures' positions. Thus, this study proposes to focus on the causal frameworks behind each figure: why and how does Proclus propose to assert that the One is a cause, at the same time that it transcends its final effect? And

what leads Damascius to propose a notion of the One's causality that no longer makes it transcendent in the way that a higher principle, like the Ineffable, is? The present work will answer these questions in two parts. In the first, Proclus' and Damascius' notions of causality will be examined, insofar as they apply to all levels of being. In the second part, the One's causality will be examined for both figures: for Proclus, the One's causality in itself and the causality of its intermediate principles; for Damascius, the One's causality, and how the Ineffable is needed to explain the One. The outcome of this study will show that Proclus' framework results in an inner tension that Damascius is responding to with his notion of the One. While Damascius' own solution implies its own tension, he at least solves a difficulty in Proclus—and in so doing, partially returns to a notion of the One much like Iamblichus' and Plotinus' One.

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¹ Especially for my friends (who may hopefully understand), for the short version of this I refer you to the Acknowledgements page in Pietsch, B. M. (2015), *Dispensational Modernism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

² Ultimately the first half of Chapter 5, below.

guiding me on my current path in my last master's thesis on Plotinus and Proclus. Her vast knowledge of the texts and relevant secondary literature on any topic or question proved quite useful, as well as her feedback on different presentations and discussions of this doctoral study. I am also indebted to the community in Edinburgh for their help and feedback on earlier presentations and work on this topic and the forerunner of this topic from my master's thesis.

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Preface

The inspiration for this study is in large part thanks to a confluence of personal influences: in particular, both my unusual, yet beneficial liberal arts education—which heavily focused on Thomas Aquinas and the main works of Aristotle—and, at about the same time, my introduction to Byzantine Church Fathers, especially Gregory Palamas. I came to find that both Aquinas and Palamas shared a common heritage, not just theologically but especially in their philosophical terminology and framework, ultimately going back to Aristotle and Plato, while their metaphysical positions implied a disagreement: for instance, on the nature of God’s simplicity and causality, one figure (Aquinas) affirmed the unity of God and denied any essential distinction in internal attributes or characters, while the other (Palamas) appeared to affirm the opposite, by distinguishing between the divine *ousia* and *energeiai* in God. What led these two figures to have such different positions, given their shared philosophical background,¹ initially puzzled me, and it eventually led me to consider the intervening period of late antique philosophy—starting with Plotinus, and eventually the Aristotelian commentators and later Neoplatonists. Since I pursued these areas in my postgraduate education, I have come to find that the issues that recur in the later Latin and Byzantine figures can be traced back to the inner disagreements among pagan Neoplatonists, as well as the way Aristotle and Plato were read in late antiquity. In this regard, my work in late antiquity, especially in Neoplatonists like Proclus and Damascius, has proved very beneficial and illuminating, both for my earlier interests in Aquinas and Palamas, as well as the issues that are raised in themselves by these late antique figures. In this regard I am a firm believer in past context informing the philosophical debates and dialogues between figures,² and that is especially the case for the figures which are the focus of this study.

1 Excepting, of course, the immediate Byzantine Greek and Latin backgrounds. That is—inasmuch as they possessed the texts from Aristotle, and Neoplatonists, as I go to show in the Introduction.

2 In this regard I generally follow, albeit with certain reservations, Skinner (1969)’s argument for a middle ground between a perennialist-only and a historical-contextualist-only reading of texts. I also follow Peter Adamson’s ‘rules’ for doing history of philosophy, which he has documented in a series of blog posts attached to his podcast, ‘History of Philosophy without Any Gaps’. The question of methodology in how to read or approach texts in history of philosophy, while also giving a critical philosophical judgment, is still an area that merits further discussion and work.

Given this background, this work is ultimately focused on the arguments made by Proclus and Damascius, while it also attempts to engage the context from the Platonic and Aristotelian backgrounds, as well as intermediate figures like the Stoics and earlier Platonists. Here I wish to make a few quick notes on the technical guidelines for this study.

Throughout this study, in block-quotations I provide the English translation first followed by the Greek. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted in the citation after the translation. In my translations I give a close reading of the Greek wherever possible, while taking into either the technical nature of certain passages or certain lines that require some careful paraphrasing (as is the case, for instance, in Plotinus, sometimes Damascius).³ Because I attempt a literal reading where possible, the English may appear less pleasant and somewhat awkward, however this is with the hope of a thorough examination of the thought and text of each figure. In the main body of my work, whenever I quote a word or phrase, I give a transliteration of the Greek for non-Greek readers' convenience, unless there are specific features of the Greek on which I wish to comment.

I generally refer to secondary source discussions in the footnotes, except on specific issues—for instance, the nature of the Limit and Unlimited in Proclus.⁴ I otherwise orient the main discussions around the primary texts and the issues that arise. I provide an outline of the main positions in the secondary literature connected to my topic in the *Status Quaestionis* of the Introduction.⁵

Throughout the study I will follow general convention for Platonic and Neoplatonic scholars by referring to principles and transcendent (Platonic) forms in the uppercase—thus, 'Form' or 'Intellect', for the transcendent version; 'form' or 'soul', either for the particular, immanent form (i.e. the form, 'man', in Socrates), or the particularized principle or entity. There may be certain variations in some places, such as in the translations, but I attempt to follow this general convention throughout.

All original Greek quotations and citations can be found under 'Primary Sources' in the Bibliography. I also attempt to follow the recent critical editions for the Greek cited: for instance, for Proclus' *Parmenides' Commentary* I follow Carlos Steel's 2006–2009 edition in the OCT series, unless otherwise noted in the citation.⁶

In giving the Greek, I also follow the standard conventional textual marks given by the critical editions: thus,

· [...]—for **English** (translations and quotes)—indicates either paraphrasing, skipped section, context provided.

³ Usually in these cases I defer to already-existing standard translations—for instance Armstrong, for Plotinus, or Westerink-Combès for Damascius.

⁴ In Ch. 4.5, p. 226 ff.

⁵ P. 13 ff.

⁶ This applies in at least two cases—strictly to refer to the line numbers. In these cases I indicate the citation with '[Cousin]':

- [...] —for **Greek**—indicates a deletion or ignoring in the edition.
- <...> indicates conjectural additions in the Greek, usually following the edition.
- (...) indicates transliterated Greek terms/phrases.
- Numbers in primary source quotations, especially in italic or bold, are mine unless noted.
- In certain places I will sometimes italicize certain terms or phrases in a quote—this is usually mine unless noted.

For abbreviations in footnotes or the text, one may locate their reference in the full title under ‘Primary Sources’ in the Bibliography. Certain abbreviations, especially those used in the footnotes, should be noted:

- *ET* = Proclus, *Elementatio Theologica, Elements of Theology*
- *DP* = Damascius’ *De Principiis = On Problems and Solutions on First Principles*
- *PT* = Proclus, *Platonica Theologica = Platonic Theology*
- *GC* = Aristotle, *De Generatione et Corruptione = On Generation and Corruption*
- *DA* = Aristotle, *De Anima = On the Soul*
- *In Met.* = *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria* = Syrianus’ or Alexander’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (where noted)
- *In Phys.* = Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum = On Aristotle’s Physics*
- *In Tim.* = *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* = Proclus’ or Iamblichus’ *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* (where noted)
- *In Phd.* = Damascius, *In Phaedonem = Commentary on the Phaedo*
- *In Parm.* = *In Platonis Parmenidem commentaria* = Proclus’, Damascius’, or the Anonymous’ *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* (where noted)
- *In Eucl.* = Proclus, *In primum Euclidis Elementorum librum commentarii = Commentary on the First Book of Euclid’s Elements*
- *In Alc.* = Proclus, *In Platonis Alcibiadem = Commentary on Alcibiades I*
- *In Phil.* = Damascius, *In Philebum = Lectures on the Philebus*
- *De comm. math.* = Iamblichus, *De communi mathematica scientia liber*
- *De Decem Dub.* = Proclus, *De decem quaestiones circa providentiam* (under the *Tria Opuscula* in the Bibliography) = *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*
- *De Prov.* = Proclus, *De Providentia = On Providence*

Introduction

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is an investigation into the nature of the first principle and its causality between the two late Neoplatonists, Proclus and Damascius, of the fifth to sixth centuries A.D. The issue is one that reflects basic philosophical interest, both for the problems that are raised and discussed, as well as the place that the two figures occupy in the history of philosophy. At stake for both philosophers is the question how there can be a first cause of all things that, as the first principle (*archê*), comes *before* all things, while as a cause, also implies synonymy *with* all things. The roots to this issue stretch back to Plato and Aristotle with the Old Academy's reception of the two, and its relevance can be seen after the end of pagan Platonism in the sixth century, A.D., with questions that arise on the nature of God's causality and transcendence in Arabic, Byzantine, and Latin thought. The issue also reflects a basic, perennial issue about the nature of causality: on the one hand, causality entails that the cause must pre-contain or reflect the essential feature of the effect it produces—if one subscribes to a view that essential features in things come to be in virtue of the cause's own nature. On the other hand, there are cases of causes that should *not* imply this synonymy—for instance, the artisan's idea or thought, which is immaterial, is not like the artifact that he or she produces, which exists in matter. For Plato and Platonists this is, of course, one of the main problems about the Forms' causality, while it becomes one of the main issues for divine causality in later figures in the history of philosophy. For these reasons, the focus of this study will be on how both Proclus and Damascius respond to the difficulties involved in the first principle's causality within late Neoplatonism. In particular, the focus will be how, and why, Proclus combines transcendence and causality for the Neoplatonic first principle—the One—while Damascius separates these two functions into two, separate principles: the Ineffable, as the purely transcendent first principle, and the One, as the first true cause of all things.

Proclus (ca. 412–485 A.D.) and Damascius (ca. 462–after 532 A.D.) come towards the end of a nearly-800 year run for the Platonic tradition, which culminates in the period that has been termed 'Neoplatonism', from Plotinus (ca. 204/205–270 A.D.) to

Olympiodorus (roughly 505–565 A.D.)¹ and Simplicius (roughly 480–560 A.D.)² Among the previous eras of Platonism, the period marked by Neoplatonists is marked by an extensive systematization that, in large part, goes back to Plotinus, while Proclus and his successors, including Damascius, tighten this systematization on a number of standard Platonist positions. The majority of Platonists in the tradition up to Proclus maintained a traditional stance, going back to Plato's middle dialogues and unwritten doctrines, about the existence of transcendent Forms. On this understanding, the physical world has its rational structure grounded in the Forms as transcendent, intelligible principles which are separate from their particular instantiations—as, for instance, the Form of 'tree' or 'treeness' is distinct from different particular trees, yet provides each tree's intelligible structure and organization. For Neoplatonists from Plotinus onward, the derivation of the world's rational structure from the Forms necessitates distinguishing between three immaterial principles: Soul,³ Intellect, and the One.⁴

Although one finds variations of this three-fold structure in previous Platonists before Plotinus,⁵ what especially distinguishes Neoplatonists from Plotinus onward is that the One for them is 'beyond being' in an absolute sense. This follows from Plato's claim about the Form of the Good in *Republic* VI in the sense that the category of 'being' (*to on*) does not apply to the One as the cause of Being-itself. As 'One', this interpretation is also combined with an ontological reading of the *Parmenides*' first hypothesis, where negations of the different attributes of being apply for the Form of the One. This results in a unique kind of causality for the One, compared to the Forms: while each Form is a cause through being of that specific kind, the One acts as a cause by *not* being identifiable with one specific kind of being or another. This is rather distinct from, for instance, later interpretations of the first cause in early medieval Arabic and Latin thought, as in the *Liber*

¹ See Opsomer (2010) 697 about the speculation for the dates.

² See Baltussen (2010) 711 about the speculation for the dates. One can argue that 'Platonism', generically construed outside the Academy, continued beyond these figures—for instance in the form of the Christian, John Philoponus (ca. 490–ca. 570 A.D.), and onward for Byzantines like Maximus the Confessor. Strictly speaking, the school allegiance to Plato comes to an end in Athens with the closing of the Academy under Justinian, in 529 A.D., and in Alexandria with Olympiodorus (roughly 500–570).

³ Here and throughout the dissertation, I will use uppercase for names, like 'Soul' or 'Being', indicating self-subsisting principles or hypostases, while the lowercase for, e.g., 'soul' or 'being', to indicate either a common ontological category or particular entity (as individual souls, like individual bodies).

⁴ To elaborate, (1) Soul distributes the world's rational structure in matter and through time, using the Forms as paradigms for generating that structure; (2) Intellect, which is separate from matter (and by proxy Soul), and contains and thinks the Forms in themselves; and, (3) the One, as the cause of the Forms' unity, and derivatively the cause of all things. In late Neoplatonists, from Iamblichus onward, this basic three-fold structure becomes elaborated, when each principle becomes distinguished between one universal cause and multiple particular, participated principles—for instance, one universal cause, Soul-itself, and separate, particular souls which correspond to their respective bodies. For an excellent diagram of this structure, see Chlup (2012) 103.

⁵ Some of which will be broached in Ch. 1 (p. 23 ff.).

de Causis, Avicenna, or Aquinas, where the principle, God, causes being and existence by being paradigmatically existence-itself, without belonging to a particular genus or kind of being.⁶ Thus in the Neoplatonic formulation of the One, one finds the confluence of both transcendence—insofar as the One ‘is not’, in one sense, yet it is also a cause, which implies some form of relation with the things it causes. It is here that one also meets with an implicit tension, and where Proclus and Damascius become directly relevant inasmuch as they address this tension that exists in earlier Platonists and Neoplatonists.

GENERAL BACKGROUND ON CAUSALITY AND THE PLATONIC / ARISTOTELIAN NOTION OF 'CAUSE'

However before we go on, it is worth first reflecting on the basic question of causality. Although causation in a contemporary context tends to be equated with event causation,⁷ for Platonists and Aristotelians causation is to be understood in terms of types, or kinds, of causes that explain a given effect.⁸ Thus, when one asks why, for instance, the mug fell, the answer given is not just that the hand pushed the mug—an event—but, more primarily, that the hand is of a *type* (as having a hard surface, let’s say, or being moved) such that it has the power to make the mug fall.⁹ In this sense, causality for these figures is related to explaining essential features about natural substances and the world.¹⁰ Although Aristotelians and Platonists differ on where to place the causes of these essential features—either solely in particular instantiations of a species (for Aristotelians), or in transcendent Forms and causes (for Platonists)—they share the same position that accounting for causes is directly related to ontology. Thus one important aspect for both conceptions is the principle of causal synonymy: namely that a feature of the cause, whether an essential or accidental property, is the same in kind as that which is

6 Thus only in a loose sense is the Neoplatonic One analogous to Avicenna and Aquinas’ God, insofar as the first principle/God is a cause of beings by not being tied to the Forms or kinds of being—although (and here the analogy breaks) unity is still considered a quasi-form of being, unlike the notion of existence which does not directly imply ‘to be’ of a specific kind. Here I follow Adamson and Galluzzo (Forthcoming), *pace* those like Gerson (1994): one does not find a metaphysical essence/existence distinction in Plotinus (let alone Aristotle), but rather later with Avicenna.

7 This has been characterized as a ‘Neo-Humean’ approach (see e.g. Schmaltz (2014) 14–16). On event causation in general, see Loux (2006) 187–204.

8 For a history of the notion of causation, specifically efficient causation, from antiquity to contemporary philosophical discussions, see the overview of Schmaltz (2014).

9 In contemporary discussions of causation this position is represented as ‘causal dispositionalism’: see for instance Mumford (2014).

10 Although Aristotle, for instance, allows for accidental causes: see Aristotle, *Physics* II.4–5. However even in these cases, accidental causation is possible only within the context of admitting essential causes.

transmitted in the effect.¹¹ Thus the property, ‘heat’, in a hot stone which is dropped in cold water is transmitted to the water: the water then also becomes the same in kind as the cause, which is warm. This might initially seem counterintuitive for cases like a hammer causing the effect of shattering glass: we would not say that the hammer, also, shatters, even though it causes shattering. Synonymy would work in a different way in this case: the hammer’s hard surface has the potentiality to produce shattering, while its material makes it impossible for it in itself to shatter when the glass also shatters (rather unlike two glasses, for instance, smashing into each other which may both shatter). The same form is then shared between the two objects—for instance, we might say motion—while it only exists in actuality in one, namely the glass, where the glass shards are put in motion.

Given these two examples, here we may mention two corresponding versions of this principle: for Plato and later Platonists, the Forms are causally ‘synonymous’ with their effects only in one direction—e.g. the Form of ‘Beauty’ conveys its essential property to all beautiful things, while in itself it does not undergo the plurality of the participants of ‘beauty’; for Aristotle, causes like the hot stone (above) are causally ‘synonymous’ with their effects in two directions—e.g. only an enmattered man produces another enmattered man. In the former case, synonymy is held alongside the cause’s transcendence in relation to the effect, similar to the example of the hammer and the glass. In the case of man causing man, synonymy entails a two-way relation, which does *not* imply transcendence, like the earlier example of the hot stone and water—in fact, typical cases of synonymy for Aristotle entail reciprocity, so that the cold water, in turn, cools the hot stone.¹² Thus causes like the unmoved mover, for Aristotle, do not exhibit causal synonymy, since they do not convey their characteristic property to the effect, as in the case of the hot stone or the hammer; in the case of the unmoved mover, its actuality as a divine intellect is entirely self-focused, and instead becomes the final cause for the motion of the world-sphere, which in turn moves the stars and the planets.¹³

As we will later see,¹⁴ Neoplatonists like Proclus come to appropriate features from both versions of causal synonymy: they appropriate Aristotle’s characterization that

¹¹ The terminology, ‘synonymy’, comes from Aristotle: see e.g. *Physics* VIII.5, 257b9–14. On the principle in general, see Bodnár and Pellegrin (2009) 279–289; Hankinson (1998) 31–32, 129; and Makin (1990). Hankinson links the principle to Neoplatonists, in connection with the ‘principle of prior actuality’ and the ‘principle of simplicity’ in p. 454. The principle is further discussed below in Plato, Aristotle, and Proclus in Ch. 2 (p. 91 ff.).

¹² Thus in the hammer/glass case, above, even if the hammer does not shatter, it would still be, in some sense, reciprocally acted on by the glass insofar as it is pushed back (whether slowed down or stopped). Implicitly this is the case for causes that are in matter, like their effects. As we will see, Aristotle allows for cases of efficient causes that do not imply reciprocal action: for instance, for the artist creating a statue, the artist’s *thought* of the form of the statue is the efficient cause of the statue coming about, but it is not affected by the matter of the statue that comes to be. Discussed below in Ch. 2.1.2, p. 103 ff.

¹³ Bodnár and Pellegrin (2009) 289–290.

¹⁴ Ch. 2.1, p. 94 ff.

the actuality of the cause is that by which the effect is conveyed, yet they ultimately keep a Platonist model that Forms and immaterial entities like Intellect and Soul are not the same in kind, or reciprocally acted on, by the lower effect they produce. However it is within the appropriation of this understanding of causal synonymy that we find disagreements arising—specifically for Proclus in response to Plotinus and his successors, and in turn for Damascius in response to Proclus. This issue becomes elaborated below, but we may put it briefly here. Both figures appropriate a form of the Aristotelian model of synonymy on their understanding of higher, immaterial causes in relation to the effects, although in radically different ways. For Proclus, the cause is synonymous with its effect ‘by causality’ (*kat’ aitian*), since it anticipates the character of its effect and must, in some way, pre-contain it. In Proclus’ model this means that one must add an additional ‘step’ and posit two kinds of causes: a first cause that does not imply such an anticipation *kat’ aitian*, and a second, intermediate cause where the *kat’ aitian* relation to the effect applies. For Damascius, however, this is not enough: any notion of ‘cause’, in one or the other case, directly entails its effect, and must reciprocally become like the effect it brings about. In this sense Damascius more strongly holds to the Aristotelian model of causal synonymy. However for immaterial causes, like Intellect and especially the One, this endangers their transcendence and brings to the fore the issue of transcendence and causality when we look at Proclus’ account in comparison with Damascius’.

WHY PROCLUS AND DAMASCIUS?

Given the general issue of causes, we may now ask, among other Neoplatonists, why Proclus and Damascius are specifically considered in this study. Two answers may be given: first, both philosophers explicitly respond to internal tensions in earlier Neoplatonists’ theories about the One, and further Damascius’ framework shows how a different kind of tension results in Proclus’ own response to earlier Neoplatonists. And second, little work has been done in contemporary scholarship on the relation between Proclus and Damascius, specifically in light of responding to this internal tension between the One’s causality and transcendence.

First for the historical background, one problem with the notion of the One, from Plotinus onward, is that it at once transcends its effects, while as a cause it accounts for specific features found in the effects—namely, the character of unity found in all things, as well as the plurality which characterizes all things.¹⁵ Since plurality and unity are entailed in ‘all things’, this suggests that the One is implicated with its effects, insofar

¹⁵ Whereas in earlier Platonists—for instance in the Old Academy—a second, apparently separate principle accounted for the existence of matter and plurality, with the Old Academy’s Dyad for Speusippus and Xenocrates. The trend for Neoplatonists, from Plotinus onward, is to affirm a strict one-principle view: the One must then be responsible *both* for plurality and unity emerging from itself. See Plotinus, *Enn.* II.9.4.

as causes are synonymous with their effects. Yet on Plotinus' interpretation, and for all subsequent Neoplatonists, the One radically transcends its effects in such a way that it does *not* pre-contain the effect: for if the effect of the One is plurality, then the One cannot, itself, be the plurality which it produces. In this sense the One is not a 'cause', like other causes, since it is not synonymous with its effect of plurality. Yet, on the other hand, it is still a 'cause' insofar as all things are from it, and insofar as it produces its own property, unity, in all things. The difficulty then becomes how to distinguish between these two aspects in the One: between its transcendence over plurality, and its synonymy as the cause of unity in all things.

I address the varying attempts to solve this difficulty in **Chapter 1**, on the predecessors of Proclus, but we may summarize at least two approaches that Cristina D'Ancona has insightfully highlighted.¹⁶ The first approach, which is taken up by Plotinus and Porphyry (and, as I argue, up to Iamblichus),¹⁷ is to say that the One's causality is directly analogous to the Forms' causality: just as a given Form, like the 'Beautiful-itself', gives shape to its determined participants by being shapeless and undetermined relative to them, so the One gives determination and thereby plurality to things by itself being formless and without plurality compared to the Forms and all subsequent plurality. In this sense the One functions like an intelligible cause.¹⁸ Yet the drawback of this approach is that it suggests that the One is, in some sense, intelligible, exactly since the One acts like an intelligible cause. Thus just as the Form, Beauty, anticipates the varying instantiations of its property within its unity, so also the One anticipates the character of Intellect within its unity. This would then make sense of why Plotinus often switches from radically negative language to positive language for the One in treatises like *Enn.* VI.8.13 ff., where the One is portrayed as the paradigm of Intellect inasmuch as it is a cause of itself and has its own activity (*energeia*)—characters otherwise only appropriate for Intellect.¹⁹ We might then characterize this as a sort of 'two-sided' approach for the One.

The second approach, which is taken up by Proclus and Damascius is to distinguish the One from a set of intermediate principles, so that the One is only directly responsible for the production of unity, while the intermediate principles are directly responsible for the

¹⁶ D'Ancona Costa (1996), esp. 361–362.

¹⁷ Unfortunately D'Ancona implicitly includes Iamblichus in what I call here the 'second approach' (i.e. separating the One's causality from its production of plurality). As I show in Ch. 1.4 (p. 70 ff.), Iamblichus still falls into the 'first approach', since he construes the One as the cause of plurality which is first manifested in the intermediate principles after it. The difference in Proclus' version is that the principles after the One are themselves 'one'-only, whereas for Iamblichus they are 'one' and plural at once. Cf. Damascius' critique of Iamblichus on this in *DP* II, 16,4–16 (and discussion below in p. 289 ff.).

¹⁸ D'Ancona Costa (1996) 374–375.

¹⁹ Of course it must be noted that Plotinus, himself, signposts his discussion beforehand in *Enn.* VI.8.13 as unusual: he says that the positive attributes he gives for the One cannot be made in a literal, 'correct' way, but in a second, 'persuasive' way, e.g. in lines 1–5. Discussed below in Ch. 1.2.1 (p. 52 ff.).

production of plurality and unity at all lower levels of being.²⁰ In one sense this relieves the tension implied by the earlier model, since the One's first effect is not plurality but entities that are also just 'one' themselves (i.e. with the henads). At the same time the One is still preserved as a cause of 'all things' through its delegated causality, while it also transcends the plurality implied in all things, at the lower levels.

It is within this second approach that Proclus and Damascius diverge on the One's causal relation. As I show in the following chapters, Proclus and Damascius are both responding to the tension implied in this first approach, however the solution that each employs differs: for Proclus, the One's transcendence is *also* causal, insofar as the products after the One are also 'one' in themselves. For Damascius, even while admitting intermediate principles, the One still implies causal synonymy with 'all things'; the One then cannot be truly transcendent over 'all things'. The difference between these two statements hinges on how one understands the following causal sequence: if A causes B, and B causes C, A is then a 'cause' of C. For Proclus, the conclusion does not imply that A is *synonymous* with C, although A is still a cause for C by transitivity. For Damascius, if A is a cause of C—whether mediately or immediately—this still implies that it is synonymous with C. A is consequently *not* transcendent over C, as it would be for Proclus, since it is synonymous with C. It is this latter claim that leads Damascius to assert that the first principle cannot be the One, but another principle beyond the One, 'the Ineffable', which has no causal relation in any way to the One or its effects. Thus, whereas Proclus tries to hold causality and transcendence together in the One, Damascius splits these two into separate principles.

Given this outline, Damascius' position has been interpreted in recent secondary literature either as concluding a typical late Neoplatonist move of positing extra principles, or as implying Damascius' acceptance of epistemic skepticism about first principles in general. The first claim would imply that the Ineffable is a superfluous principle, since the One, by itself, should be sufficient to account for the transcendence and causality implied in being a first principle. Yet neither of these views takes account of Damascius' causal framework, both in general and in the case of the One, and further they do not address how Damascius fits alongside Proclus in addressing the tension of the first approach with early Neoplatonists.²¹ In this light the issue of causal synonymy is key to understanding why Damascius distinguishes the Ineffable and the One. As this study will attempt to show, while Damascius appropriates Proclus' framework, he makes certain, radical revisions in the causal structure of higher principles to account for both issues of causality and

²⁰ Cf. D'Ancona Costa (1996) 375–377.

²¹ In this vein, cf. Van Riel (2010) 671: 'Damascius' commentaries are not so much commentaries on the classical authors, Plato and Aristotle themselves, as they are 'commentaries on the commentaries', especially those of Proclus. Thus, Damascius' commentaries consist of discussions with earlier positions that were themselves aimed at integrating older discussions.' Van Riel's description here well-applies to the collection of *aporiai* in the *De Principiis*.

transcendence that Proclus himself attempts to address with mixed results.

RECEPTION IN BYZANTINE, ARABIC, AND LATIN CONTEXTS

As has been mentioned in the literature, Damascius himself does not appear to have had much explicit reception after the end of pagan Platonism in the sixth century A.D.²² It would appear that even in the last few figures after Damascius in the Academy, no mention or response is made to Damascius' metaphysical innovations.²³ Although one might think that this leads to a philosophical dead-end, historically speaking, one can still find the same tension between causality and transcendence recurring in the receivers of Proclus' thought in Byzantine, Arabic, and Latin contexts²⁴—and cases where certain solutions tend towards Damascius' Ineffable. We find in these three contexts the question whether, for instance, the first principle, God, is a 'cause' or not; whether God must be distinguished between an ineffable and a causal aspect; and in what sense God is transcendent—that is, whether beyond being, or as Being-itself. Here it is worth briefly reviewing these questions in the three contexts, insofar as this sheds light on our study.

For Byzantines,²⁵ the earliest line of influence for Proclus can be found in the mysterious author of works like *On the Divine Names*—commonly known as the Pseudo-Dionysius.²⁶ One finds in the latter both an emphasis on God's transcendence, which at times implies language from Damascius' Ineffable,²⁷ and also a collapse of Proclus' causal categories of

22 See Van Riel (2010) 672, n. 10: 'Michael Psellus (eleventh century) mentions Damascius' name, and calls him an Aristotelian; he also refers to a Dapsamius, according to whom 'God is a simplicity that has absorbed the universe'—which is clearly a mistaken reference to Damascius. Other Byzantine texts may be relying on Damascius without mentioning him.' On this, see Van Riel's introduction in Damascius (2008) clxxxi–clxxxiii.

23 In this respect, Proclus' thought and works—especially the *Elements of Theology*—likely enjoyed more popularity and success because of the straightforward metaphysical distinctions that he applies for principles. By comparison, a work like Damascius *De Principiis* is not well-suited for a constructive philosophical project, as one finds in the reception of Proclus.

24 On the reception of Proclus in general, see Adamson and Karfik (2016), and articles in the recently edited volumes of Layne and Butorac (2017) and Gersh (2014a).

25 On the general reception of Proclus and Neoplatonism in the Byzantine tradition, see Mariev (2017b), as well as collected articles in Mariev (2017a). See also Trizio (2014).

26 For an overview of the works and theology of Ps.-Dionysius, see Brown (2012) and Perl (2010). On Ps.-Dionysius and the relation to Proclus and Neoplatonism, among many other publications, see Safrey (1982), Sarah Klitenic Wear and J. M. Dillon (2007), Lankila (2014), and more recently, J. Dillon (2017).

27 See for instance Ps.-Dionysius, *Epistle II*, esp. lines 1–4 (Heil/Ritter ed.), where God is said to transcend the 'source of divinity and goodness'; cf. Griffith (1997) 241. This hearkens back to Damascius' claim that the Ineffable transcends the One, as the Good and source of divinity. For a more substantive treatment and comparison between Damascius and Ps.-Dionysius, see Lilla (1997), as well Mainoldi (2017), esp. 210–214. However cf. Adamson and Karfik (2016) 294: 'As a Christian, Dionysius does not pursue the sort of proposal we find in Damascius, who separates out the truly ineffable as a further divine principle above the (already

the ‘unparticipated’ and ‘participated’ which indicate separate entities. Where Proclus would distinguish between these two sets as separate principles or henads, Ps.-Dionysius combines these two as simply aspects: in one sense God is ‘unparticipated’, transcendent, and beyond being; in another sense God is directly ‘participated’, immanent, and Being-itself.²⁸ The later Byzantine figure, Nicholas of Methone (early 1100s–ca. 1160/66), who commented on Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, adopts a Ps.-Dionysian formulation of ‘unparticipated participated things’ (*amethektos metechomena*) to speak of God as both unparticipated and participated in the effects, while he also criticizes Proclus’ hard distinction between these two attributes.²⁹ By contrast, the earlier Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) appears to return to the hard Proclean distinction between unparticipated and participated when he distinguishes between God in his eternal, uncreated works (*erga*) (alongside temporal, created works) and God in himself, as ‘infinitely infinite times’ (*apeirakis apeirôs*)³⁰ transcending both eternal and created works.³¹ This latter formulation contrasts with Proclus’ distinction between the One and the henads, as being of the same nature and both ‘one’-only, and is rather reminiscent of Damascius’ distinction between the Ineffable and the One and henads, where there is no ontological or causal link between the two sides. On this picture, God is causal of all things only through the uncreated, eternal works—like Proclus’ participated henads. Yet Maximus mentions this distinction only briefly in passing; in other passages he reverts to a Ps.-Dionysian-like ‘collapse’ of negations and assertions applied to God: for instance, Maximus both denies and affirms ‘beginning, middle, and end’ of God without making an ontological distinction between these two aspects.³²

It is in the later Patristic figure, Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), that we find an attempt to systematize the distinction between God’s transcendent and immanent, causal aspects along the Proclean lines developed in Maximus,³³ when Palamas distinguishes between God’s essence (*ousia*), as absolutely transcendent, and activities (*energeiai*), as uncreated

unknowable) One.’

28 One could possibly relate these two ‘respects’ with Proclus’ attempt to understand how the terms, ‘beginning, middle, end’, are denied of the first principles in the *Parmenides*’ first hypothesis, while they are affirmed of ‘god’ in *Laws* IV (715e); Proclus ends up following his master, Syrianus’ interpretation: the negation of the terms applies to the One *in itself*, while the affirmation applies to the One *in relation to other things*. See Proclus, *In Parm.* 114,29 ff.

29 Matula (2011) 882. For a general overview of Nicholas, see Robinson (2017).

30 One finds this formulation in Proclus, *ET* Prop. 1, 2,10 [Dodds], in the context Proclus’ demonstration that positing an ontological multitude *apeirakis apeirôn* is absurd without unity as a constitutive element; and in Damascius, *DP* II, 33,2–4, where the second principle, the ‘All-One’, is characterized as *apeirakis apeirôn* in a positive way, as the principle of all plurality (see this further discussed below in p. 296, n. 151).

31 Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries of Theology* I.48–50 (PG 90, 1100C–1101B [Migne]). On the relation of this passage with Proclus, see my article (2017).

32 Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries of Theology* I.2, I.8. See earlier n. 28.

33 See Van Rossum (1985) 68–80; Demetracopoulos (2011) 278–280, esp. n. 47.

and eternal, which represent God as participated.³⁴ This became a point of criticism for critics like Nicephoras Gregoras, who linked Palamas' distinction with that of Proclus between the unparticipated and participated, which for Nicephoras (like Nicholas of Methone) suggests separate gods and would imperil both God's simplicity and Christian monotheism.³⁵ Palamas' later writings, as well as his followers, attempted to clarify the distinction in a way that would affirm both the simplicity of God and some form of 'real' or virtual distinction without endangering divine simplicity.³⁶ In any case, among all these Byzantine figures one can recognize the tension at work between affirming God's transcendence, as the first principle before all things, and God's causality, as immanent and what is first participated by all beings. One finds directions both towards Damascius' conclusion of a principle beyond the unparticipated/participated, and towards the opposite conclusion, combining Proclus' unparticipated/participated distinction.

For the Arabic world,³⁷ Proclus' framework for the One and its causality came through a series of texts produced by the circle of al-Kindī, collectively referred to as the 'Arabic Proclus', and a specific text, the *Book on the Pure Good*,³⁸ which became the well-known *Liber de Causis* in its Latin translation.³⁹ Both collections of texts reflect a great simplifying of the metaphysical hierarchy from Proclus, where the *Liber*, for instance, does

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- 34 See e.g. Gregory Palamas, *Triads* III.2.6–7. In the latter case, Palamas explicitly references Maximus' terminology in *Centuries of Theology* I.48–50. For a thorough survey of the philosophical developments that lead to Palamas, see Bradshaw (2004).
- 35 Mariev (2017b) 16–18; cf. Demetracopoulos (2011) 277–278, esp.: 'As Gregory Acindynos and Nicephoros Gregoras (1293–1361) noticed in Palamas' own time, Palamas' explicit distinction between 'lower deity' and 'God's transcendental essence' as well as his plural use of *θέοτης* is redolent of Proclus' metaphysical tenet that each level of the hierarchical structure of beings derives its ontological grade from its essence, whereas it produces the lower level by granting, in terms of its superior, existence, substance, qualities, and energy to its inferior. As Mariev also notes: 'However, it is important to understand that not only do some of Palamas' theses point towards what can be characterized as 'unconscious' Neoplatonism, (see Von Ivánka 1964) but, as Demetracopoulos maintains, Palamas also quite consciously adopted some typically Neoplatonic, and more specifically Proclean, theoretical elements. It is probable that he did so because he thought that Proklos was a quasi-Christian author, whose authority derives from the indisputable authority of Ps.-Dionysios the Areopagite.'
- 36 See Demetracopoulos (2011) and Kappes, Goff and Giltner (2014). Late Byzantines, as especially Gregorios Scholarios, tended to interpret Palamas in light of recent fourteenth-century translations of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus in Greek. Scotus became an especially more useful interpretive lens, rather than Aquinas, for reading Palamas. On this see Kappes (2017).
- 37 Here I use 'Arabic' cautiously: philosophers in the tradition, however, encompassed non-Arabic writers, for instance in Andalusia/Spain as well as Persian writers. See the *proviso* on the term, 'Arabic philosophy' vs. 'philosophy in the Islamic world' in Adamson (2016) 298.
- 38 Full title: 'Book of Aristotle's Exposition of the Pure Good' (*Kitāb al-īdāh li-Aristūṭālīs fī al-khayr al-mahd*). The work was falsely attributed to Aristotle, rather than as an adaptation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. See Bardenhewer (1882) and Guagliardo, V. A., et al. (1996).
- 39 Adamson and Karfik (2016) 295–296. On the general reception history of Proclus in the al-Kindī circle, see the collected papers of D'Ancona (1995); on the reception of Plotinus in the circle, see also Adamson (2002).

not raise the distinction between unparticipated and participated—a major point for Proclus.⁴⁰ Among other innovations, one significant change from Proclus in the *Liber* is that the first cause is described as the ‘first being’ (*huwiyya*), and not just pure unity as for Proclus.⁴¹ Although one may wonder about the principle’s transcendence since it is not ‘beyond being’ as for Proclus, the *Liber* still seems to preserve the same form of causality for the first principle, just as Proclus’ (and Plotinus’) One, insofar as it transcends Intellect and all lower beings which are characterized by plurality.⁴² A second, notable change is that the principle is described as ‘creative’,⁴³ implying that it brings things into existence from non-being by will rather than necessity.⁴⁴ This would implicitly counter an ‘emanationist’ model of causality implied in Proclus and other Neoplatonists, insofar as higher causes for them, including the One, necessarily bring about their lower effects. At the same time, the *Liber de Causis*, like al-Kindī in his *On First Philosophy*, endorses a view of mediated causality for the first principle, so that creation happens through secondary principles—thus beings are created by the principle through Intellect.⁴⁵ While al-Kindī emphasizes the unity of the first principle, denying attributes that only apply to creatures that are characterized by multiplicity, he still allows that the principle is properly a ‘cause’.⁴⁶ On this al-Kindī is similar to Proclus, insofar as both affirm that the

40 For an analysis of the consequences of this position, see Riggs (2017).

41 On the general comparison of the *Liber de Causis* with Proclus, see D’Ancona (1992).

42 It is also important to note, ‘being’ may have a different connotation between Proclus (and by proxy Plotinus) and the *Liber de Causis*: for Proclus, Being (*to prôtôs on*) is the first plurality, although simpler than Intellect, since it is a composite of ‘limit’ and ‘unlimited’ (see *ET Prop.* 89). The *Liber*, by comparison (and perhaps by proxy al-Kindī), seems to equate being with unity, without this question of composition. Along these lines, al-Kindī appears to make Intellect the first plurality: see Adamson (2016) 302. For a study on the shift in the use of the term, ‘being’, from the Neoplatonic to the Arabic (and eventually Latin) context, see D’Ancona (2011); note esp. her insightful conclusion in pp. 44–45: ‘It has been suggested by [Charles] Kahn in a groundbreaking article that existence in the modern sense becomes a central concept in philosophy only in the period when Greek ontology is radically revised in the light of a metaphysics of creation: that is to say, under the influence of Biblical religion. As far as I can see, this development did not take place with Augustine or with the Greek Church Fathers, who remained under the sway of classical ontology. The new metaphysics seem to have taken shape in Islamic philosophy, in the form of a radical distinction between necessary and contingent existence: between the existence of God on the one hand, and that of the created world on the other. The old Platonic contrast between Being and Becoming, between the eternal and the perishable (or, in Aristotelian terms, between the necessary and the contingent) now gets reformulated in such a way that for the contingent being of the created world (which was originally present only as a ‘possibility’ in the divine mind) the property of ‘real existence’ emerges as a new attribute or ‘accident’, a kind of added benefit bestowed by God upon possible beings in the act of creation.’

43 See *Liber Prop.* 8, from Adamson and Karfik (2016) 296: ‘the First Cause is neither intellect, nor soul, nor nature, but is above intellect, soul and nature; for it is creative (*mubdi’a*) of all things’.

44 Adamson and Karfik (2016) 296. This could also be connected to al-Kindī’s position against the eternity of the universe, where God then creates the universe by will, rather than necessarily: on this see Adamson (2016) 302.

45 Adamson and Karfik (2016) 296, and Adamson (2016) 301.

46 Adamson (2016) 302.

first principle's transcendence is not at odds with its causality. By contrast a later critic of al-Kindī—Ibn Ḥazm—attacks the ascription of 'cause' (*'illa*) to God, since for Ibn Ḥazm causation implies a necessary relation to the effect, which goes against the notion of God's ineffability as beyond any relation.⁴⁷ This directly parallels Damascius' own critique of making the first principle a 'cause', since it implies 'coordination' (*suntaxis*) with the effect and in this sense cannot be truly prior as a principle (*archê*).⁴⁸ Like Damascius as well, Ibn Ḥazm proposes that God instead 'establishes' (*wada'a*) causes, like the four elements, which directly bring about their effects. This would also parallel Damascius' statement that the Ineffable is a 'sanctuary' (*aduton*) from which the One emerges as a cause which gives rise to its effect of all things (*ta panta*).⁴⁹

In the Latin tradition Proclus passed through the ninth-century Latin translations of Ps.-Dionysius and Maximus by Eriugena,⁵⁰ and later on the translations of the *Liber de Causis* as well as William of Moerbeke's Latin translation of Proclus' works from the Greek.⁵¹ Although the same tension is not expressed in terms of causality and transcendence, as between al-Kindī and Ibn Ḥazm, above, an analogous tension arises in the later Latin tradition between whether to characterize God as pure being, as found in those like Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), or as unity beyond being, as found in the later German Dominican tradition, like Meister Eckhart.⁵² Thomas is uniquely positioned insofar as he was the first figure to appropriate the three distinct lines of Proclus' reception at once, as mentioned above. In the *Liber* Aquinas recognizes Proclus' influence, and goes on to use Proclus to show how the *Liber's* characterization of the principle 'creating' through an intermediary, Intellect, should be contextualized: beings *qua* beings do not come to be through Intellect, but only beings endowed with intellect, while beings as such come to be directly through the principle of Being-itself.⁵³ Whereas for Proclus, and implicitly the *Liber*, these represent separate principles, Aquinas follows Ps.-Dionysius (and his interpretation of Aristotle) by identifying Being-itself, Life-itself, and Intellect-itself with the first principle, while Aquinas also maintains the *Liber's* characterization of the first

47 Adamson (2016) 302–303: 'Instead, Ibn Ḥazm proposes that we should see God as 'establishing' (*wada'a*) certain causes (such as the four elements) which do necessarily give rise to their effects (20 and 23). Ibn Ḥazm provides us with a very clear instance of the tension discussed at the beginning of this chapter: God's primacy is to be understood as transcendence, and this makes it impossible to call Him a cause. Unsurprisingly, Ibn Ḥazm quotes in this context the aforementioned Qur'ānic stricture that 'no thing is like' God (20 and 22).'

48 Cf. Adamson (2016) 300, n. 6.

49 Cf. Damascius, *DP* I, 8,6–11 (discussed below in Ch. 5.3.3, p. 313 ff.).

50 On the reception of Ps.-Dionysius and Maximus, and in general on Eriugena's work, see Hankey and Gerson (2010).

51 For William's specific translation of Proclus' *Elements* (which Thomas Aquinas refers to), see Boese (1985).

52 Although there are passages where Eckhart speaks of being in God, although contextualized by God's self-identity. See Adamson and Karfik (2016) 300, n. 51.

53 Adamson and Karfik (2016) 298–299.

principle as pure being.⁵⁴ Aquinas thus follows the *Liber* by maintaining that God's transcendence is that by which he is a cause, since God's being is his own, while God also functions as the paradigmatic cause of being for all created things. The later receivers of Proclus in the German Dominican tradition, especially seen in Meister Eckhart and Berthold of Moosburg—a Latin commentator on Proclus' *Elements*—come to appropriate Proclus' position that unity, rather than being, is the first principle, unlike Aquinas' and the *Liber's* position.⁵⁵ For these figures, being comes to represent an attribute strictly linked with creation, so that God's transcendence cannot be represented by 'being', but rather, in this way, as beyond being.⁵⁶ In one sense we find a return to a standard Proclean position by affirming unity for the first principle, while at the same time the German Dominicans' emphasis on God's unity as discontinuous with being, which is linked with creation, once again loosely parallels Damascius' division between the Ineffable, as first principle, and all things (*ta panta*) as the effect.

In sum, one thus finds within these three distinct contexts a parallel to the specific issues raised for the metaphysics of Proclus and Damascius, partly helped by the reception of Proclus and by internal discussions within each of these traditions. One may then see the relevance of Damascius and Proclus on the issue of causal relation and transcendence brought out and repeated within these different contexts.

STATUS QUAESTIONIS

We should now situate this study among others that have been done on the One's causality in both Proclus and Damascius, especially in light of Damascius' response to Proclus. Although outside Plotinus late Neoplatonism has not received as much scholarship for ancient philosophy studies (at least until recently), much work has already been done

54 Oddly Aquinas fails to mention Proclus' own position that unity, rather than being, is the first principle, as noted in Adamson and Karfik (2016) 299.

55 Adamson and Karfik (2016) 299, although cf. earlier n. 52. For an all-encompassing overview of these positions see Aertsen (1992) and Beierwaltes (1992).

56 Adamson and Karfik (2016) 300: 'The German tradition connects this apophatic tendency in the Proclus materials to Dionysian negative theology. This leads to an anti-Thomistic position which restores the original Proclean (and of course more generally Neoplatonic) claim that God is beyond being. The First Cause may be identified with One or the Good, as in the *Elements*, but being is associated with creatures rather than creator. The parallel claim that the First transcends intellect also fits well into Dionysian theology since it implies that thought cannot grasp God. Berthold enthusiastically accepts all these consequences, concluding that man's relationship with God must culminate in mystical union with the divine, rather than in knowledge of being itself.' For Berthold of Moosburg however, King (2016) 1–2 notes that he does not fit into the standard Thomist/anti-Thomist opposition, as might be applied for Dietrich of Freiburg, but instead Berthold places himself within the more ancient philosophical opposition between Aristotelianism and Platonism.

on Proclus in general, especially in recent publications,⁵⁷ and in particular recent work has helped to shed light both on Proclus' causal structure⁵⁸ and aspects of Proclus' metaphysics.⁵⁹ The situation is less so for Damascius, although recent work has started to shed light on aspects of Damascius.⁶⁰ Here I only wish to indicate previous works that are specifically related to the issues of causality and the first principle in Proclus and Damascius, and show how this study will contribute to the field.⁶¹

For Damascius, the secondary literature can be grouped into roughly three camps: (1) those that follow a 'subjective' or skeptical interpretation; (2) those that focus on Damascius' use of *aporiai* as a method for metaphysics; (3) those that discuss Damascius' position on the One and the Ineffable in light of the general Neoplatonic hierarchy of principles.

In the first camp are those like Sara Rappe,⁶² Dirk Cürsgen,⁶³ Marie-Claire Galperine,⁶⁴ and Phillipe Hoffmann.⁶⁵ For Rappe, Damascius' discussion of the Ineffable is meant to show the inadequacy of discursive human thinking, and an abandonment of a propositional way of doing metaphysics, as one finds in Proclus' framework, for example.⁶⁶ Thus she finds that Damascius uses skeptical language and argumentative strategies, like the mode of relativity from Sextus Empiricus, for instance, to attack the 'relational character of causation in general'.⁶⁷ In this she thinks that Damascius attacks Proclus' Proposition

57 See for instance the collected papers of d'Hoine and Martijn (2016), Layne and Butorac (2017), and Gersh (2014a).

58 See for instance Martijn and Gerson (2016), which I have only just seen before the time of this dissertation's submission. See also Van Riel (2016), whose general presentation I generally follow, although with reservations, specifically in his comparison with Damascius: see below Ch. 5.3.4, p. 316 ff.

59 Among recent studies, see for instance Vargas (2016) for a thorough study on time in Proclus. On Proclus' use and transformation of Aristotle's physics for sensible and intelligible entities, see the excellent and thorough study by Opsomer (2009). On the principle of nature in Proclus, see Martijn (2010); and on sensible substance and Proclus' shift from Plotinus, see Russi (2009).

60 In this regard the best overviews of Damascius can be found in Combès (1996b), Combès (1996c), C. G. Steel (1978) (esp. 77–119, in the context of the soul for Damascius), and more recently Van Riel (2010).

61 For a more detailed analysis of the secondary literature, see Tanaseanu-Döbler (2016) 367–371, as well as the Introduction to Metry-Tresson (2012) (esp. 15–23).

62 Ahbel-Rappe (2010) and Ahbel-Rappe (1998).

63 See Cürsgen (2007).

64 Damascius (1987), 26–35.

65 See Hoffmann (1997).

66 E.g. Ahbel-Rappe (1998) 362: 'Despite his Sceptical affiliations, Damascius ends his *Doubts and Solutions* with a theological testimony to the truth of his unorthodoxy, his metaphysics of the Ineffable (C-W, [DP] III. 161). [...] Damascius writes for those who belong to the tradition but whose intellectual activity impedes their progress. For such people, the only way to remove doubt is to remove human thought altogether.' The thesis about the inadequacy of discursive thought is brought out more in her chapter on Damascius in Rappe (2000) 197–230. Cf. p. 146, n. 25.

67 Ahbel-Rappe (1998) 358; cf. Rappe (2000) 207–208.

11 from the *Elements of Theology* in the beginning *aporia* of *De Principiis* I, 1–2,⁶⁸ as part of his venture to remove the ‘barriers’ of discursive thought.

Hoffmann looks at Damascius’ discussion of the Ineffable in contrast to Plotinus on the One’s ineffability, and considers it primarily in light of the soul’s knowledge of first principles. For Hoffmann, Damascius’ framework implies the impossibility for doing negative theology.⁶⁹ He considers passages where the soul is analogous to someone who is blind trying to perceive color by touch.⁷⁰ As a result, the ‘ineffable’, rather than being a name by which the One is ‘hymned’ and honored as in Proclus, instead indicates a limit in Damascius beyond which the soul cannot pass in the attempt to appropriate the first principle itself.⁷¹ In this sense Hoffmann’s reading considers the Ineffable mainly as an epistemological, negative limit, and not within the broader picture of principles.

Cürsgen gives a more direct, skeptical interpretation of Damascius’ position, which he sees as anticipating Kant, insofar as Damascius emphasizes the gap between human knowledge and the principles in themselves—implied in Damascius’ distinction between the One and the Ineffable.⁷² Cürsgen thus emphasizes passages (like Hoffmann and Rappe) where Damascius appears to say that we impose concepts on principles like the One and the Ineffable, which do not imply the content or entities behind those concepts. Galperine also appears to follow this line of thought in her conclusion on the Ineffable in Damascius, which she refers to as more ‘mystical’ than a metaphysical principle.⁷³

68 Ahbel-Rappe (1998) 356. Although Damascius ends up using the same argument from Prop. 11 in multiple places—e.g. in his proof for the One’s superiority to the Unified (‘Being’ for Proclus) in *DP* I, 54–55, and when Damascius claims that the One is the first, ‘proper’ cause (*DP* I, 5,11–12). The issue for Damascius, as we will see, is the *relation* of the cause to the absolute first principle.

69 Hoffmann (1997) 385.

70 Hoffmann (1997) 381: ‘Ce silence s’installe dans l’impossibilité de la théologie négative. Il est la «limite du discours» (πέρας τοῦ λόγου) qui coïncide avec son «renversement» (περιτροπή).’

71 Hoffmann (1997) 388–390.

72 Cürsgen (2007) 321–322: ‘Das menschliche Denken muß aus und mit seiner immanenten Verfassung einen doppelten Weg in die Leere des Nichts gehen, wo es scheitert und endet, aber auch seine reflexive Selbstverortung vollziehen kann; es schreitet aus der Mitte seiner ursprünglichen, innerlichen Strukturen zu den Rändern voran, an denen jene sich auflösen und von sich selbst als inadäquat begriffen werden. Dennoch ist der Denktrieb im Menschen unauslöschlich und folgt aus der menschlichen Natur, ihrem ursprünglichen Zwischenstatus, aus dem das ihm gemäße Denken den Menschen ständig hinaustreibt. Die Erkenntnis der Unmöglichkeit der Erkenntnis des Absoluten mit konkreten Erkenntnisformen und -prinzipien bildet damit das wesensgemäße, sich notwendig stufenweise entwickelnde Ende des Denkens, die Selbstbegrenzung und Selbstvollendung des Denkens an einem nicht einmal mehr negativ aussagbaren Absoluten. Will man einen historischen Vergleich bemühen, so nimmt Damaskios einen philosophischen Standpunkt ein, der gleichermaßen Kantische und Fichtesche Gedanken vorwegnimmt.’

73 Damascius (1987) 31: ‘Si l’invitation à «demeurer en repos, dans le sanctuaire indicible de l’âme» semble plus mystique que métaphysique, il n’y a pas de théologie ici. Et le principe indicible n’est pas dieu. La question de l’absolu n’est pas celle des rapports de dieu et du monde. Ce jeu serré de métaphysique pure se joue, dans les premières pages du *Traité des premiers principes*, sur le plan des idées pures, entre le tout, le quelque chose et le rien.’

In the second camp (2) are Carolle Metry-Tresson⁷⁴ and Damian Caluori.⁷⁵ In general these authors tend to focus on Damascius' use of *aporiai* in revealing the different principles, from the Ineffable to the One and the principle, the Unified. Metry-Tresson's 2012 study in particular is focused on Damascius' use of aporetic arguments as revealing, through the experience of the arguments and their structure, the principles in question. In this sense, Metry-Tresson's reading is similar to the subjective readings above inasmuch as she still thinks that the arguments reveal the inner structure of human thought,⁷⁶ although she de-emphasizes the skeptical interpretation, as above.⁷⁷ Caluori also makes a similar argument in his study on the first *aporia* in *De Princ.* I, 1–2, where he shows that Damascius is not offering an Aristotelian-style *aporia*—which leads to a middle-ground positive answer—nor a strictly skeptical-style *aporia*, like those given by Sextus—which would throw in doubt the whole metaphysical structure; rather Damascius, for Caluori, gives a unique kind of aporetic argument that reveals the nature of the Ineffable, without implicating it or questioning its existence.⁷⁸

For the purposes of our study, these readings—especially those following a skeptical interpretation—do not appear to take into account two factors. One is passages where Damascius indicates a stronger relation between principles in their transcendent aspect and their causal aspect, so that the difference does not amount to a complete separation between the two, but rather, as it were, a 'modal' distinction. Cosmin Andron, and especially Sebastian Gertz's recent paper,⁷⁹ have already brought out this aspect, which partly helps refute a hard skeptical reading. A second, more general factor is the thesis

74 Metry-Tresson (2012) and Tresson and Metry (2005).

75 See Damian Caluori (2018).

76 Metry-Tresson (2012) 25: 'La thèse du *Péri Archôn*, au fond, n'est pas de dénoncer la transcendance du principe qui rend impensable l'immanence du principe aux réalités, mais d'exhumer la difficulté qui vient de la loi même de la pensée. Quelle est donc cette loi de notre pensée qui nous empêche de saisir dans la pleine lumière de l'intelligence les principes premiers? La question que Damaskios ne cesse de reprendre à chaque aporie est celle de l'interrogation fondamentale portant sur les conditions de possibilités de la pensée humaine.'

77 Similar to Metry-Tresson's reading is D. O'Meara (2004) 204–206, who focuses on the effect of Damascius' *aporia* on the soul, where the arguments keep referring back to the self.

78 Although in his *Überweg* entry on Damascius (in Damain Caluori (Forthcoming)), Caluori reads Damascius' theory of knowledge along the lines of the first camp (1), which may implicitly include his reading of the Ineffable. For instance: 'Wie [Andron (2004)] in einer detaillierten Analyse gezeigt hat, besteht der Unterschied darin, dass das (traditionelle) Erkenntnisobjekt nichts anderes als das Ding ist, das erkannt wird, während der Erkenntnisgegenstand das Erkenntnisobjekt ist, insofern es erkannt wird. Dieser Unterscheidung liegt ein tieferliegender, an Kant erinnernder Pessimismus zugrunde, gemäß dem wir nie etwas als es selbst erkennen können. Was wir eigentlich erkennen, ist immer nur ein Erkenntnisgegenstand, d. h. ein Erkenntnisobjekt, wie es sich uns darstellt.' This, however, seems to misinterpret Andron, who argues for a 'perspectivalism' reading—in other words, we get a grasp of the thing in itself as an 'aspect' of the object, rather than the whole object (or in the context of the *De Principiis* which Andron argues from, Intellect grasps a 'side' of Being via its *gnôsmā*). Discussed below in Ch. 3.2, p. 157, n. 59.

79 See Gertz (2016).

that this study poses: namely that Damascius is responding to a tension found within the dialectic between Neoplatonists on the One's status as both causal and transcendent, especially in Proclus; Damascius' use of *aporia* and his construal of the Ineffable is not meant, then, to cast a negative, 'pessimistic'⁸⁰ light on the inquiry into metaphysical first principles, but rather to offer a 'positive' response to the tension posed with affirming the One's causality and transcendence at once.⁸¹ In this respect, the skeptical reading may draw out a consequence of Damascius' position, but it does not adequately describe Damascius' intentions in light of the previous tradition.

In this respect the third camp (3) gives us a more promising approach for our study.⁸² Among this group, the overview given by Jan Opsomer (2013) is a touchstone for this study, insofar as it compares Proclus on the One and Damascius on the One and the Ineffable, and provides an outline for the reasons why Damascius shifts away from Proclus.⁸³ What this study hopes to add on to Opsomer's analysis is the underlying causal framework in Damascius, which leads to the 'split' between the Ineffable and the One, and which has not received much analysis. Gerd Van Riel's study on the Limit and Unlimited in Damascius (2002) is one step in this direction. Van Riel shows how Damascius highlights certain problems implied in Proclus' account of the Limit and Unlimited from the *Philebus*, such as the opposition implied between the Limit and Unlimited, while Damascius attempts to solve the tension by asserting the principles' unity in a prior principle—the Unified. As we will see, this becomes one focus of our study in Chapter 5, especially as it relates to a tension that arises in Proclus' framework.⁸⁴ Similarly Carlos Steel (1999) highlights the implicit tension in Proclus' interpretation of the final deduction in the *Parmenides*' first hypothesis, where Proclus affirms both the absolute ineffability of the first principle and the One as the subject of the first hypothesis—an implicitly speakable entity.

Given this, Van Riel (as well as Jan Opsomer)⁸⁵ also raises a significant objection to Damascius' Ineffable, which we might term the 'superfluous principle' objection: if the One for Damascius is also transcendent and implies no plurality in itself, just as for Proclus, why posit the Ineffable in the first place? In fact, if one posits the Ineffable, what would stop someone from positing an extra principle behind the Ineffable, and then another *ad*

80 As in Cürsger's 'Kantian' reading, as well as Damain Caluori (Forthcoming) (see previous n. 78) and Rappe's reading.

81 This is not to deny that one *can* find a negative response in Damascius' construal, as in Cürsger (2007) and others. But as I hope to show, this is not Damascius' direct concern: there is no 'return' to skepticism for Damascius, except insofar as it proves useful to refining Proclus' system.

82 Although the scope of her study is not directly related, worth honorable mention is Tanaseanu-Döbler (2016), who focuses on the school 'heresy' of Damascius' response against Proclus. She brings up a number of helpful points against the skeptical thesis, e.g. p. 370, n. 40; p. 372, n. 44.

83 Along these same lines are Combès (1996b) and Combès (1996c).

84 As I show at the conclusion of Chapter 4, starting from Sect. 4.5.5, p. 244 ff.

85 Opsomer (2013) 638. We consider these objections below in Ch. 5.3.4, p. 316 ff.

infinitum?⁸⁶ This difficulty appears to be raised if one assumes that Damascius' One is functionally equivalent to Proclus' One, while only the linguistic reference to the One is what detracts from the One's transcendence.⁸⁷ Yet as this study will show, this is a significant mis-reading of the One for both figures:⁸⁸ for Damascius, it is exactly because the One is causally, and not just linguistically, synonymous with 'all things', that it is no longer transcendent in the way that Proclus' One is. In this sense, the current work will help to contribute to seeing why and how Damascius argues this for the One.

For Proclus, much has been done to expose both his understanding of the One's causality and the notion of unparticipated and participated causality.⁸⁹ Here we may note specific authors who have addressed these two areas in light of the background and tensions implied in Plotinus. Cristina D'Ancona's work has been especially significant in this regard: she has shown how Proclus responds to the issues raised in Plotinus' construal of the One, as both transcending plurality and as the cause of plurality and unity.⁹⁰ In this I follow D'Ancona's analysis of Proclus, where the One as unparticipated is Proclus' attempt to solve the difficulty implied in Plotinus' One. D'Ancona also raises a difficulty that we will discuss further: namely, Proclus appears to posit two causal models—the henads, and the Limit and Unlimited—below the One, which both facilitate the One's causality for the lower levels. At first it is not apparent whether or how the two are coordinated systematically, and the ambiguity is one that Proclus does not directly answer. Where he does address the issue in certain passages, Proclus seems to imply that the henads are determined, if not composed, by the Limit/Unlimited. But if the henads are entirely simple and one-only, this means that they should *not* be composed by the Limit and Unlimited. On this issue D'Ancona, Van Riel, and Edward Butler, among others, have proposed differing solutions, which we consider more in depth in Ch. 4.5 (p. 226 ff.), and this study proposes an alternative that has not been considered in the literature.⁹¹

The issue of the coordination between the henads and the Limit/Unlimited becomes

86 As raised in Van Riel (2016) 76–77.

87 This comes out in Van Riel (1997) 37–38, albeit in Van Riel's analysis of the 'ineffable principle' in Iamblichus: see below p. 79, n. 230.

88 See for example Van Riel (2010) 676: 'According to Proclus, the One is the cause that contains everything, while at the same time transcending all things. Damascius argues that this cannot be an adequate account of the nature of the first principle.' Van Riel presumes that Damascius and Proclus hold the same view of the One in its causality. However, the first sentence is a fundamental misreading of Proclus: Van Riel cites Proclus' *In Parm.* 1108,19–29 and *PT* II.5, 37,24–5. However in the *Platonic Theology* passage (latter), Proclus says that all things *proceed* from the One, while in the former passage, Proclus says that the One is a *cause* of all things by not being any one of them. Just before Van Riel's citation, Proclus says that 'we will preserve it as One in the proper sense and remove all things from it' (1108,7–8)—in other words the One should *not* contain all things. By contrast, Damascius would argue for this—that the One contains, or is, 'all things'. For this reason, our study in Ch. 5, p. 247 ff., becomes important.

89 See for instance Chlup (2012) 99–110; Martijn and Gerson (2016); d'Hoine (2016a) 108–110.

90 D'Ancona Costa (1996), esp. 375–380.

91 See Ch. 4.5.4, p. 243 ff.

a significant conflict in Proclus' model, which is important to account for the One's causality, since the One mediates its final effect of plurality and unity through these intermediate causes. Thus Proclus' model for the One's causality depends on how he construes these intermediate causes. This specific focus, especially bearing in mind the tension in Plotinus' model, is one that has not been well addressed in the literature (beyond those like D'Ancona), which this study seeks to address and elaborate. Further, Damascius' account of the One becomes an important factor that addresses this conflict in Proclus' model: whereas Proclus prohibits all relation between all things and the One, including the characters (*idiotêta*) by which the henads are differentiated, Damascius' understanding of the One allows for such a relation, since the One is causally synonymous with 'all things'. By proxy, the One then implies the plurality of characters that correspond to the henads. This is an additional area which has not been addressed in the literature that this study will pursue.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

We should now summarize the main points of this study and how we will proceed. The **first chapter** analyzes Proclus' predecessors on the One, with an eye towards the tension implied in Plotinus' model to which Proclus is responding. The first section (1.1) surveys Plotinus' predecessors on the first principle, from the Old Academy response to Plato and Aristotle to the Middle Platonist, Numenius, who anticipates Plotinus; within this survey one finds cases where the principle is identified either as a divine intellect (Alcinous, for instance) or distinguished between a higher and lower 'one' or intellect, yet all make the first principle either a being or a kind of intellect. In Sect. 1.2, we look at Plotinus' response to the tension implied in these earlier models: namely that, if it is an intellect or a being of some kind, the first principle implies the plurality of the Forms that it either contains or produces. This leads to Plotinus' radical shift in asserting the One's status as 'beyond being' in a strict sense, and thus not an intellect. Yet as we will see, Plotinus' construal of the One implies a dual-sided aspect: in itself it contains no plurality, yet since the One directly produces plurality, and since it acts as a paradigm of Intellect and Being, it internally implies attributes that are correlated with plurality and pertain to Intellect and Being. In Sections 1.3–1.5 we look at the reception of Plotinus in Porphyry and Iamblichus, as well as Proclus' interpretation of these three figures. One finds the consequences of Plotinus' position made explicit in both successors, even for Iamblichus who anticipates Proclus and later Neoplatonists who add intermediate principles between the One and Intellect. We end with Proclus' master, Syrianus, in Section 1.6, where he establishes the foundation for Proclus' understanding of the One, and the causal framework that supports responding to the tensions implied in a Plotinian conception of the One.

The remaining chapters are then split into two groups: the first set (Chapters 2–3)

focus on the general causal frameworks for Proclus and Damascius, which informs how they construe the One's causality; and the second set (Chapters 4–5) focus specifically on the One's causality and the important correlation of participated principles, for Proclus, and the Ineffable grounding the One, for Damascius.

In the **second chapter**, we consider the distinction between unparticipated and participated entities as crucial for Proclus' response to the tensions implied in Plotinus' causal model. Proclus builds this distinction on his understanding that productive causes produce intermediate entities that convey the producer's effect while they also mirror the participant's nature. This distinction applies both between each individual soul and its participating body, and more generally between the first, unparticipated cause of a property to individual, distinct participants. This balances both the transcendence of the cause—insofar as it is unaffected in itself by the participant(s)—while causal synonymy is still maintained—insofar as the intermediaries themselves reflect the character of their prior causes. The emergence of distinct levels of beings then results, not from being contained simultaneously in the same way within the One, but one-by-one from unparticipated causes which are self-constituted in their particular character, ultimately going up to Being which constitutes itself below the One.

The **third chapter** shows how Damascius' causal framework is built as a response to difficulties raised in cases of dissimilar causation, like the derivation of Intellect from Being, which breaks the principle of causal synonymy. This leads Damascius to hold that causal synonymy cannot apply only between the cause and the intermediate cause, or power, as in Proclus, but it must include the final effect: in other words, to produce Intellect the principle of Being must ultimately be like, or synonymous with its effect, Intellect. Damascius thus introduces a fundamental modification for causation: that in producing an effect, causes 'act on themselves' in the causal process. Thus two stages are posited for producers: in themselves they transcend their effects—thus they are not causal in this sense—but in the causal process, the producer *in itself* becomes synonymous to the effect as a cause. This leads to a major revision of Proclus' distinction between unparticipated/participated causes, as well as the notion of self-constitution: while Damascius keeps these causal distinctions, they indicate a progressive separation of unity and being, from higher, 'concentrated' causes to lower, 'unfolded' effects.

The **fourth chapter** begins by focusing on Proclus' proof for the One, where compared to Plotinus' proof, Proclus distinguishes between two notions of prior unity: one that implies plurality 'by participation' (*kata methexin*), and one that is beyond the direct participated relation with plurality, both of which correspond to the participated and unparticipated distinctions. Thus, Proclus' understanding of henads, as the prior unities that are plural 'by participation', is a major factor to account for the One's causality. Alongside the henads, Proclus also poses the Limit and Unlimited as intermediaries between the One and beings, so they also fulfill the same intermediary role that the henads perform. A number of questions emerge about the relation between the two, but

a fundamental issue at stake is this: what accounts for the henads' distinction? Even if the Limit and Unlimited are responsible for this, then one needs to account for the distinction between the two in the first place. One would be tempted to locate these in the One, yet Proclus explicitly denies this, let alone any relation between the One and the principles below it. This tension then suggests an opposite problem to the one possessed by Plotinus and his successors: the One may be transcendent and produce unity, but it is not clear how it accounts for the distinction between the Limit and Unlimited, and thereby the plurality of unique characters that distinguish each henad.

Finally in the **fifth chapter**, we consider Damascius' *aporia* on the first principle's relation to all things in the beginning of the *De Principiis*. Damascius' notion of the One as in a 'coordination' (*suntaxis*) with all things—even if it is not strictly identified with 'all things' as its cause—follows on his notion of causal synonymy, as indicated in Chapter 3: thus if the One truly causes 'all things', as a cause it must be synonymous with 'all things', or as Damascius says, it is 'all things itself' (*auto panta*). Since the notion of a 'principle' (*archê*) implies priority to the effects, whereas the notion of a 'cause' implies being the same in kind as the effects—and therefore *with* the effects—this leads Damascius to assert that the proper 'principle' cannot be the One but rather a truly non-causal principle: the Ineffable. Damascius then treats the Ineffable not as a skeptical conclusion, but instead as a grounding principle by which the One functions as the first cause. This leads to two results: first, the Limit and Unlimited, which were separate henads for Proclus, become co-related principles implied within the One; and second, Damascius makes a third principle—the Unified—the first henad which is has the combination of unity and plurality as its characteristic property, unlike Proclus' henads which are only 'one' by their character. These two consequences suggest that Damascius' account solves the causal 'gap' between the One and the henads in Proclus, both by affirming the existence of unity and plurality within the henads, and by affirming the One's internal relation to the principle of plurality, which results in the derivation of the Unified and the henads. This move, however, is made possible only by separating the principle of absolute transcendence, which Damascius does with the Ineffable.

On the whole, this work attempts to place Proclus and Damascius within the whole Neoplatonic (and by proxy, overarching Platonic) tradition by asking, in a nutshell: what justifies Proclus positing the One as unparticipated? And what justifies Damascius in positing the Ineffable, if not Proclus' One? The answer for both, we find, is an attempt to solve the tension of transcendence and causal relation for the first principle. Both Proclus and Damascius begin with roughly the same structure, yet they diverge in the manner in which one can or cannot ascribe causality to the first principle as a result of the causal framework they employ.

Conclusion

In our study we have sought to place Proclus and Damascius within a general tension that runs throughout the Neoplatonic tradition: in affirming the existence of a principle that is the first cause of all things, one needs to affirm the principle's transcendence over the effects it produces—yet as a cause, the principle must also be like the effects it produces. At face value these two aspects seem to conflict with each other: if one emphasizes the principle's transcendence, this risks detaching its causal relation from the effects, while if the principle's causal relation is emphasized, this implies that the principle is itself characterized by the feature it is supposed to transcend as the first cause. In all the figures we have looked at, especially from Plotinus onward, each attempts to address this tension in the way that the principle is formulated.

As our study has shown, what then makes Proclus and Damascius unique among other Neoplatonists is that they attempt to address this tension by making the first principle prior in every respect to the plurality which is produced after it—both the One, for Proclus, and the Ineffable, for Damascius. For both, the principle transcends both plurality and any direct causal relation with the effects that come after it, while intermediate principles, like the henads, are responsible for the production of plurality. This is a contrast to the earlier tradition,¹ particularly found in Plotinus and Porphyry, which attempts to make the principle, in the case of the One, both transcendent and a direct cause of plurality. This results in the notion of the One as being simple in itself, but as also pre-containing the character of the plurality which is produced after it. For Proclus, and even Damascius, one cannot accept this notion: if the principle truly transcends its effects, it cannot be causally related, at least directly.

Where we find Proclus and Damascius parting ways is in how each describes the One, as the first *cause*, in relation to its final effect of plurality. For Proclus, the One's causality does not entail that it is directly related to its final effect—although it produces entities, like the henads, that produce that plurality. This allows for the One to be both transcendent and act as a cause, since its causality does not implicate it in the process of the production of plurality. By comparison the One's causality for Damascius rather implies its final effect of plurality, or all things, even while he accepts Proclus' premise

¹ The 'first reading' from our Introduction: p. 6.

that the first product after the One also exists in unity. The result for Damascius is that the One cannot remain transcendent in the causal process, but becomes correlated with the lower level of the effects that come after it. Thus, Damascius posits a separate principle, the Ineffable, which remains transcendent and is *not* causally related to any of the effects that come after it, in order to ground the One's causality.

So far our study has attempted to work out why and how Damascius makes this latter move, and in turn how Proclus first responds to the tensions of the earlier tradition by construing the One in the way he does. This has involved three steps in our study: first, we have indicated the predecessors' views about the first principle, either as a divine intellect or as the One (**Chapter 1**), which finally motivates Proclus' position; second, we have analyzed Proclus' and Damascius' causal frameworks (**Chapters 2–3**), which ground the way that each construes the first principle—either as the One for Proclus, or the One and the Ineffable for Damascius; and third, we have looked at Proclus' and Damascius' positions on the One in itself, and whether or not this leads to a separate principle, as the Ineffable for Damascius (**Chapters 4–5**).

Thus in **Chapter 1**, we made our investigation in two halves: in the first half we set up the motivations for Plotinus to posit the One as the first principle amidst the backdrop of the Old Academy and Middle Platonists; and in the second half we investigated Plotinus and his successors on the One. One of the outcomes we saw in the first half is that a number of positions anticipate features we find in later Neoplatonists: for instance, the distinction between two 'Ones' in Eudorus which correlates with Proclus' One and the Limit, and in Numenius the distinction between the two intellects that anticipates Plotinus' distinction between the One and Intellect. Yet as we found, the problem with construing the first principle as an intellect—as Numenius had done, as well as the majority of earlier Middle Platonists—is that plurality is implied: as the first cause of plurality, the principle in itself should not be such a plurality. One can then see why Plotinus comes to assert that the principle must simply be 'one' in itself in relation to its effect of plurality.

As we concluded, one problem with Plotinus' construal is that he makes the One paradigmatic of the plurality that it produces: as such, it must anticipate features that are characterized by plurality, as seen in passages like *Ennead* VI.8.13–21. Even when Plotinus tries to mediate the tension by qualifying his language, he is bound up by the problem of causal synonymy for the One: framed another way, if the One explains perfections found in Being and Intellect, it must embody them to a higher degree in itself. This suggests that the One is the same in kind as the plurality it produces.

It is perhaps this difficulty with language for the One, in comparison with Being and Intellect, that leads Porphyry to find a systematic method of predication for both the One and Intellect/Being. As we have seen, Porphyry attempts to articulate the difference between the One and Being as analogous to the relation of an indefinite genus, in itself, to the species, where the species are the same in kind as the genus but exist as

defined relative to the undefined genus. Insofar as the One is indefinite like the genus, it might escape being implicated by the plurality that comes about at the defined level of Being. Yet as we saw in Iamblichus, the distinction fails to affirm the transcendence of the One, where the One cannot be the same in *kind*, as Porphyry's solution suggests. Iamblichus' response, as we saw was to separate out different principles—and this led to a distinction between a transcendent, non-causal principle, and the One as the first cause. Like Plotinus, Iamblichus preserves a two-sided view of the One: as 'one' in relation to all things, but within itself precontaining paradigmatic features that belong to Being. Iamblichus' higher, ineffable principle thus grounds the One's activity—a feature we find revived in Damascius' framework. But as we saw for Syrianus, in the conclusion of Chapter 1, Iamblichus' position on the One is unsatisfactory: the One's unity should suffice to explain both its causality and transcendence as a principle. Syrianus thus sets the foundation for Proclus' framework by making Iamblichus' ineffable principle the One-alone, as unparticipated, and by re-appropriating Iamblichus' 'One' into a plurality of henads, as participated 'ones'. The important difference between Iamblichus and Syrianus—as we also find in Proclus—is that the One, as unparticipated and transcendent, is affirmed as a cause, since it produces the plurality of henads, and by transitivity produces plurality *through* the henads. Syrianus' innovation, then, compared to Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus is to affirm that the first products after the One are *also* just 'one' in themselves, rather than pluralities.

Chapters 2 and 4 thus spelled out Proclus' systematization and elaboration of his master, Syrianus', initial framework. In **Chapter 2**, the main question we addressed was how Proclus comes to justify the distinction between unparticipated and participated causes. As we have seen this presupposes a distinction between primary and instrumental causes in all cases of productivity: in the case of particular causes, like individual souls, the soul, as existing separately (*choristôs*), cannot produce its effect in the participating body without implanting an immanent power in its participant. Proclus thus relies on a principle of intermediate causality, where the primary cause produces an intermediary that directly brings about the effect in the participant. This allows for causes like the soul to bring about its effect immanently within the participant without being reciprocally affected. Proclus thus generalizes this framework with the distinction between unparticipated and participated causes, where the unparticipated functions as the first cause of a common property found in multiple participants. Participants then receive that common effect directly from their respective, participated causes—like a given living body with its particular soul—and not *directly* from the unparticipated. In this way, the unparticipated brings about its effect across multiple participants without being, in turn, reciprocally conditioned by the plurality of the participants.

This framework becomes crucial for Proclus to articulate the One as both transcendent and a cause, as we find developed in **Chapter 4**: as unparticipated, the One is not reciprocally affected by the plurality of the participants of unity, but it still has a causal

relation, insofar as it produces the henads, which in turn produce the effect of unity in all beings. However, as we find in the latter half of the chapter, there is an implicit conflict in Proclus' model: Proclus appears to employ *two* intermediate participated causes, with the henads and the Limit and Unlimited. While the henads are responsible for the *character* of unity produced in each, distinct participant, the Limit and Unlimited are responsible for the common composition of unity and power, or plurality, found in all participants of Being. In Proclus' texts it is not immediately clear how the two are coordinated, if at all, or in what sense one may be subordinated to the other. As we investigated certain contemporary positions on this issue, one conclusion we made was that Proclus indicates the Limit and Unlimited as the first henads to emerge from the One, while the derivation of the other henads after the Limit/Unlimited is determined by these latter two principles. Yet, as we ended the chapter, an open tension in Proclus' framework is how he accounts for the Limit and Unlimited's derivation from the One: Proclus has been careful to emphasize that what comes after the One is also merely 'one'—yet then how do the Limit and Unlimited come forth from the One as *distinct* from each other? What individuates their particular characters *as* Limit and Unlimited, even if they are still 'one' by their nature? This results in an *aporia* for Proclus' framework: on the one hand, he perhaps successfully construes the One as both transcendent and a cause—at least of unity—but in what sense the distinction comes to be between the most basic entities after the One remains unaccounted for.

Thus while Proclus claims the transcendence and causality of the One and all unparticipated causes, when we turn to Damascius we find these two aspects pulled apart in our investigations in Chapters 3 and 5. In **Chapter 3**, we saw that Damascius appropriates Proclus' framework for the unparticipated and participated, but raises basic questions about the causality of entities that differ in kind from their causes: in particular, how Being produces Intellect, even though Being in itself is not the same in kind as its effect, and therefore is not causally synonymous with Intellect. Throughout Damascius' *aporia* on this point, he eventually concludes that causes, in producing their effect, become characterized by what they produce: as he phrases it, causes 'act on themselves and on their effect'. Thus while Being, by its own nature, has no causal relation to Intellect, Being *makes itself* mirror the effect that it produces, and thus it becomes synonymous with the effect it generates—even though it remains distinct as a cause. As we have seen, this reflects Damascius' emphasis that causes exist as such only in relative opposition to their effects, whereas in themselves, *before* they produce anything, there is no causal relation. Thus this reflects a two-sided distinction in causes, either *before* or *during* the causal process, where it is only at the latter stage that there is a causal relation. This reflects a dynamic structure of reality for Damascius, where higher causes exist as 'concentrated' in relation to the effects, which are an 'unfolding' of the higher cause. This results in a re-adjustment for the higher levels of reality, specifically between Intellect and the One: at the level of Being, or the Unified, the distinction between the unparticipated and participated does not exist,

since distinction as such only fully exists beginning at the level of Intellect, where subject and object of thought become fully distinct. At higher levels, the distinction becomes such that one cannot distinguish between unity and being, as one can in Proclus between the henads as participated and intelligibles as the participants. Thus, whereas Proclus sees reality as derived episodically from higher levels—for instance, the henads exist by themselves, as ‘one’-only, before Being and the intelligibles emerge—Damascius appears to see reality ‘unfolded’ and ‘concentrated’ altogether—thus the henads exist as both ‘one’ and ‘being’ together, as undifferentiated, while at lower levels unity and being become progressively separated as distinct elements.

Damascius’ two-sided distinction between causes *before* and *during* the causal process becomes a central premise in his distinction between the Ineffable and the One, as is argued in Chapter 5. There, we showed how Damascius’ *aporia* in the beginning of the *De Principiis* (I, 1–2) sets out a dichotomy between the notion of ‘cause’, implying an immediate, opposed relation to its effect, and the notion of ‘principle’, which implies being prior, and without relation to, the effect. From our previous chapter, this should show that Damascius’ conclusion for the Ineffable is not the result of a ‘skepticism’ in Damascius’ view of first principles, but rather the consequence of a dynamic ‘unfolding’ of effects from higher causes, where the causes *per se* become contextualized and transformed in producing lower effects. Thus we first showed that one of Damascius’ main claims is that the One is causally synonymous with its final effect, all things (*ta panta*). In Proclus, while the One produces henads, which in turn produce plurality, this means that the One is a cause of ‘all things’—but *not* causally synonymous with ‘all things’. By contrast, for Damascius, if the One is such a cause, this also entails *synonymy* with ‘all things’. For Damascius this means that the One must then anticipate its final effect within itself in the causal process. This results in Damascius reorienting Proclus’ two principles of the Limit and Unlimited as principles internally implied within the One: thus when the One produces ‘all things’, it becomes distinguished into three principles—the One-All (corresponding to the Limit), the All-One (corresponding to the Unlimited), and the Unified—with the Unified representing the first henad which pre-contains both ‘all things’ and unity together within itself.

As a consequence of the One internally changing itself as a cause, this implies that the One no longer remains transcendent in the causal process—just in the same way that Being no longer remains transcendent when it causes Intellect. This leads to Damascius’ argument for the Ineffable as a principle which remains transcendent while the One, as the first cause, produces its subsequent principles. As we concluded, Damascius is not arguing for a subjective distinction between the Ineffable and the One, nor is he repeating the same function or role of transcendence that the One otherwise has—but instead he attempts to maintain the Ineffable’s function as a principle which grounds the One, but without explicitly ascribing causality to it.

One general outcome we can draw from our study is that Damascius’ model solves the

causal ‘gap’ between Proclus’ One and the Limit and Unlimited, since the One anticipates the two principles in itself, even though Damascius agrees with Proclus and denies that the One pre-contains, in itself, plurality. On the other hand, Damascius appears to shift the tension from the One to the Ineffable: if the Ineffable in fact ‘does’ something—for instance, act as a principle of transcendence for the One’s ‘relative’ transcendence—does this not yet implicate it? While Damascius exercises great caution to secure its position, as we have shown, one cannot help but feel that the tension is not quite removed. Damascius’ solution may follow as a logical response to the difficulty in Proclus’ framework, insofar as he attempts to give the One more causal ‘weight’, however at the expense of being fully transcendent. Yet one may still wonder if Proclus’ difficulty could be solved some other way, in spite of the tension, than by concluding to an ineffable principle that is both the beginning and the end of a metaphysical study of first principles—or to speak more exactly, as a *condition* for beginning with the One as the first cause in such a study of principles.

One other interesting outcome that we have only touched on in Damascius is that he tends to construe unity as relative to plurality. As we saw in his critique of Proclus,² Damascius thinks that Proclus’ solution of the One as the first principle does not work, since the One—as prior to the opposition between unity and plurality—ultimately becomes reduced to the ‘unity’ that is juxtaposed with plurality. Although he still affirms the causal priority of the One, Damascius appears to return to an Aristotelian position that unity is correlated with being, rather than prior to being, as Aristotle argues against the Old Academy Platonists. If he actually makes this move, this would be a major shift from nearly all previous Neoplatonists, inasmuch as the One always comes before being, whereas Damascius comes to affirm the co-existence of unity with being. This reflects one area that scholarship has yet to investigate, particularly the use of Aristotle in Damascius’ logic and ontology.

Connected with this, although the Academy in Athens closed under Damascius, and Platonism slowly crumbled as a school association, it is telling that later receivers of Proclus and other Neoplatonists, like the author of the *Liber de Causis*, tend to collapse the One into Being for the first principle. Although it is unclear that Damascius had much influence after the Academy, one cannot help but wonder if Damascius’ arguments for the One’s co-relativity with ‘all things’ and Being precipitates this move by the later traditions—although there is no known, clear textual connection. We may at least thank Damascius for revealing an aspect of the One’s causality, or at least an aspect that solves a difficulty in Proclus’ account, even though Damascius’ final solution raises questions of its own. Although Damascius is more known for the obscure, radical position of positing the Ineffable as the first principle, Damascius’ innovation, as this study has shown, may lie more with his notion of dynamic causality for the One, and for all lower levels.

² Cf. Ch. 5.2.3, p. 292 ff.

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