KNOWING THE INEFFABLE ONE: THE MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF PROCLUS

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Abstract Proclus insists on the fact that the One cannot be named and that it cannot be talked about. Proclus does not emphasize the poverty of language, but rather the transcendence of the One. The human discourse concerning the One can be generally validated as a reflection “of the natural striving of the soul towards the One”. The goal of the soul is thus not to obtain “scientific knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη) but to achieve resemblance to the One, for only thus can the soul know the One. Unification is what brings us closer to the One, and this unity is another type of knowledge: it is knowledge inspired by divinity, higher than the “scientific knowledge”.

Keywords Proclus, the Ineffable One, mystical knowledge, transcendence, negation.

From a strictly philosophical point of view, the late Neoplatonist Proclus (A.D. 412–485) is a rationalist in the classical, Platonic sense. As in Plato’s works, purification produced by discursive reasoning (διάνοια) leads to contemplation, established at the level of the Intellect (νοῦς). At Proclus, however, contemplation perfects itself in union with the divine, accomplished in the highest part of the Intellect, called the “flower of the Intellect” (ἄνκοσ τοῦ νοῦ).¹ Contemplative philosophy seeks detachment from the multiplicity and the ascension towards the primordial unity. Beyond this level, the one seeking the purification of the soul from materiality — and, thus, coming into contact with the gods² — is theurgy.³ The close

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relation between theurgy and intellection leads to important developments in Proclus’ theory of knowledge. Proclus’ philosophy tends to integrate at a theoretical level all previous philosophical doctrines (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism), to compose a single philosophy, a single theoretical body. Proclus enhances the idea of a possible agreement between philosophy (Platonic and Aristotelian), theology (Orphic and Pythagorean) and the revelation of the Chaldean Oracles. He transposes this agreement in a fundamental condition of philosophy and its task: for the Neoplatonic philosopher, all theologies (including the texts of Plato, read in a theological manner) are under the sign of the same single truth, and philosophy has to enhance this agreement.

“The One beyond all”

O thou beyond all. How else is it meet for me to sing of Thee?
What words can make thy hymn? For no word can describe Thee.
What mind perceives Thee? For no mind can grasp Thee.
Thou alone art unspeakable, though creator of all that is spoken of,
Thou alone art unknowable, though creator of all that is known.
Ὦ πάντων ἐπέκειναι τι γὰρ θέμις ἄλλο σε μέλπειν;
Πῶς λόγος ύμνήσει σε; σὺ γὰρ λόγῳ οὐδενὶ ῥητόν.
Πῶς νόος ἀθρήσει σε; σὺ γὰρ νόῳ οὐδενὶ ληπτός.
Μοῦνος ἐὼν ἄφραςτοσ· ἐπεὶ τέκεσ ὅςςα λαλεῖται.
Μοῦνος ἐὼν ἄγνωςτοσ· ἐπεὶ τέκεσ ὅςςα νοεῖται.

5 It is about a writing in the late 2nd century, whose author is, by tradition, Julian the Chaldean or his son, Julian the Theurgist, the latter being a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121–180). Influenced by Iamblichus, whom he often calls “the divine”, Proclus systematically integrated theurgic doctrines into his philosophy, being himself a connoisseur of theurgy.
This is the way in which the hymn dedicated by Proclus to the first principle unfolds itself, “a litany of negation” which gathers in itself the whole concept of “the One beyond all” –Ὦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα.  

Werner Beierwaltes places on the same level this hymn and a remark that Proclus makes regarding Plato’s *Parmenides*, stating that the negations in the *Parmenides* 139e are nothing more than “eine theologische Hymnus auf das Eine durch die Negationen (ἀποφάσεων).” In that section, Plato proclaimed that the One “will be neither like nor unlike anything, either itself or another,” and Proclus reads in this text a statement regarding the transcendence of the One in relation to the ten categories, the negations being arranged in the form of a hymn. 

The transcendent terminology of the One revealed in the writings of Proclus is perhaps the most comprehensive compared to any other Neoplatonic philosopher and marks the climax in the development of the apophasis in Greek thinking. Linking his conception of the One with the negations of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, Proclus repeatedly consolidates the idea that “the One is transcendent over all things.” He invokes the Republic VI (509b) as a source for the discussion of the One in the negative terms of the First

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14 The hymn written by Proclus was once attributed to St Gregory of Nazianzus but, as W. Beierwaltes (cf. *Proklos. Grundzuge seiner Metaphysik*, 353) seems to prove, there is largely unity in terms of the thinking encountered in the hymn and the one in the Proclean philosophical works. Cf. also R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, 98.


Hypothesis, because here Plato "says about the first principle that it is what is beyond intellect and the intelligible and beyond existence." The One is "that unity above essence, above all plurality and second to nothing at all" – ἐκεῖνο δὲ υπὲρ οὐσίαν, υπὲρ πάν τὸν πλήθος, οὐδενὸς ὁ λόγος δεύτερον.

The fundamental statement which is centred on the Proclean vision regarding the One can be uttered as follows: "it is not a particular one, but One in the absolute sense" – ὃ γάρ τι ἐν ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ ἄπλως ἐν. For all that can be qualified is not something absolute, "so that quality is not to be applied to the One in the essential and absolute sense, in order that it may not become a particular kind of One instead of the One itself" – ὡστε καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ ἐνι καὶ ἄπλως οὐ προσακτζον τὸ ποιὸν, ἵνα μὴ τοιοῦντε ἐν γένηται ἀντὶ τοῦ αὐτοενός. To ascend to "the unspeakable and incomprehensible consciousness of the One" (τοῦ ἑνὸσ ςυναίςκθςιν), thinking must "remove the multiplicity" (seponere quidem anime multitudinem).

To the Neoplatonists, the “desperate negation” of Parmenides (142a4–8) reflects the final recognition of the insufficient nature of any kind of determination of the absolute One. Absolute unity requires the
The basic rule of Proclus follows the Plotinian line of thinking: regarding the One, additions diminish. He insists that nothing has to be added to the One, “for whatever you add causes oneness (τὴν ἑνότθτα) to vanish since it rejects the addition of everything that is alien to it.” Therefore, the One is not any particular thing; nor should it be understood as “the summit of the things that are” (ἀκρότθσ τῶν ὄντων) or “the entirety of the Forms” (ὁλότθσ τῶν εἰδῶν), because such an interpretation would only “restrict its power” (τὴν δφναμιν αὐτο ῦ ςυςτζλλομεν). In its absolute unity, the One is totally imparticipable (τὸ ἀμζκεκτόν ἐςτιν ἓν) and transcendent.

Although – like all apophatic philosophers – Proclus insists on the fact that the One cannot be named and that it cannot be talked about, yet we find in him the description of the ways by which the One can be expressed. The human discourse concerning the One can be generally validated as a reflection “of the natural striving of the soul towards the One” – τὴν removal of all plurality and, hence, of all positive determination. Cf. Gerd Van Riel, “The One, the Henads, and the Principles,” in All from One: A Guide to Proclus, eds. Pieter d’Hoine and Marije Martijn, 75–76.


See Proclus, In Platonis Parmenidem VI, 1070.13 Cousin; see also Proclus, In Platonis Parmenidem VII, 36k Klibansky/Labowsky (499.8–10 Steel); Theologia Platonica II.9, 57.22 Saffrey/Westerink. A systematic discussion on the concept of transcendent unity is found at the end of In Platonis Parmenidem VII, 46k Klibansky/Labowsky (504.65–67 Steel: Ab omni ergo cognitione partibili et intelligentia le unum exaltatum est et ab omni contactu. Solum autem unio nos adduct un; et hoc quidem ut melius omni ente incognitum – “Thus the One transcends all analyisable knowledge and intellection and all contact. And only unification brings us near the One, since just because it is higher than any existence, it is unknown”) (trans. Morrow/Dillon), in Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides, 587. Cf. Deirdre Carabine, The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena, 163–164.
αὐτοφυῆ τῆς ψυχῆς ώδινα περὶ τὸ ἕν,  

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even though “in fact we say nothing in the proper sense about the One” – “Ὀτι γὰρ οὐδὲν κυρίως ἐπὶ τοῦ ἕνος λέγομεν.”  

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We cannot give a definitive shape to a definition of what is incomprehensible and beyond being, as long as we cannot even gain an understanding of simple Forms, devoid of parts. All definitions and names  

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are part of the composite horizon;  

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therefore, it is not appropriate to talk of the One in terms of having the relation of cause to those things following upon it, nor as being greater nor smaller nor equal; for these qualities only have place in things which are subject to comparison – οὔτε κατὰ τὸν τῆς αἰτίας λόγον τῶν μετὰ τὸ ἕν, οὔτε μεῖζον οὔτε ἐλαττον οὔτε ἴσον ἐν οἷσ γὰρ ἐστὶ σύγκρισις, ταῦτα μόνον ἔχει χώραν.  

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Nor is it acceptable for the One to have applied to it the superlative form of some epithet (highest, greatest, best, etc.); such an exigency hides the aspiration for conceiving more about the One than it is possible to achieve by means of negations (τῶν ἀποφάςεων).  

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The One “is superior even to such superlatives” – τῶν τοιούτων ὑπερκζςεων ἐκεῖνο κρεῖττόν ἐστι: we cannot describe something as being white in the superlative, as long as it is not white by any means.  

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Although it shows how far the human discourse falls from the One, there is at Proclus a continuous tension between the “vague terminology”, derived from the realm of existence – which we are forced to invoke when we refer to the One – and the validity of this language. This tension cannot be grasped especially in the context of the process of naming  

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– a topic which is extremely important for understanding the subsequent negative theology.  

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34 For the One is inexpressible by both description and name. See Proclus, In Platonis Parmenidem 46k Klibansky/Labowsky (505.79–82 Steel).


The Transcendent Negations

The term ὑπεραποφάςεις was usually translated as *hypernegations*\(^{41}\) – though it could also be rendered by one of the next forms: transcendent negations\(^{42}\) or “supernegations” – indicating that “some negations are superior to affirmations, as in the case of something that does not possess a characteristic because it transcends this characteristic: the negations which are applied to the One must be of this last kind.”\(^{43}\)

Proclus asserts\(^{44}\) that Plato – having as a point of departure the “genera of being” (τοῦ ὄντος γένεσιν)\(^{45}\) from the *Sophist*\(^{46}\) – has shown how the One, though it is the *cause* of the so-called “transcendent negations” (*hypernegations*),\(^{47}\) does not “partake of” any of them nor is it one of them, proving by this that the One transcends them, being situated “beyond” (ἐπέκεινα)\(^{48}\) the intelligible zone.\(^{49}\)

In the *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides VII*,\(^{50}\) Proclus initiates a tripartite taxonomy of negation: negations must fall under the incidence of three categories, corresponding to the three stages of the relations of the One. First, we have the One in the relation “of itself to itself”; then, in relation “of itself to itself and others”; and third – “of itself to others”. These three groups of negations correspond to these three kinds of the One’s relations, and they are distributed in a descending order. On the first and highest level, there are those negations which apply to the One’s relation to itself and – in conformity with this relation – the One is negated of Motion and Rest. Concerning the relation to itself and other things, the One is negated of Sameness and Otherness; in a similar fashion, the One which is in relation to itself and the others is negated of the Like and the Unlike, the equal and the unequal, the younger

\(^{41}\) ὑπεραποφάςεις is a technical term that belongs to Stoic logic. See Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* VII, 69.10–12: “Of the negative proposition one species is the double negative. By double negative is meant the negation of a negation, *e.g.* It is not non-day. Now this presupposes that it is day” – ὑπεραποφατικὸν δύςτιν ἀποφατικὸν ἀποφατικοῦ, οἷον οὐχ ἡμέρα οὐκ ἔστι· τίκθςι δὲ τὸ ἡμέρα ἐςτίν (trans. R.D. Hicks), in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (London/New York: Heinmann/Putnam’s sons, 1925), 179. Presumably, in the case of the One, such a hypernegation would be, *e.g.*, “It is not not at rest” or “not not the same.” For the Stoics, the double negative simply equated an affirmative, while in the case of Proclus it indicates the One’s transcendence of both sides of the opposition (cf. J.M. Dillon, n. 33, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, 523).


\(^{49}\) See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem VII*, 1176 Cousin.
and the older. Thus, by “negating (ἀποφάςκων) all these attributes of the One”, it is “deprived of substance, quality, quantity, and temporality” – ἀφαιρῶν τοῦ ἑνὸσ τὴν οὐςίαν, τὸ ποιὸν, τὸ ποσὸν, τὸ ποτζ. Proclus adds further that Plato – by negating the One (ἀποφάςκει τοῦ ἑνὸσ) of the Sameness and the Otherness – has gone further than Parmenides himself and he is considered “to be more of a negator than Parmenides himself”. “Sameness is more akin to the One,” but Plato “removes (ἀφαιρεῖ) both the Sameness (τοῦτο) and the Otherness (ἕτερον) from the One (τοῦ ἑνὸσ), in order to illustrate that it transcends the one-in-being (τοῦ ἑνὸσ ὄντοσ).” Here, Mortley detects “the real radicalism of Proclus, and the conservatism of his venerable predecessor, Parmenides. Proclus does not emphasize so much the poverty of language, as the transcendence of the One.”

For if that which partakes of (μετζχον) Sameness (ταυτότθτοσ) and Otherness (ἑτερότθτοσ) is not yet One in the true sense, it is necessary that the truly One (ἀλθκῶσ ἓν) should exist prior to these as being pure of these, or else in its participation in these it will not be solely One (οὐκ ἔσται μόνωσ ἑν), being filled with what is alien to the One (τῶν ἀλλοτρίων τοῦ ἑνόσ), for whatever you add (προσθῆς) to the One by its addition (προσθήκης) causes oneness (τὴν ἑνότθτα) to vanish, since it rejects (ἀναινομζνθν) the addition of everything that is alien to it.

Therefore, the genuine Oneness is to be found beyond the relations of Sameness and Otherness, and Proclus here reaffirms the paradox that “addition” (προσθήκης) leads to subtraction, when we speak of the One. The One is the only entity that is nothing more than its own singleness. Any “addition” to it contradicts its nature, spoiling what it was: the One will be completely destroyed. Proclus insists that even that which is identical with itself cannot be added to the One, its unity being obscured.

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As Proclus shows in the *Commentary on the Elements of Euclid*, the pair of affirmations and negations reveals the **superior** and the **inferior** from the range of beings, but the “point” is reached by negation alone. For Proclus, negation brings forward the superior situated **beyond** – the source of each being, which is the subject of affirmation. Even **hypernegations** – which elucidate the transcendence of a particular attribute, showing that it does not exist in a manner specific to an inferior attribute – are not applicable to the One, which is itself the cause of those **hypernegations**.

Using the same strategy, Damascius confirms that the Ineffable (τὸ ἀπόρρθτον), conceived “by excess”, is neither known, nor unknown: in regard to it, we are situated in a state of **hyperignorance** (ὑπεράγνοια).

**Knowing the Ineffable One**

The soul has only a fragmented view and strives for reaching a unified view. Proclus repeatedly insisted on the soul’s desire for the One: “a reverence for it lies in us” (ἡμῖν ἔγκειται περὶ αὐτὸ σέβας), an inborn and connatural “travail for the the supereminence of the One” (ὦδῖνα τῆς ύπεροχής τοῦ ἕνός).

The soul is brought up to the One by desire for the nature of the One, and it runs up to it from all sides and wishes to embrace it, and wishes with its supreme love (ἔρωτι ἀκροτάτῳ) to be present to it completely, and makes itself one as much as it is able and purges itself of all its multiplicity (καὶ πᾶν τὸ ἑαυτῆς κακαίρους α πλῆκοσ), so that somehow it might be perfected by the One (ἵνα πώς τῷ ἕνι τελειωθῇ).

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61 Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* III, 808.17–19 Cousin: “For the One is one only and precedes thought, Intellect thinks all Ideas as one, and Soul sees them all one by one” – ἐκεῖνο μὲν γὰρ ἐν μόνον ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸ νοήσεως· ὁ δὲ νοῦς ὡς ἐν πάντα νοεῖ, ἢ δὲ ψυχὴ καθ’ ἐν πάντα ὑπάρ (trans. Morrow/Dillon), in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, 174.


Although the One is incomprehensible and unknowable (ἀπεριλιπτου ὄντοσ καὶ ἄγνϊςτου), the soul loves the One with an unquenchable love (τὸν έρωτα του ἕνός ἀσβεστον). Nonetheless, Proclus manages to find a solution for breaking the deadlock marked by the incognoscibility of the One, leaning upon the fact that this “inexpressible striving” (τὴν ἔφεςιν τὴν ἄςβεςτον) of the soul for the One ensures a certain likeness to the One (ὁμοιοῦται ἄρα τα ὄντα πρὸς τὸ ἕν). Thus, the soul aims not to obtain “scientific knowledge” (ἐπιςτήμθ), but to acquire likeness to the One, for only this way can the soul “know” the One. In this circumstance, the full function of negation might be discovered: if the purpose of accessing the dialectics of negation consists of removing the multiplicity, then negation can be conceived as an instrument of intellectual purification.

For, if we are to approach the One by means of these negative (ταῖς ἀποφατικαῖς) conceptions and to emancipate ourselves from our accustomed ways of thought, we must take away (ἀφελεῖν) the variety of life and strip off (ἀποδφςαςκαι) our multifarious concerns, and render the soul alone by itself (μόνθν αὐτὴν κακ' αὑτὴν), and thus expose it to the divine and to the reception of divinely inspired power (ἐνκεαςτικῆσ δυνάμεωσ). In order that having first lived in such a way as to deny the multiplicity within ourselves (ἀποφατικῶσ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν πλικουσ), we may thus ascend to the undifferentiated intuition of the One.

In order to enter the vicinity of the One with the help of intuition, the soul must first purify itself, so that removing the multiplicity will leave open the path towards the apprehension of the One. Since the intellectual negation itself proved incapable of grasping the One, the way left open to the soul is the one of union: the way of intellectual intuition. The

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66 As we already know from Plotinus, “like is known by like” (cf. *Enneads* 3.8.9.22–23). Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem IV*, 975.36–37 Cousin (“like is comprehensible by like” – τῷ ὁμοίῳ... τὸ ὁμοίον ἔστι ληπτόν); VI, 1081.5 Cousin (“to know like by like” – τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὁμοίον... γνῶναι); VII, 48k Klibansky/Labowsky (506.8 Steel): “like is apprehensible by like” – *simili simile sit cognoscibile*; *Institutio theologica* 32 Dodds.
itineration of the soul through the various spheres of knowledge is illustrated by Proclus as a “journey”: from sensible perception, imagination, and opinion towards Nous and “intuitive intellection” – which is the only faculty capable of divination.

The ascension of the soul from a fragmented to a unified vision stands under the sign of divine inspiration. Therefore, the fact that the soul has within itself an image of primary causes makes it capable of invoking the power of these entities and especially the power of the One: “how else could we get closer to the One, if we do not awaken the One of the soul, which is within us as a kind of image of the One...?” – Ἡ πώς ἐγγυτζρω τοῦ ἕνος ἐσόμεθα, μή τὸ ἐν τῆς ψυχῆς ἄνεγείραντες, ὃ ἐστιν ἐν ἡμῖν οἶον εἰκών τοῦ ἕνος. There are obvious theurgic virtues in the process of “rousing up the One within us” (τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ἄνεγείραντες) – which lead to “warming the soul” (ἀνακάλψαντες διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ψυχῆν) and so to the possibility of “connecting ourselves to the One itself” (συνάψωμεν πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ἔν): as it were find mooring, taking our stand above everything intelligible within ourselves and dispensing (ἀφελόντες) with every other one of our activities, in order that we may consort with it alone and perform a dance around it, leaving behind (ἀπολιπόντες) all the intellections of the soul which are directed to secondary things.

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Platonism and Forms of Intelligence, eds. J. Dillon and Marie-Elise Zovko (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), 247–258.


72 The genuine ways of knowledge recognized by Neoplatonic epistemology are intellectual intuition (νοῦς), discursive reason (διάνοια, λόγος), opinion (δόξα) and sensation (αἴκθςισ). Proclus provides the same epistemological vision in many different formulations. See, e.g., Eclogae de philosophia Chaldaica 2.1, ed. É. des Places, Oracles chaldaïques, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971): “Ψυχῆς βάκος” τὰς τριπλὰς αὐτῆς γνωστικὰς δυνάμεις φησί, νοεράς, διανοητικάς, δοξαστικάς, where the “soul’s depth” is represented as consisting of three levels. Proclus does not always hold the same terminology and the various distinctions depend on the different exegetical needs in his reading of Plato. Cf. T. Lankila, “Hypernoetic Cognition and the Scope of Theurgy in Proclus,” Arctos: Acta philologica fennica 44 (2010), 149, n. 4.


To avoid the risk that the soul should “slide” through negations into the “invisibility of the non-being” – because of the indefinite imagination –, divine inspiration is needed, which will deliver a superlative comprehension of the Non-Being:79

I see here a great fuss being stirred up by those who think that these negations (τὰς ἀποφάςεις) lead us into the absolute non-existent or something such, since by reason of the lack of definition our imagination does not have anything definite to grasp onto, inasmuch as nothing is proposed to it, but everything absolutely is removed from the One (ἀναιρουμένων ἀπὸ τοῦ ἕνος), and for this reason they are persuaded that one must establish some nature and characteristic for the One.80

In the ascent of the soul towards the supreme orders of existence, the intellectual and affective elements work in conjunction with the divine initiative. When Proclus takes into consideration the mystical contact of the soul with the supreme intelligibles and the One itself, he indicates a supra-rational sense of mystical knowledge which transcends the inferior faculties of the soul.81 This is “the one of the soul” (ἕν τῆς ψυχῆς),82 it is “the σύμβολον of the

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81 To such a special faculty of the soul, Proclus assigns names such as “the one of the soul” (τὸ ἕν τῆς ψυχῆς), “the flower of our essence” (ἄνθος τῆς οὐσίας ἐμῶν), “the flower of the intellect” (ἄνθος τοῦ νοῦ), “the flower of the soul” (ἄνθος τῆς ψυχῆς), or (νόκος νοὺς) “spurious (bastard) intellect”. For the relevant passages in Proclus, see T. Lankila, “Hypernoetic Cognition and the Scope of Theurgy in Proclus,” 151; 151, n. 9.
82 Some scholars have considered ἕν τῆς ψυχῆς an alternative wording for ἄνθος τοῦ νοῦ, borrowed from the Chaldean Oracles. See J. Bussanich, “Mystical theology and spiritual experience in Proclus’ Platonic Theology,” in Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne: actes du colloque international de Louvain (13–16 mai 1998) en l’honneur de H.-D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink, eds. A.-Ph. Segonds and C. Steel (Leuven/Paris: Leuven University Press/Les Belles Lettres, 2000), 302. In the In Platonis Cratylium commentaria 32.18; 65.16, ed. G. Pasquali (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908), Proclus distinguishes between that point of the intelligible god (νοθτοὶ κεοί) where the highest god that can be named is situated, and the higher regions of the intelligible which are unknowable and unnameable. The first point can be attained through theurgy, while the second level can be reached by the “flower of the intellect” (ἄνθος τοῦ νοῦ). Cf. Anne Sheppard, “Proclus’ Attitude to Theurgy,” The Classical Quarterly 32/1 (1982): 221. This idea has Plotinian roots: in the Enneads 5.5.8.22–23 and 6.9.3.26–27, Plotinus speaks as if there were a special element within the nous by which we attain mystical union. See, in this respect, J.M. Rist, “Mysticism and Transcendence in
One in the soul” and it illustrates, in a non-technical way, what makes the mystical union with the One possible. A passage in the Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides is especially helpful for enlightenment on the manner in which ἑν τῆς ψυχῆς works in Proclean mystical psychology:

Or how else are we to become nearer to the One, if we do not rouse up the One of the soul (τὸ ἑν τῆς ψυχῆς), which is in us as a kind of image of the One, by virtue of which the most accurate of authorities declare that divine possession most especially comes about? And how are we to make this One and flower of the soul (τὸ ἄνθος τῆς ψυχῆς) shine forth unless we, first of all, activate our intellect? For the activity of the intellect leads the soul towards a state and activity of calm. And how are we to achieve perfect intellectual activity if we do not travel there by means of logical conceptions, using composite intelli...
soul we may connect ourselves to the One itself (συνάψωμεν πρὸς άυτό τό ἕν) and, as it were find mooring, taking our stand above everything intelligible within ourselves and dispensing (ἀφελόντες) with every other one of our activities, in order that we may consort with it alone and perform a dance around it, leaving behind (ἀπολιπόντες) all the intellections (τῆσ ψυχῆσ νοήσεις) of the soul which are directed to secondary things.  

This statement gives us solid testimony for the fact that the supreme mystical states transcend not only discursive rationality – activity which is still a preliminary one – but also the intuitive noetic level. Inspiration and “erotic mania” reflect the activity of the ἕν τῆς ψυχῆς as it approaches and attains contact with the One.  

In this process of unification, the logic of negation finally finds its place, since the statement “we know the one by the One” means that “by Non-Being we know the One”, which is to say that “it is via negationis that we know the One.”

Let us then declare it to be Not-Being, and let us cognise it by that in us which is similar to it (for there is in us a sort of seed of that Non-Being), and so let us call it “non-existent” as transcending all beings. (...) It should be clear from this, then, how negations (ἀποφάσεις) are proper to the One, and in what manner all things are denied (ἀποφᾶκται) of it, and that all knowledge of the One is through negation (ὅτι πᾶςα γνῶσις τοῦ ἕνός δι’ ἀποφάσεως ἐστί).  

The soul, while ascending to the level of the Intellect, and from there, further, getting close to the One, no longer asks what the One is and what the One is not, “but everywhere closing her eyes, and contracting all its activity and being content with unity alone” – sed omniquaque claudentem et omnem operationem contrahentem et contentam unione solum.  

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“The One transcends all analysable knowledge and intellection and all contact. And only unification brings us near the One” – *Ab omni ergo cognitione partibili et intelligentia le unum exaltatum est et ab omni contactu. Solum autem unio nos adducit uni.*

This unity is another kind of knowledge: it is knowledge inspired by divinity, “better than all knowledge” (*melius cognitione*). This new type of knowledge reaches the soul by illumination (*illustrationem anime*), which is a sign of “our individual light” (*particulare enim et ipsa lumen*). By the One in ourselves do we apprehend the One: the transcendent One can be seen only through its own light.

*The Proclean influence, especially regarding negative theology, was experienced alongside certain adaptations and developments perceived in the Dionysian Corpus: the discourse on the transcendent underwent an extension, integrating affirmative, symbolic, negative and mystical theologies.* Although Proclus “conquered Europe” largely through his influence on the *Corpus Dionysiacum, Liber de causis* seems to have had a great significance – which passed in medieval

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95 Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 48k Klibansky/Labowsky (505.3–506.6 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon), in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, 588: “a divine light is kindled in us through which there comes about – in such a way as is possible to us – a glimpse of it, which makes us participate in it in respect of that part of ourselves that is most divine. But the most divine thing in us is the One in us (*Diuinissimum autem eorum que in nobis le unum*).” Cf. *In Platonis Parmenidem* IV, 951.18–19 Cousin. See also Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.17.36–37: “It must see that light by which it is enlightened: for we do not see the sun by another light than his own” – Δι’ οὗ γὰρ ἑφωτίσθησαι· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἥλιον διὰ φωτός ἄλλου (trans. A.H. Armstrong), in Plotinus, *V* (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 135. Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, 181.
times as the work of Aristotle, although, in fact, it was a Latin translation by Gerard of Cremona after an Arabic work based on Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*.\(^{97}\)

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