

PROCLUS' NEOPLATONIC POLYTHEISM AND NICHOLAS OF METHONE'S CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM

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Abstract: TEREZIS, Christos. *Proclus' Neoplatonic Polytheism and Nicholas of Methone's Christian Monotheism*. In this article, the author attempts to present some of the differences between Nicholas of Methone and Proclus regarding the meaning of the production. More specifically, he gives emphasis to the following: Proclus, through his analytical description on the development of the divine beings, structures a rational Metaphysics and describes the special ways in which the production of the natural world is activated. On the other hand, Nicholas generally speaks about the characteristics of the production and avoids introducing human knowledge into the area of the divine providence. Proclus considers production to be a necessary step in the internal dialectic of the supreme Principle, which is almost set under a developmental process that is pushed by its internal powers, which then will organise the terms for the formation of the cosmic becoming. On his part, Nicholas, by giving emphasis particularly to the divine will, excludes the possibility of an inevitable appearance of the created world, the existence of which is considered to be possible or potential and is independent of any kind of stereotypical determinism.

Key-words: *Nicholas of Methone, Proclus, mono-causality, multi-causality, One-Good*

Abstrakt: TEREZIS, Christos. *Proklov neoplatonický polyteizmus a kresťanský monoteizmus Mikuláša z Methone*. V predkladanom článku sa autor snaží prezentovať niektoré rozdiely medzi Mikulášom z Methone a Proklom, ktoré sa týkajú zmyslu vytvárania. Konkrétne autor dáva dôraz na nasledovné: Proklus, cez svoj analytický opis vývoja božského bytia, štruktúruje racionálnu metafyziku a opisuje špecifické cesty, ktorými sa samotná tvorba prírodného sveta spustila. Na druhej strane, Mikuláš všeobecne hovorí o charakteristike tvorby a vyhýba sa zasväteniu ľudského vedomia do oblasti božskej prozreteľnosti. Proklus považuje tvorbu za potrebný krok vo vnútornej dialektike Najvyššieho Princípu, ktorý je zasadený skoro pod vývojovým procesom tlačným vnútornými silami, ktorý potom bude organizovať podmienky formovania kozmického bytia. Zo svojej strany, Mikuláš, ktorý kladie hlavne dôraz na Božiu vôľu, vylučuje možnosť nevyhnutného vzniku stvoreného sveta, ktorého existencia je považovaná za možnú alebo potenciálnu a je nezávislý od ktoréhokoľvek druhu stereotypného determinizmu.

Kľúčové slová: *Mikuláš z Methone, Proklus, monokausalita, multikausalita, Najvyššie Dobro*

Introduction

In this study we will attempt to present some aspects of the differences between Christianity and Neoplatonism concerning cosmology or, in other words, the production and the function of the sensible world. We receive as an opportunity the critique expressed by the Byzantine thinker Nicholas of Methone (? – 1165) against the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus (412 – 485), whose presence-influence in Eastern Christianity was quite special. More specifically, we will focus

on Nicholas' attempt to confute the theorems that Proclus uses as an introduction in his famous dialectic scheme "remaining-procession-reversion" concerning the production, which one may find for instance in his treatise entitled *Institutio Theologica*, props. 25-39; Proclus 1963, 28.21-42.7 (Dodds 1963, 212-213; Trouillard 1972, 78-106; Trouillard 1982, 53-91; Beierwaltes 1979, 118-163). This is a scheme that relates to how the productive and the final cause work and in which way is the transition from the metaphysics of transcendence to the metaphysics of immanence accomplished, without ontological distinctions to be eliminated. His points of view are included in props. 25-29 of his philosophical book entitled *Institutio Theologica*, in which the entire Neoplatonic metaphysical system, both in itself and as to its adjustments made so as the physical universe to emerge, is structured in a quite careful geometrically expressed way. In this study, we will present the two thinkers' arguments in the exact order that they are expressed. Our goal is to show that the differences between them not only are real, but in some cases are also quite essential. Furthermore, they are often presented by Nicholas so intensively that make Christianity and Neoplatonism being two almost incompatible worldviews, while it should be mentioned that their similarities and their common points should not escape our attention.

A] The One-Good as a cause

In prop. 25 of *Institutio Theologica* Proclus says that the One as a supreme Principle precisely because of its goodness – which is its main ontological idiom that feeds its functions – produces the beings, both the metaphysical and the physical ones (Beierwaltes 1979, 143-144; Trouillard 1980, 5-10)¹. And this is a production that takes place because of the bestowment and the way in which the unity works, i.e. because of what expresses its pure condition. The first question that arises, when thinking in a Christian way, is whether production is performed or not in terms of necessity. I.e. is the One fed by specific unavoidable terms set by its own existence? Is it subject as to its manifestations to its own ontological formations, even if these are not due to another reality? So, the discussion refers to whether, in the supreme ontological level, personal and volitional conditions concerning the production, i.e. expressive of the freedom, are actually manifested. Obviously, however, the Neoplatonist philosopher thinks that it is impossible the supreme Principle to fall under necessities, since such a possibility would reduce its integrity, the absoluteness of its hypostasis and would be defined, up to a point, by its products. Then, he says that the action of producing is not an exclusive privilege and a function of the One, but is also extended and given as an ontological possibility to the rest of the inferior deities. Thus, he claims that there are secondary causes, which because of the hypostatic completeness or perfection that they possess as divine entities, own the ability to produce some inferior compared to their respective ontological texture entities. This productive ability of theirs means that they imitate the good Principle, which holds as its main feature the absolute excellence². Here we are facing the cosmotheoretical scheme of polyarchy or polytheism, which according to the Platonic teaching is ontologically and operationally necessary, mainly for two reasons arising from the way in which production is constituted: on the one hand, in order the multiple levels and the ontic variety of the natural world to be structured with precise programmatic terms and, on the other

¹ «... ἐκείνη (sc. ἡ μία τῶν ὅλων ἀρχή) διὰ τὴν ἀγαθότητα τὴν ἑαυτῆς πάντων ἐστὶν ἐνιαίως ὑποστατικὴ τῶν ὄντων» (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 25; Proclus 1963, 28.23-24).

² (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 25; Proclus 1963 28.34-29.1). According to Dodds (1963, 213), the structure of the whole is reflected, apparently by analogy, in the structure of the individuals.

hand, in order its content to be explained and interpreted according to strict definitions as regards its initial presence and infinite development³.

Apart from the above, according to Proclus among the perfect divine productive causes there is a strictly defined hierarchical classification, which is determined by the One. The fact that metaphysical pluralism is hierarchically classified, determines the particular production range of each divine being and how close to the One is. Thus, the most perfect are closer to the supreme Principle, participate in a wider extent in the properties that emanate through its manifestations and their productive range includes more categories of beings, both metaphysical and physical. Conversely, the productive –and the archetypical– fertility is limited as the distance from the Principle increases. «Τὸ δὲ ἀτελέστερον, ὅσω περ ἂν ἀτελέστερον ᾖ, τοσῶδε μᾶλλον ἐλαττόνων αἴτιον. Πορρώτερον γὰρ ὄν τοῦ πάντα παράγοντος, ἐλαττόνων ἐστὶν ὑποστατικόν»⁴. Therefore, a metaphysical system develops, within which the ontological and axiological gradations are dominant and combined with a sense of relative autonomy, decreasing at a steady and strictly delimited manner as the metaphysical system is removed from the One, in a prospect of a productive mission.

Expressing his estimation in this multicore and multifunctional causality, first of all Nicholas does not accept that the property of perfection belongs to beings. He considers them to be imperfect and inferior to the divine Principle regarding their ontological texture and their functions. His opinion is quite clear: the only perfect ontological reality is God. According to his Christian views, fertility is absolutely and initially manifested within the Holy Trinity, with the birth of the Son and the proceeding from the Father of the Holy Spirit. We could here speak about a somehow internal dialectical development within the Holy Trinity, in an absolutely self-founding way⁵. Moreover, the Christian theologian says that between the metaphysical and the sensible world there are clear ontological differences. Specifically, they are defined to be different to each other levels because of their essence and functions. Consequently, the Holy Trinity, despite the fact that it is the productive cause of all the created beings, is totally transcendent over them and it is not possible to be found either in the same level or on the top of a hierarchical succession in the sense of a descending scale. Namely, any possibility of a pyramidal development is excluded. Any proximity a being can have to the triadic Principle is absolutely determined by the ability and the degree of participation to its multiple provisions. That is to say it is not due to ontological initiatives. The whole idea here is based on the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. More specifically, God, despite the fact that is essentially immovable and unchanged, activates his creative and providential powers. Thinking in a more wide sense this distinction, two are the required remarks, an ascending and a descending one. On the one hand, the divine energies (or even powers) through their manifestation constitute the communicative side of the Holy Trinity, the first result of which is the production of the world of the sensible beings. Production, however, is of such kind so as every sensible being to participate in these divine projections according to the abilities of its structural formation, so the degree of its ontological quality is analogous⁶.

³ (Proclus. *Theologia Platonica*, IV; Proclus 2003, 6.6-17.14).

⁴ (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 25; Proclus 1963, 28.34-30.1).

⁵ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 25; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 33.11-21). On how Nicholas dealt with Proclus' presence in the Byzantine thought, cf. Podskalsky (1976, 509-523).

⁶ «... κινουμένης (sc. τῆς τριάδος) δημιουργικῶς τε καὶ προνοητικῶς εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν παραγωγὴν καὶ συντήρησιν καὶ εὐτακτον ὑπαρξιν, οὐσιωδῶς δὲ μενούσης ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἀκινήτου τε καὶ ἀναλλοιώτου» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 25; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 33.21-28). On the divine powers and their relation to the divine essence in Eastern Christianity, cf. Lossky (1944, 43-86).

Speaking, then, the Christian thinker about the relative-deficient character of the natural beings, he says that their imperfection is also defined comparatively with the absolute perfection of their Principle. However, when we think of them in their pure condition, they may be considered to be perfect, in the sense of what their prospect is. Namely, it is absolutely necessary something to direct them to the actualization of the perfection that is totally connected with their identity, which is determined by the way that their divine source has chosen. We have to mention that this source provides every form of perfection, not however in a univocal way but in an analogous one. «Πρὸς μὲν οὖν τὴν μίαν πάντων ἀρχὴν οὕτως ἀτελῆ πάντα τὰ ἐξ αὐτῆς παραγόμενα, αὐτὸ δὲ καθ' αὐτὸ τούτων ἕκαστον λέγοιτ' ἄν τέλειον, φθάνον εἰς τὴν οἰκειαν καὶ τῆ ἑαυτοῦ φύσει ἀνάλογον τελειότητα, ἣν ἔλαχε κληρωσάμενος ἀπὸ τῆς μίας ἀρχῆς τῆς παντελοῦς καὶ προτελείου καὶ ὑπερτελοῦς καὶ τελειωδώρου»⁷. Assuming, then, that they receive their ontological properties from a principle which exceeds them, natural beings are not independent. This imperfection of theirs means that they are determined by something else, without, however, being in an inactive state. Their hypostatic mission is to activate-utilize what is being given from above. They are prioritized to each other according to the degree and the way in which they actively participate in the divine provisions. This is a hierarchy that reflects how the divine energies appear in the natural beings, in accordance with each one's perfection. Thus, for instance, man as a rational being is superior to the horse and the ox.

Nicholas, however, explains that the most perfect being does not have the natural ability to produce the imperfect one. He denies the possibility that the most perfect being compared with the imperfect owns a further productive capacity, in which he gives a relevant content, obviously because it is subject to becoming. He says that the decisive factor for producing is the natural affinity of the ontic kinds. I.e. every creature produces a being similar to itself and equivalent as to the physical composition, for instance a man produces another man. And in a possible objection on that every produced being does not initially own its natural perfection he says that because of its composition it owns the possibilities in order to accomplish such a goal. I.e. this is a natural organic development, with the transfer of the basic cores of existence in their active state⁸. The Christian thinker also explains that no species is produced by another one, even during the initial levels of the development of the general cores. All of them come from God as individual shapes of existence and as somehow natural archetypes⁹. It is obvious that through these views the suggested idea is that the entire reality, as essence, function and as to any kind of relations that its forms, depends on the divine rational and coherent interventions, with no exception. Ontological monism is totally absolute in any possible sense.

Regarding the above, there is an important remark that we should make – which we will keep in mind for what follows too: the differences described between Proclus and Nicholas are up to a certain point due to the fact that each one of them speaks about a particular ontological field. The Neoplatonist philosopher describes the content and the operational presence of the divine entities as well as the general procedures of the world to which they belong. All these are not subject to the limitations – or some necessities – of the natural world. Since the Christian theologian

⁷ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ανάπτυξις...*, prop. 25; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 33.28-33).

⁸ «ἀλλὰ φυσικὴν ἔχον (sc. τὸ γεννώμενον) δύναμιν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν φθάσαι τῷ γεννῶντι τελειότητα» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ανάπτυξις...*, prop. 25; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 34.1-12).

⁹ «παράγει δὲ οὐδὲν εἶδος ἕτερον εἶδος ἀλλ' ἢ πάντα θεός, ἡ μία πάντων ἀρχή» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ανάπτυξις...*, prop. 25; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 34.12-13). The above extract excludes the possibility of chain development of the created world and defines a somehow independent and under its own terms way of development for every initial seminal condition, which obviously has arisen from a special plan of the divine providence.

denies according to its worldview that lots of gods exist, except the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, his argumentation on subject to becoming entities in order to refute Proclus' views is perhaps unnecessary. Maybe this is a deliberate and quite clever choice of his, in order to refute the ontological dependence of an imperfect being on a more perfect into the sensible world, and conversely, in order to refute the ontological autonomy too. Regardless, however, of whether this is true, he manages to develop Christian views with stable arguments on the ontological monism and to refute polyarchy and multi-causality.

B] Mono-causality – Multi-causality

In prop. 26 Proclus, intending to emphasize the absolute ontological purity, the autonomy of the action and the permanent integrity of the One, says that it proceeds to productions, in the sense of a source that spreads, without setting in motion itself or a condition of itself. He explains his point by mentioning that, if the One provided its substance to the beings by motion that would mean that the motion is an internal property of it or an external assistance of it. If that was true, its ontological absoluteness would change and it would be impossible to keep its unity, which is beyond any other condition related to it and absolutely transcendent (Dodds 1963, 214)¹⁰. He obviously intends to exclude any possibility of duality or multitude within the supreme Principle and to prevent it from, let's say, being controlled by its functions or by some external interventions. He then says that any secondary cause during its distributional productive intervention and range imitates the One, which produces the entire world, in the sense that it structures all the archetypal general cores. And obviously in this formation it would include the possibility for its productive function as well. Exactly within the context of this ontological chain of the dependencies-successions the Neoplatonist philosopher points out that everything that owns a special productive application comes from the supreme Principle, which produces everything¹¹. During this process of development, the initial integrities are preserved. Every productive cause provides its substance to the following beings, remaining stable to itself. Without changing at all its ontological completeness, it promotes its productive formations or the seeds for a process like this. If it was reduced, it would lose its perpetual productive dynamism. «Ἀνελαττώτων ἄρα τῶν παραγόντων μενόντων, τὰ δεύτερα παράγεται ὑπ' αὐτῶν· τὸ γὰρ ὁπωσοῦν ἐλαττούμενον μένειν ἀδύνατον οἷόν ἐστιν»¹². Moreover, since the Principle is unchanged, it preserves its possibility for perpetual ontological suppling and the preconditions for the initial formation and the subsequent development of the sensible world. And this would be not possible, unless the metaphysical intervention was not strictly structural and legislative.

Nicholas, in his critique, excludes once again the possibility of many productive causes. He says that, if they existed, then the One would not be perfect or self-sufficient, since it would accept additional assistance and, possibly, intervention regarding its manifestations. To his opinion, this is impossible, since the One is absolutely capable of promoting processes with a specific effect while it remains immovable. Specifically, the effects are two. Firstly, it produces by its substance realities which are consubstantial with it. This is the internal way of existence of the Holy Trinity – including its Persons and its energies – which excludes any process that would work in a transitional sense towards other ontological and hierarchically inferior levels.

¹⁰ «... καὶ κινούμενον (sc. τὸ ἓν) οὐδὲν ἔν ἐτι ἔσται, μεταβάλλον ἐκ τοῦ ἓν...» (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 26; Proclus 1963, 30.12-17).

¹¹ «... ὥστε καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πάντων παρακτικῶ τὸ τινῶν παρακτικόν» (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 26; Proclus 1963, 30.18-21).

¹² (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 26; Proclus 1963, 30.22-24).

It then produces by moving in a creative way natural beings, which before their creation did not own a specific area where they would be present as sperms. While the One is projecting like this, it does not experience any ontological change of its substance –and certainly of its Persons or energies. Its existence remains permanently undivided. It just makes possible the necessary processes in order the beings to come from “non-being” to “being”, spreading its energies, i.e. the precondition for a transition to the new ontological level. «...Ἀκίνητον ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένον τὸ ἐν τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῆς οἰκειᾶς οὐσίας προάγει ὅμοια, μᾶλλον δὲ ταῦτὰ κατὰ φύσιν ἑαυτῷ (καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ μένειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔστι), τὰ δὲ παράγει ἐκ μὴ ὄντων κινούμενον δημιουργικῶς καὶ μηδὲ αὐτὸ εἰς τὴν οἰκειᾶν οὐσίαν πάσχον». The One stays untouched from any new condition, which either way presupposes it, as to what originally is (Lossky 1944, 87-108)¹³.

Nicholas also says that Proclus, by denying the Christian view on Trinity, forms a divine multitude both infinite in number and indefinite; this is a development manifested through the gradual emergence of many and specialized causes. According to his opinion, this productive pluralism excludes the possibility for metaphysical monism too¹⁴. At this point, however, we have to mention that Proclus’ metaphysical system is clearly a monistic one, but not in a simplistic way. Polyarchy comes from a Principle and in this way the dialectic between the homogeneity (initial united condition) and heterogeneity (subsequent development of a multitude) is established. If there was no heterogeneity among the metaphysical properties, the variety that is found into the sensible world would be impossible to exist. Either way, however, unity, which is the most important quality of the One, remains the common substrate and shows the infinite quantitatively wealth of it (Trouillard 1982, 187-206, 223-234)¹⁵.

Subsequently, Nicholas, in order to disprove the view on an inflexible immovable system of productive elements, suggests that the attribute of inactivity should be called just for One’s essence. He, therefore, says that, even if we claimed that there are secondary productive causes, we would have to accept that they produce not in an immovable way but by having received the analogous for production motion by the first mover¹⁶. Furthermore, it is mentioned that there is a difference regarding their meaning –and, obviously, regarding the conditions that they describe– between the verbs: «ὑφίστημι», «παράγω» and «κινῶ». He explains that «ὑφίστημι» has two meanings. It indicates both the natural substalization – i.e. the immutability of the internal presences of the Holy Trinity– and the creative one, which conceptually is related to the verb «παράγω» – and obviously reflects the transitions to a new ontological level, not previously existing. On the other hand, the verb «κινῶ» is related not only to «παράγω» but also to «μεταποιῶ» and «μετασκευάζω». These are processes connected to volition and to a specific anaphorism of the mover¹⁷. According to Nicholas, it is clear that in the supreme level the verb «κινῶ» describes the intentional motion of the One for production. Here the widely defined by the Christians view

¹³ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 26; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 34.23-38.8).

¹⁴ «καὶ τῆ τῶν πολλῶν παρεισαγωγῇ τὸ ἐν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐκβάλλων...» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop.26; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 35.9-21).

¹⁵ (Proclus. *Theologia platonica*, III; Proclus 1978, 5.6-28.11). This is Proclus’ most important text concerning the theory on the absolutely united transcendent type. Cf. (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, props.1-6 and props. 113-165; Proclus 1963, 2.1-6.30 and 100.5-144.8).

¹⁶ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 26; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 35.21-31).

¹⁷ «... τὸ δὲ κινεῖν οὐ τὸ παράγειν μόνον δηλοῦν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ μεταποιεῖν καὶ τὸ μετασκευάζειν κατὰ τὴν τοῦ κινούντος βούλησιν» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 26; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 35.32-36.7).

on God's personal and free choice is highlighted, i.e. the fact that he is not subject to ontological necessities, not even those derived from its substance¹⁸.

In prop. 27 Proclus takes the responsibility to prove the above mentioned views of his, by extending his argumentation. Once again he starts his reasoning from the fact that every cause, regardless of which one is and what is the ontological level that it possesses, proceeds to productions by remaining hypostatically unchanged. By actually producing without moving, there is no change, which could occur by the development of the beings that it produces¹⁹. In fact, in many other cases, he emphasizes that the provision does actually mean reduction, since it comes from hyper-completeness. The Neoplatonist philosopher's intention is quite obvious. If the case was about a change of the cause within its effects, then the cause would stop being a productive core of a perpetual spreading and literally would disappear as an ontologically specific reality. This would be a chaotic situation that would be the main way in which the sensible world would appear, while at the same time the metaphysical world would lose its functions as the first and the final protection –both the ontological and the epistemological one– of the sensible beings. By taking, then, the matter in the natural composition of what is being produced Proclus says that for the same reasons we should not think of it as a part of the producing. By extension, he excludes the possibility the production to be an ontological transition or a movement of the feeding core, since according to his opinion the productive cause may not be considered to be the whole of the elements or the matter of the produced. It keeps being the entity that it was from the beginning in a strictly specific ontological way and, thus, the produced is different form its substance. And such an ontological difference is preserved, since the cause produces because of its perfection and the excess of the radiating power of it. «Οὐδὲ μετάβασις· οὐ γὰρ ὕλη γίνεται τοῦ προϊόντος· μένει γὰρ οἶόν ἐστι, καὶ τὸ παραγόμενον ἄλλο παρ' αὐτὸ ἐστιν. Ἀναλλοίωτον ἄρα τὸ γενῶν ἴδρυται καὶ ἀνελάττωτον, διὰ γόνιμον δύναμιν ἑαυτὸ πολλαπλασιάζον καὶ ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ δευτέρας ὑποστάσεις παρεχόμενον»²⁰. An ontological confusion between the cause and the effect is, therefore, out of the question; this is a distinction that preserves both the permanence of the existence and the intervention of the causes and the possibility of the production. Every effect appears to be a new potential ontological condition into the metaphysical world and, when the necessary terms are fulfilled, in an actual one into the cosmic becoming too.

Nicholas, attempting to confute what is being said, thinks in the same way as he did before here too. He emphasizes once again that we should not attribute to other entities or powers except the One the properties of hyper-perfection and productivity. This supreme and only Cause is the exclusive criterion for determining the degree of the perfection that the being possesses, which in any case is predetermined and in each case relative²¹. In order actually to strengthen his objections, he takes the issue discussed once again to what is the exact meaning of the terms that describe the production. According to his opinion, if we intend to be scientifically accurate regarding the description of the appearing conditions, we have to know the difference between the terms «γέννησις» and «γένεσις» and between the terms «γεννᾶν» and «παράγειν». As he has explained in other parts of his treatise, the first two terms express Christians' opinion about

¹⁸ «... ὅτε βούλεται, τὸ ἐν αὐτό...» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ανάπτυξις...*, prop. 26; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 36.7-16).

¹⁹ «αὐτὸ ὄν ὅπερ ἐστὶ (sc. τὸ παράγον) καὶ οὔτε μεταβάλλον εἰς ἐκεῖνα (sc. τὰ πράγματα) οὔτε ἐλαττούμενον» (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 27; Proclus 1963, 30.27-32.2).

²⁰ (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 27; Proclus 1963, 32.5-9). Noteworthy is also that he defines as a productive cause the dynamic nature of the essence and not an essence without active fertility. For the historical-philosophical sources of this view, cf. Dodds (1963, 215).

²¹ «...πρὸς αὐτὸ (sc. τὸ Ἔν) δὲ πάντα ἀτελεῖ» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ανάπτυξις...*, prop. 27; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 36.20-28).

creation, as a completely starting action of volitional and intentional character²². So, Nicholas understands birth in the sense that the One takes beings from the state of non-existence and brings them to the state of existence and that it provides being as an effect of strict processes without any exception and from the beginning. Thus, by accepting and not possessing under their own power existential properties, beings do not possess self-existence and productive ability. So, what comes from the One and has some intervening abilities is not a cause that produces, but a functional spirit that handles situations, which co-operates in the salvation and the transformation of the beings that have committed sin. «Τὰ δὲ μετ' αὐτό (sc. τὸ Ἔν) καὶ μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων αὐτῷ ἐγγίζοντα οὐκ αἴτια παρακτικά ἀλλὰ λειτουργικά πνεύματα καὶ ὑπηρετικά δεδικαίωνται λέγεσθαι, συνεργοῦντα τῇ σωτηρίᾳ τῶν ὑποβεβηκότων τὰ ὑψηλότερα κατὰ θεϊαν κέλευσιν τε καὶ βούλησιν»²³. He obviously speaks about angels, which, however, are created and not divine beings and constitute the spiritual powers that bring to the human beings the divine orders and not the divine energies. Thus, what here is immaterial is not necessarily uncreated too, without of course excluding the possibility that angels are not immaterial but non-perceptible. That is to say in a sense of a somehow anti-matter, or as energy condition of the matter²⁴.

Nicholas, however, agrees with Proclus that in an incorporeal birth what is being produced is not some separation of the producing. Otherwise, the consequences for the Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity would be crucial in two respects. On the one hand, a hierarchy and, subsequently, tritheism would result. The most important consequence would be relations of subordination, such as submission, separation and determined succession. And regardless of a resulting differentiation of the divine essence, its internal development would appear, i.e. its ontological relegation. The transition would be then domination and corruption and not an intact way of existence. On the other hand, the One would be diffused in created beings or would be absorbed by their essence, so they would be exact separations of it. In this theory one may also include the view that the One stays unchanged and undiminished, promotes everything that eternally participates in the same ontological condition as it does, while it produces creatively the rest of the world²⁵. We have to mention that generally in the Christian example even the leading conditions of the natural world do not reveal, and actually by analogy, the divine creativity and creation. These remarks do not actually apply in the case of physical birth, where: «...ὄν σῶμα καὶ μέρος ἑαυτοῦ (sc. τοῦ γεννῶντος) τὸ σπέρμα εἰς τὴν τοῦ γεννωμένου γένεσιν καταβαλλόμενον»²⁶.

C] The ontological presence-function of “similarity”

In prop.28 Proclus says something completely different compared to the previous that he has discussed. First of all, he explains that the producing is superior to the produced as regards its power, i.e. it is superior regarding the way in which it projects its internal properties. Up to this point, hierarchy is explicitly defined. He points out, however, that if the cause and the effect are related to each other as to their essence and the first one likes the second one, then every effect desires to relate to its direct source and, in a broader sense, to the Good, the first-supreme Principle. This,

²² (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 7; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 10.23-12.5).

²³ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 27; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 37.5-8).

²⁴ On the Christian angelology, cf. Dionysius the Areopagite's treatise entitled *Περὶ τῆς οὐρανίας ἱεραρχίας* (*De coelesti hierarchia*); Dionysius the Areopagite 1857, 164d-321a. Also, Roques (1983, 135-169).

²⁵ «οὔτε γὰρ γεννῶν ἢ προβάλλον οὔτε παράγων ὁ Θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἐλαττοῦται ἢ μεταβάλλει εἰς τὸ γεννώμενον ἢ ἐκπορευόμενον ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἢ μὴν τὸ γινόμενον...» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 27; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 37.13-23).

²⁶ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 27; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 37.23-26).

somehow, emotional relationship means that the causes and their effects are more united than separated to each other. By extensions, they are clearly more similar than dissimilar²⁷. And here one may raise the following question: is Proclus speaking about an ontological composition or, more specifically, does he mean that the effect exists potentially and like a sperm into the cause? The answer to this question will be mainly provided by the analysis of the prop.29 of *Institutio theologica*. A demanding researcher, however, could also see, in order to get more information, the next works of the Neoplatonist philosopher, where the question is approached in more details and the ways of the relations are explained on the basis that tautological essential absorptions are not allowed to arise. Moreover, he would find that within the metaphysical world all beings are in actual condition²⁸.

While expressing his critique, Nicholas, first of all, accepts that there is a hierarchy in beings regarding the degree in which they are similar to the divine, since noetic beings (obviously the angels) take precedence over the sensible ones and the simple beings come before the composite ones²⁹. However, he does not negotiate the context of the principle on similarity or the specific relevancies-distinction that its function determines. He says that neither in this way nor in any other way the process of production could actually be a fact within the Holy Trinity, where there is neither quantitative nor qualitative difference nor an ontological condition superior or more remarkable than another one. «Ὡστε καὶ μείζων καὶ κρείττων οὐ φυσικῶς ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἄρα ὑποστατικῶς τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὁ πατήρ· εἰ δὲ μήτε τὸ ποσὸν κυρίως ἐκεῖ μήτε τὸ ποιὸν χώραν ἔχειν, δῆλον ὡς οὐδὲ τὸ μείζον οὐδὲ τὸ κρείττον»³⁰. That being said, polytheism is absolutely out of the question, since the removal of the properties that define the successions and the axiological gradations from a priori to a posteriori appears, i.e. hierarchies of an ontological texture. Moreover, however, we should not overlook that the Christian thinker's extract refers to the first hypothesis of the Platonic dialogue entitled *Parmenides*, which is implicitly found throughout the entire tradition that was formed since Dionysius the Areopagite and up to Gregory Palamas.

Taking further his thinking –on the somehow ontological combination – Proclus, in prop. 29, says that the cause produces the effects because of the similarity that has with them and not because of the dissimilarity. He actually explains that up to a point the identity between the producing and the produced during –and despite– the hierarchical relegation is preserved. So, the producing, as it is in its original state, seems to own, obviously, in an analogous way, the same characteristics with its effects. «Εἰ οὖν ἡ πρόοδος ἐν τῇ ὑφέσει σώζει τὸ ταυτὸν τοῦ γεννηθέντος πρὸς τὸ γεννησάν, καὶ οἶον ἐκεῖνο πρῶτως, τοιοῦτον ἐκφαίνει τὸ μετ' αὐτὸ δευτέρως, δι' ὁμοιότητος ἔχει τῆν ὑπόστασιν»³¹. This kind of relation adds a new fact to what has been said in props. 25-27, since it introduces a much more strong communication between the two participating agents. It becomes clear that with such a development or emanation undoubtedly the transition remains in the same ontological level, since the essence of the producing does not change. However, regardless of whether Proclus is consistent or not concerning the connections of his thoughts, it is clear that he attempts to keep unchanged the qualitative properties of the metaphysical world. Here descending developments occur, but the consequences derived from it appear just as much as the intensity of the properties is reducing; not if they disappear³². If they disappeared, then

²⁷ (Proclus, *Institutio theologica*, prop.28; Proclus 1963, 32.28-34).

²⁸ For instance Proclus. *Theologia Platonica*, IV; Proclus 2003, 98.2-111.3.

²⁹ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ανάπτυξις...*, prop. 28; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 38.7-13).

³⁰ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ανάπτυξις...*, prop. 28; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 38.30-32).

³¹ (Proclus. *Institutio theologica*, prop. 29; Proclus 1963, 34.8-11). On the principle of "similarity", cf. Dodds (1963, 216).

³² (Proclus. *Theologia Platonica*, III; Proclus 1978, 84.4-91.24).

some of the produced that the philosopher describes, would no more belong to the metaphysical beings' world. However, such a possibility does not correspond to the whole spirit of his views.

Nicholas approaches the question on the occurring ontological relations in its beginning and excludes forms of production that show an internal development and not a creation. Once again, he points out that during the ontological constitution of the divine essence, no "procession" relying on similarity is actualized and that in its level there is no hierarchy among the first one and the following. The three divine Persons are the same as to their essence and different as to their hypostatic properties, which do not indicate gradations or separations but a special way of presence³³. So, introducing a special perspective of the apophatic and superlative theology, he says that the terms "similarity", "dissimilarity", "equal" and "unequal" – which are basic ontological categories since Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* (Corsini 1962) – are improperly used for the Holy Trinity. These are basically names familiar to the human consciousness for identifying the various relations among the created beings, which are subject to the direct perception and are categorically classified. At the same time, the terms "one" and "three" and the relating to them conditions of the identity and otherness declare just the essence. Obviously, otherness shows the radical ontological difference between the divine and the human – or any other created – essence. On their part, the terms "similarity" and "dissimilarity" show the differences regarding the quality and the terms "equality" and "inequality" regarding the quantity. According to the Christian thinker, however, the divine is without quality and without quantity, since it is simple, intangible and non-acceptable to sortal determinations.

So, God cannot receive any attribute, since, otherwise, the divine would be a part of the world of the created beings and it would be subject to the existing among them relations³⁴. God provides these conditions to the created beings, without however to subject himself in their determinations. Thus, the only ontological category that may be attributed to the divine is that of the "being" and the "essence", and actually in a superlative way. Κρατεί δὲ μᾶλλον ὄν καὶ οὐσία λέγεσθαι, εἰ καὶ τοῦτο μεθ' ὑπεροχῆς³⁵. In the superlative theology of the Eastern Christianity, the above remark means that the Holy Trinity is not without essence. Such a deprivation would result in an extreme ontological relegation. It possesses the essence in a special way, radically different from the way in which the individual beings possess it. This difference excludes the proportional approach of the divine essence, thus human being lacks of the valid abilities for a rational structure of the metaphysical world. Between the uncreated and the created essence there is no possibility of a structural or any other kind similarity.

Conclusion

According to what we have examined, we come to the following three concluding judgements:

a) The Neoplatonist Proclus, through his analytical descriptions for the emanating development of the divine beings, establishes a rational Metaphysics and pre-describes the special ways in which the production of the sensible beings is going to activate. On the other hand, Nicholas presents just general estimations about metaphysical prefigurements of the production and avoids introducing

³³ «... ταῦτά μὲν γὰρ τὰ τρία κατὰ τὴν φύσιν εἶπουν οὐσίαν, ἕτερα δὲ κατὰ τὰς ὑποστατικὰς ιδιότητας» (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 29; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 39.3-8).

³⁴ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 29; Nicholas of Methone 1984, 39.8-18). Here the famous apophatic theology comes to the fore. On this issue, cf. Begzos (1986).

³⁵ (Nicholas of Methone. *Ἀνάπτυξις...*, prop. 29, Nicholas of Methone 1984, 39.18-23). On the superlative theology, cf. Semmelroth (1950, 209-234).

the human cognitive process into the area of the divine happenings. He remains in a much more apophatic level.

b) Proclus thinks that the production is a somehow necessary stage for the internal dialectic process of the supreme Principle, which subordinates to a developmental process driven by inherent powers, which will set the ontological and the functional boundaries in the subsequent cosmic becoming. On the other hand, Nicholas, obviously motivated by the Christian theory on the divine intentionality, excludes any prospect of compulsory production of the created world. The existence of this world is placed in the level of the potential to happen and of the possibility that is out of any kind of stereotypical determinism.

c) Nicholas' disproving attempt, despite the limited scope that it appears in relation to the development of the history of philosophy, since it is directed to a treatise – and in a wider sense to a philosophical system – to which he is almost totally opposed regarding the worldview, provides actually some good results too. He presents in a systematic way the Christian teaching and defines the context of the structures into which it formulates itself. He strongly insists on the support of the theological realism, includes into their actual limits and relativizes, as far as this is necessary, the philosophical and scientific reasoning and establishes the in detail controlling critique, which is actually determined by a special point of view. In this sense, it could be easily suggested that Nicholas follows the strict scientific criteria, since he accurately defines the worldview systems. He is, literally, a consistent theologian. We have to mention though, that his contribution would be more crucial, if his critique included other treatises of the Neoplatonist philosopher too, to which more data on the concept of production are included. *Institutio theologica* was mainly a teaching manual, with strict, admittedly, scientific substrates.

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SUMMARY: PROCLUS' NEOPLATONIC POLYTHEISM AND NICHOLAS OF METHONE'S CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM. The matter concerning the differences between Neoplatonism and Christianity starts from the distinction between two concepts: polytheism and monotheism. Taking as examples for the two worldviews Proclus and Nicholas of Methone, the modern researcher of philosophy, who approaches their work, becomes able to understand that the first one, through his description regarding the development of the divine multitude, structures a rational Metaphysics, while the latter permanently preserves the principle of the unutterability of the divine essence. Thus, while attempting to interpret the supreme Principle as a cause, the Neoplatonist philosopher describes a development process that is pushed by the One's internal powers, while the Christian thinker, by giving emphasis to the divine will, rejects determinism. With the attention focused on Nicholas attempt to confute Proclus' views, the given impression is that they are two completely incompatible philosophical systems. Christian teaching is systematically presented in the context of the theological realism and clearly differentiates from the Neoplatonic worldview. The fact, however, that Nicholas puts under his microscope just Proclus' treatise entitled *Institutio theologica*, makes his critique of limited scope, without however, this remark to attach less value to his attempt.

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