

THE ONE BEYOND SILENCE: THE APOPHATIC HENOLOGY OF PROCLUS

DANIEL JUGRIN¹

ABSTRACT. For Proclus, “negations are truer than assertions” (*In Platonis Parmenidem* 70k), but for a negation to be issued, there must be a name that is denied. But if names are left out, then the negatives are no longer possible. All those aspects of the negation which lead us to discern the transcendent power are now found inapplicable. The negation of negation is the one that introduces us in the appropriate state of silence. The theme of silence is extremely important within the Proclean view of union with the One and it is reached only after intense striving and intellectual effort. The entire dialectical method, even if it operates by way of negations, is nothing but a preamble to the mystical union, removing whatever impedes the contemplation of the One. While the soul cannot know the One, it can attain likeness to the One, experiencing its unity: the way of negation is the precondition for this, purifying the soul for the inflow of divine inspiration. The silence points beyond itself to the One who is beyond all silence.

Keywords: *Proclus, the One, apophasis, negation of negation, silence, transcendence*

Proclus (412 – 485 AD) has more to say about the logic of the *via negativa* using terms which are much more technical than in any previous Neoplatonic philosopher. His discussion is shaped in the language of the Platonic dialogues *Parmenides* and *Sophist* and reflects a systematic contribution to the development of this tradition. Technically speaking, *apophasis* is employed by Proclus to designate the way of negation; his use of the term marks a conceptual shift, as Plotinus and the Middle Platonists favoured *aphairesis* (abstraction) instead. Supposedly, Proclus was not innovative here, the Athenian tradition of *apophasis* having been already

¹ University of Bucharest, Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Studies and Dialogue. Email: jugrindaniel@gmail.com.

set. This change of tone from abstraction to negation “marked a radicalization of the negative method: that the later the date, the more radical the refusal of language.”² The aim of this study is to investigate the role of negation in Proclus as the ultimate tool which prepares the soul to attain mystical union with the One. Negations do not possess the ability to reveal the nature of the One: they lead to the transcendence of the first principle. Negative discourse removes one by one all the levels of existence with which our thinking operates, culminating in its own removal. Negation of negation is that which introduces us into the appropriate state of silence. Silence is the natural conclusion of the *via negativa*. The way of negation becomes nothing more than a preamble to the mystical union, a preparation for the ultimate goal of unification.

1. Negation and Transcendence

In his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*,³ Proclus investigates the status of the negations which express the transcendence. The transcendence causes the removal of all the attributes circumscribed to being. Negation itself has many meanings and it is necessary to specify the sense ascribed to the negations which denote the transcendence. Proclus discerns between two types of negation: we can negate something of a thing when, among a range of qualities, we choose the ones appropriate to it and reject the others; at the same time, we can negate of a certain reality everything which does not have contact with it, *i.e.* everything which is alien to it by nature. Instead, in the case of the absolute One, negations have an entirely different status and relevance. In order to explain the negations corresponding to the One, Proclus overturns the above significance of negation. Firstly, all these negations applied to the first principle do not mark any deficiency of the One, but its superiority in regard to all other things.

The fact that we remove from the principle any trace of plurality and manifestation situated on the level of being, does not simply mean that the principle would be “deprived” of all these and that it would need them. More precisely, Proclus clearly differentiates between the “Non-being” of the One⁴ and its specific negations,

² See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, Hanstein, Frankfurt am Main/Bonn, 1986, p. 97 and 106.

³ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1074.22-1075.16 Cousin.

⁴ Proclus wishes to specify that the expression τὸ μὴ ὄν has three different meanings: “For ‘One’ has three senses: one as superior to Being, another as coordinate with Being, and another as inferior to Being” – τὸ μὲν ὡς κρείττον τοῦ ὄντος, τὸ δὲ ὡς τῷ ὄντι σύστοιχον, τὸ δὲ ὡς ὑφειμένον τοῦ ὄντος (*In Platonis Parmenidem* 1039.29-30 Cousin; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on*

respectively, the “non-being” and the negation corresponding to Matter – on the other side of the hierarchical reality.⁵ In *Platonic Theology*,⁶ Proclus confronts the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* with the Fifth one:⁷ the result is that both hypotheses arrive at some negative conclusions.

The First Hypothesis refers to the absolute One, excluding from it everything else, while the Fifth Hypothesis shows that those which come out completely outside of the One cannot receive any kind of affirmative attribute, falling into *pure negativity*. But, if the First Hypothesis refers to the absolute One and expresses its superiority to everything else, the Fifth Hypothesis is to be found at the opposite extremity, being concerned with Matter, which holds no quality because it lacks form and evades being. Still, the absolute One evades being by its superiority to it, while Matter evades being by its inferiority. The One is a Non-being “by excess” (καθ’ ὑπεροχῆν), and any addition pertaining to being would limit and diminish it, while Matter is a non-being “by defect” (κατὰ ἔλλειψιν) which tends to receive a form, to become a particular being.⁸

The negations of Matter indicate the privation (στέρησις) of being, while the negations of the One denote the exceeding of being.⁹ Thus, though the One itself is a Non-being, it is not a pure nothingness, but a Non-being superior to being. Secondly, the things that are negated (ἀποφασκομένω) of the One do not remain outside of it –

Plato’s Parmenides, p. 400). Cf. *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 38.26-39.5 Saffrey/Westerink. While the first one τὸ μὴ ὄν is, to Proclus, the one at the end of the First Hypothesis of *Plato’s Parmenides* (142e2) – identical to the first principle –, the second one is identical to the τὸ μὴ ὄν in the *Sophist* 256d11-e2, and the third one is identical to the Matter, characterized for that matter by στέρησις (for the latter aspect, cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 99.3-5 Saffrey/Westerink). Cf. S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero greco classico”, *Helikon*, vol. 29-30, 1989-1990, p. 175, n. 776.

⁵ Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, *Chora. Revue d’études anciennes et médiévales*, vol. 7-8, 2009-2010, p. 61.

⁶ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* I.12, 21-22 Saffrey/Westerink.

⁷ Plato, *Parmenides* 159b2-160b4. See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 106 sq.

⁸ On the Neoplatonic interpretation of the conclusion of the First Hypothesis of *Parmenides* in terms of “negation by defect” or “negation by excess”, see J. Trouillard, “Le Parménide de Platon et son interprétation néoplatonicienne”, *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, vol. 23, 1973, p. 94 sq.

⁹ If, e.g., someone says that “he is not happy”, it might be assumed that he is actually *more than* happy, in fact in a state of delirious ecstasy. Alternatively, he could be non-happy in the opposite sense, in that he is *unhappy*. A first form of the negative points to a *superiority* (ὑπεροχῆ), while the other one indicates a *defect* (ἔλλειψις). Such a reduction in the scope of the *negation* was very necessary because, from the theological perspective, it is obviously necessary that the negatives be directed in an *upward* direction. Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 107.

as if there were no communion between their nature and the superior One¹⁰ –, but on the contrary they are in fact derived from the preceding One (παράγεται ἐκεῖθεν) and are brought into being by the prior One (ὑφέστηκεν ἐκεῖθεν).¹¹ The principle is not just an absolute negation and removal – which would lack relevance to those removed things.¹² In fact, it has the power to bring into existence all the things which it transcends – consequently, all that we negate of it. Proclus says that “The One, therefore, entirely transcends an order of this kind, and is the cause of it” – πάντη ἄρα τὸ ἐν ἐκβέβηκε τῆς τοιαύτης τάξεως καὶ αἰτιὸν ἐστὶν αὐτῆς.¹³

The negatives derive then their significance by starting from an ontological basis. In the second case – that of privation –, the lack of a specific kind of being gives the negative its content; in the first case, the presence of being underlies the superiority which the negative encircles. Nonetheless, the second case requires a certain continuity between the superior and the inferior stage. The concept of continuity is constitutive to the Proclean negative theology because, for the negation of superiority to be efficient as a theological instrument, some continuity between the ontological levels is needed. Even though the first principle has an existence by itself – independent of its inferior manifestations –, there must be nonetheless a link between it and the existence of those to which it is the cause and the source. If this ontological continuity is not present, then we are not guaranteed that the negative process really leads to ascension:¹⁴

Let not, however, anyone considering these *negations* to be such things as *privations* despise such a mode of discussion, nor defining the sameness in words analogously, and words in habitudes, endeavour to calumniate this anagogic progression to the first principle – Καὶ μοι μηδεὶς μήτε τὰς ἀποφάσεις ταύτας οἶον

¹⁰ Just as mathematical objects and colours are mutually exclusive.

¹¹ *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1074.35-1075.1 Cousin.

¹² Proclus insists on the difference between the One and “nothing”: even if both are negations of being, the One is not a mere non-being. In *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII (46k Klibansky/Labowsky; cf. 504.221-222 Steel/Rumbach), Proclus notices the similarity between “nothing” (οὐδέν) – defined as “not even one” (οὐδὲ ἓν) – and the absolute One, of which, in the First Hypothesis of the Plato’s *Parmenides*, it is said to be “not even one”. To distinguish between the two, Proclus shows that, if the *nothing* is a complete suppression of anything – even of the One –, instead, the first One is not an absolute suppression of the One, but of the one who accompanies the being – of the *intelligible one*. Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendence et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 62, n. 24.

¹³ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.12, 66.16-17 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Th. Taylor, in *The Platonic Theology*, vol. I, p. 140). Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendence et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 61-62.

¹⁴ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 107-108.

στερήσεις εἶναι τιθέμενος ἀτιμαζέτω τὸν τοιοῦτον τῶν λόγων τρόπον, μήτε τὴν ἀναλογίαν ἐν λόγων ταυτότητι τοὺς δὲ λόγους ἐν σχέσεσιν ἀφοριζόμενος διαβάλλειν ἐπιχειρεῖτω τὴν ἀναγωγὸν ταύτην πορείαν ἐπὶ τὴν πρωτίστην ἀρχήν.¹⁵

Taking as premise the above excerpt, we could assume that, in Proclus' time, there was a debate concerning the value of these two ways of knowing the divine: analogy and negation.¹⁶ It would seem that ἀπόφασις was repudiated on the grounds of its relation to privation, and Proclus tried to counteract such an opinion by introducing "the negation of superiority".

In his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Proclus discusses the nature of negations and the extent of their superiority or inferiority in regard with the corresponding affirmations. There was clearly a trend which claimed that affirmation was preferable to negation, presupposing that negation was just a privation of something, while affirmation implied a presence.¹⁷ This view was substantiated by the Plato's *Sophist* which brought into attention being and non-being.¹⁸ Privation was identified with "non-being", a lack of a certain kind, while affirmation was perceived in reference to being. Following this equivalence, negation was reduced to privation and was considered as indicating "the absence of something". In this situation, Proclus argues that the *Sophist* explicitly suggests various meanings for "non-being": it could designate what is superior to being, or equal to it, or inferior to it, so that – if negation was coupled with non-being – it would carry three possible senses: *superiority* to affirmation, *coordinated* with affirmation, and *inferiority* to affirmation.¹⁹

2. The Typology of Negation

There are three kinds of negations: some negations are lower than affirmations, as in the case of something that does not possess a characteristic because it is absent, although it could have been present; some negations are equal to affirmations, as in

¹⁵ *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 38.13-18 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Th. Taylor, in *The Platonic Theology*, vol. I, p. 118-119). Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 107-108.

¹⁶ See W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzuge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 339 sq.

¹⁷ Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1072 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 425 sq.).

¹⁸ Plato, *Sophista* 258a-b.

¹⁹ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1073.2-8 Cousin; 1076.4-12 Cousin. Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 108. Cf. also Marilena Vlad, *Dincolo de ființă. Neoplatonismul și aporiile originii inefabile* (*Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*), Zeta Books Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p. 256.

the case of something that possesses a negative characteristic which nevertheless has a positive significance; and some negations are superior to affirmations, as in the case of something that does not possess a characteristic because it transcends this characteristic.²⁰ Inferior negation refers to the being which is superior to non-being (as defect), the coordinated negation refers to the being which has the same rank as non-being and, finally, the type of negation superior to affirmation reflects the type of Non-Being which is beyond being.²¹

Only if negation stands under the sign of the Non-being *superior* to being, is it superior to affirmation. In the situation of the non-being which is of the same rank with the being, both negations and affirmations can be adequately applied to being.²² In the circumstance of Non-being which is *beyond* being, neither affirmations nor negations properly apply. Nonetheless, because no statement is completely true of the Non-being totally unrelated with being, “at least negation is more properly uttered of it than affirmation” – κυριώτερον ἂν ἢ ἀπόφασις ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ ῥηθῆι τῆς καταφάσεως.²³ Moreover, affirmations have something *definite*, while negations refer to an *indefinite* horizon, as the concept of “not-man” is much more undefined than that of “man”:²⁴

So then, it is more proper to reveal the incomprehensible and indefinable cause which is the One through negations; for assertions slice up reality, whereas negations tend to simplify things from distinction and definition in the direction of being uncircumscribed, and from being set apart by their proper boundaries in the direction of being unbounded – Τὴν οὖν ἀπερίληπτον καὶ ἀπερίοριστον τοῦ ἑνὸς αἰτίαν οἰκειότερόν ἐστιν ἐνδείκνυσθαι διὰ τῶν ἀποφάσεων· ἀποτεμαχίζουσι γὰρ αἱ καταφάσεις τὰ ὄντα, ἀναπλωτικαὶ δέ εἰσιν αἱ ἀποφάσεις ἀπὸ τῶν περιγεγραμμένων ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπερίγραφον καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν διηρημένων ὄροις οἰκείοις ἐπὶ τὸ ἀόριστον.²⁵

²⁰ L.J. Rosán, *The Philosophy of Proclus. The Final Phase of Ancient Thought*, “Cosmos”, New-York, 1949, p. 122-123.

²¹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1072.32 sq. Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 425).

²² Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1073.14-18 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 426).

²³ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1073.20-21 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 426).

²⁴ Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 172-173. On negation as indefinite possibility, see É. Bréhier, “L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1919, p. 265.

²⁵ Proclus, *In Parmenidem*, VI, 1074.4-11 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 427).

In *On interpretation*, Aristotle labels the notion of “non-man” as being an *indefinite noun* (ὄνομα ἀόριστον)²⁶ and does not see in it any negation (οὔτε ἀπόφασίς ἐστίν).²⁷ As a matter of fact, the indefinite aspect is the most striking one in a negation: it is a *non-specific affirmation*; “non-man”, e.g., could refer to everything from the spectrum of beings, except the only element of “man”. Negation leaves open the range of possible affirmations, and Proclus makes a point of virtue from this *openness*, comparing it with the *narrowness* of selection – intrinsic in affirmation.²⁸

Proclus²⁹ correlates this view – which postulates that negation detains the role of opening up the sphere of discourse rather than closing it – with the treatment of the non-being in terms of otherness, taken over from the *Sophist*.³⁰ Negation will demand only otherness – and not the contrariety:

when we say that something “is not” (μὴ ὄν), we are only uttering a denial (ἄρνησιν) of being (τοῦ ὄντος), not stating the opposite of being (ἐναντίον τοῦ ὄντος), by “opposite” meaning that which is at the furthest remove from being and is completely devoid of it – ὅτι ἡνίκα ἂν λέγωμεν μὴ ὄν, ἄρνησιν μόνον λέγομεν τοῦ ὄντος, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐναντίον τῷ ὄντι, λέγων ἐναντίον ὃ πλεῖστον τοῦ ὄντος ἀφέστηκε καὶ τελέως αὐτοῦ ἀποπέπτωκεν.³¹

Consequently, Proclus restricts negation to a form of differentiation, against those who rejected negation on the grounds that it had only a privative connotation. As Mortley shows, the question of negation and privation must have been of great importance in Proclus’ circle, because he devotes other pages to this problem, pointing out the necessity to distinguish them:³²

In the third place, in addition to what has been said, I determine, concerning the mode of negation, that they are not privative of their subjects but generative of things which are as it were their opposites – Τρίτον δὲ αὖ πρὸς τοῖς εἰρημένους περὶ τοῦ τρόπου διορίζομαι τῶν ἀποφάσεων, ὡς οὐκ εἰσὶ στερητικαὶ τῶν ὑποκειμένων ἀλλὰ γεννητικαὶ τῶν οἷον ἀντικειμένων.³³

²⁶ Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 16a32.

²⁷ Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 16a31.

²⁸ Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 108. See also R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 1: *The Rise and Fall of Logos*, p. 137.

²⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* V, 1000 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 350).

³⁰ See Plato, *Sophista* 255a sq.

³¹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1000.25-29 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 350).

³² Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 109.

³³ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.63.8-10 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 63). Cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 48.13-39.5 Saffrey/Westerink; I.12, 57.21-22 Saffrey/Westerink; *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1074.15-16,

It is clear enough that Proclus did not have in mind the fact that negation generates contrariness: in the first place, he chooses the term ἀντικειμένων (“opposition”), rather than ἐναντίον (“contrary”) – as it appears in the *Sophist*.³⁴ As results from the argumentation of Henry D. Saffrey and Leendert G. Westerink, it is necessary to invoke the word οἶον (“what might be called”) prior to ἀντικειμένων³⁵ which inculcates a “tentative tone”: to deprive the One of a certain thing through negation is to make that thing be, but nonetheless it cannot pass as a *true* contrary for what is negated of the One. For example, the negation of the multiplicity applied to the One reclaims the existence of the multiple, but this does not mean that the One should essentially be “the contrary of the multiple”. Likewise, by negating everything of the One, we will not have any positive determination or real knowledge of it.³⁶ Following Mortley’s conclusions, what Proclus wants to prove here is the fact that “negation is productive³⁷ of a counter-balancing affirmation at the next lower stage.”³⁸

Negations cannot be privative because privations can only refer to something which has the ability to be really definite. However, in a typical dialectical manner, Proclus reminds us that

the first principle is not simply deprived of the things that are negated of it, nor are these things without any communion with the One, but they are actually derived from that source – Τὸ γὰρ πρῶτον οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἀπέσπασται τῶν ἀποφασκομένων, οὐδὲ ἀκοινωνητά ἐστι πάντα ταῦτα πρὸς τὸ ἓν, ἀλλὰ παράγεται ἐκεῖθεν.³⁹

Thus, the negations of the One retain, on one hand, the significance of the transcendence of the One with regard to all things and, on the other hand, they give back to the One its role as the “cause of all things” – which were in the first instance negated of the One. Following his master, Syrianus,⁴⁰ Proclus establishes a relation of

1075.36-37, 1076.10-12, 1099.31-32, 1133.4-5 Cousin; VII, 1208.22-24 Cousin. Cf. H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 2, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 118.

³⁴ Plato, *Sophista* 257b3.

³⁵ The same expression appears in Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1092.36-37 Cousin: πανταχοῦ τὸ πρῶτως ἕκαστον ἓν ἐξήρηται τῶν οἶον ἀντικειμένων.

³⁶ H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 2, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 118.

³⁷ On the “productive sense” of negations, cf. also C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 363.

³⁸ In this context, the term ἀντικειμένων might be best translated by “counter-weight”; cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 110.

³⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1074.33-35 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 427, modified). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 173.

⁴⁰ Cf. also S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero greco classico”, *Helikon*, vol. 29-30, 1989-1990, p. 138.

precise correspondence between the negations of the First Hypothesis and the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis,⁴¹ revealing that “all those positive assertions proceed from these negations, and the cause of these is the One, as being prior to all other things.”⁴² The negations do not embody a “lack” in or a “privation” of the absolute One, but actually hide the transcendence of the *cause* in regard to everything it generates.⁴³

In the light of this reasoning, the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis are made possible exactly by those negations inserted in the First Hypothesis.⁴⁴ Proclus names the negations (ἀποφάσεις) “mothers of assertions” (μητέρες εἰσὶ τῶν καταφάσεων) and is convinced that he has demonstrated, through his mechanism of “kataphatic *apophasis*”, how the middle order of realities is established.⁴⁵ All that is affirmed in the Second Hypothesis “proceeds” from what was negated in the First

⁴¹ Cf. also Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 174.

⁴² Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1075.16-22 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 428). See also Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1061.23-31, 1085.12-17 Cousin. According to Proclus's testimony, Syrianus is the first one to notice that everything that is stated in the Second Hypothesis is denied in the First one (cf. Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 255, n. 1). Thus, Proclus argues that negations generate assertions because everything that is denied to the One proceeds from him. Cf. J. Trouillard, *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1972, p. 88. On primitive, assertion-generating negation, see also É. Bréhier, “L'idée du néant et le problème de l'origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec”, p. 265 sq.

⁴³ Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 62. Negations [of the Matter] are *privations*, while negations [of the One] are *transcendent* causes of all their effects. Cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* I.12, 57.21-22 Saffrey/Westerink. Cf. also Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1076.25-29 Cousin: “We talk of the Monad as being devoid of number, not in the sense of its being inferior to numbers and indefinite, but rather in the sense that it produces and defines numbers” (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 429). Cf. J. Trouillard, “Le Parménide de Platon et son Interprétation Néoplatonicienne”, p. 95; *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Proclus calls negations (ἀποφάσεις) “the mothers of assertions” – μητέρες εἰσὶ τῶν καταφάσεων (*In Platonis Parmenidem* 1133.3-5 Cousin; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 472) and is convinced that he has proven through the procedure of “kataphatic *apophasis*”, precisely how the middle order of realities is established. Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 114. See also Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 1208.22-24 Cousin. Cf. also Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 174, n. 103.

⁴⁵ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 114.

Hypothesis.⁴⁶ Proclus conceives the generation of the Being by the One as a complementary process of the transcendence of the One. We are dealing with a double “detachment” of the One in relation to Being (and to each of its “classes” or “orders” of being): thus, the detachment of the One as transcendent beyond Being is accomplished through the negation of the “orders” of being; on the other hand, the inauguration or the generation of all the orders of being is made through the detachment from the preceding One, which remains unreachable, caught in this network of successive negations. The One imposes itself as transcendent through the negation of all the classes of being; but, at the same time – in a complementary movement, of opposite orientation – these classes of being “emerge” through the initial negation and suppression; they unfold one by one, as they are negated of the One.⁴⁷

Therefore, as Jean Trouillard notes, “la négation du Parménide est plus libératrice que les autres formes de négation employées par Platon” – for example in the *Sophist* and the *Philebus* – and the three of them must not be mixed up:⁴⁸ the negation of the *Sophist* – or the otherness which is the non-being implied by each determination; the one of the *Philebus* – or the indeterminacy implied by the entire system of determinations; and the one of the *Parmenides* – which denies, at the same time, the identity and the otherness, the determination and the indeterminacy. “Only the third negation” is designated by Trouillard as being “the one which reveals the authentic ineffable”. For “otherness” and “determination” are still on the intelligible level. Negation of the negative theology is totally different:

⁴⁶ In that negative statements cause positive ones, Proclus emphasizes “the generating power of the negation”. See, in this respect, R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 112-113.

⁴⁷ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 63.11–12 Saffrey/Westerink: “For because the first principle is not many, the many proceed from it, and because it is not a whole, wholeness proceeds from it, and in a similar manner in other things” (trans. Th. Taylor, in *The Platonic Theology*, vol. I, p. 138). Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 66.

⁴⁸ On the distinction between the three types of negation found in the Platonic dialogues, see J. Trouillard: *L’Un et l’Âme selon Proclus*, p. 136 sq.; Idem, “Le Parménide de Platon et son interprétation néoplatonicienne”, p. 95 sq.; Idem, “Théologie négative et psychogonie chez Proclus”, in *Plotino e il Neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente*, Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, 1974, p. 254 sq. Cf. S. Breton, “Négation et négativité proclusiennes dans l’œuvre de Jean Trouillard”, in *Proclus et son influence: actes du colloque de Neuchâtel* (juin 1985), eds. G. Boss and G. Seel, Éditions du Grand Midi, Zürich, 1987, p. 86 sq.

It is not, then, simply true that assertion is always superior to negation, but there is a case where it takes second place to it, when negation expresses that type of Not-Being which is beyond Being – Οὐκ ἄρα μονοειδῶς ἢ κατάφασις ἀεὶ τῆς ἀποφάσεως κρείττων, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅπου καὶ τὴν δευτέραν ἔλαχε τάξιν, ὅταν ἢ ἀπόφασις ἐκεῖνο λέγῃ τὸ μὴ ὄν ὃ ἔστιν ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ὄντος.⁴⁹

Consequently, the usual negation – as part of discourse – is subordinated to affirmation. But negation of the negative theology is not anymore a function of language, but its limitation. Thus, it must be double: it denies the quality which we are tempted to affirm, but it dismisses at the same time the privation of this quality so that we should refuse the alternatives in language and abolish meaning. This is in order to avoid falling into a vacuum – as the privation was excluded – or being involved in another affirmation (*antithesis* or *synthesis* – which would be consistent with the previous one), and instead to look for the source of the affirmation *beyond* affirmation. It is about then of a “supra-logical negation” which Proclus denominates ὑπεραποφάσις – transcendent negation.⁵⁰

3. The Negation of Negation

Proclus understands the manoeuvre in the *Parmenides* 142a – where it is concluded that: “Therefore, no name belongs to it, nor is there an account or any knowledge or perception or opinion of it” – Οὐδ' ὄνο μάζεται ἄρα οὐδὲ λέγεται οὐδὲ δοξάζεται οὐδὲ γινώσκειται⁵¹ – as the proclamation of the final negation. For Proclus, “negations are truer than assertions,”⁵² but for a negation to be issued, there must be a name that is denied. But if names are left out, then the negatives are no longer possible.

⁴⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1073.8-12 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 426).

⁵⁰ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 1172.35 Cousin. Cf. J. Trouillard, “Théologie négative et autoconstitution psychique chez les néoplatoniciens”, in *Savoir, faire, espérer: les limites de la raison*, Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, Bruxelles, 1976, p. 311.

⁵¹ Plato, *Parmenides* 142a4-5.

⁵² Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 70k Klibansky/Labowsky (519.96-97 Steel): Neque ergo abnegationes uere de uno, sed magis quidem abnegationes quam affirmations (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 601).

...even the power of generating all things, which we said was a characteristic of negation, does not belong to the One, and therefore, even if it is said to generate and to produce, these expressions are transferred to it from the sphere of the existent, since they are the most distinguished names of powers – *le neque potentiam generatiuam totorum ipsum habere, qualem esse abnegationem dicebamus. Etsi igitur generare dicatur, etsi substituere, ab entibus ad ipsum transferuntur honoratissima omnium nominum uirtutibus iacentium.*⁵³

All those aspects of the negation which lead us to discern the transcendent power are now found inapplicable. The negation of negation⁵⁴ is the one that introduces us in the appropriate state of silence:⁵⁵ “for by means of a negation, he too removes all the negations” – *Τῷ γὰρ ἀποφάναι καὶ αὐτὸς ἀφεῖλεν πάσας τὰς ἀποφάσεις.*⁵⁶

It is interesting, however, that the Latin phrase “*negatio negationis*” does not appear as such in the texts of Proclus. It will be assumed by Meister Eckhart who gives it a decisive role in his theological discourse. In Eckhart’s vision, we must first remove from God all attributes related to beings. However, as a last resort, we must remove even the negations, bearing in mind that no negation is possible in the case of God, because we cannot deny anything to God. Therefore, we must remove all negations (*ἀφεῖλεν πάσας τὰς ἀποφάσεις*) – and this is the *negatio negationis*. All this reasoning is arranged on a line symmetrical with the arguments of Proclus, and the assumption of some researchers of an influence of Proclus on Eckhart was only a step away. Yet, as argued by C. Steel, besides the historically not very plausible character of such a thesis, the fact that Eckhart understands this negation of negation in a completely different way is unquestionable. Indeed, for him, “*negatio negationis* is the most pure and most perfect affirmation as is God’s self-revelation ‘I am Who I am’.”⁵⁷ Eckhart’s intention is thus characterized by this

⁵³ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 72k Klibansky/Labowsky (520.25-28 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 602).

⁵⁴ The *negation of negation* is also present – even if not in an explicit manner – in Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.6.26. On the history of the formula *negatio negationis*, see R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., the Warburg Institute, London, 1950, p. 22 sq.; K. Hedwig, “*Negatio negationis*. Problemgeschichtliche Aspekte einer Denkstruktur”, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, vol. 24, 1955, p. 7–33.

⁵⁵ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116.

⁵⁶ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 76k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.68 Steel; cf. 521.721-722 Steel/Rumbach; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 603).

⁵⁷ Meister Eckhart, *In Exodus*, n. 74 (*Lateinische Werke* II, 77.9-12, eds. K. Weiß, H. Fischer, J. Koch, and Loris Sturlese, vol. II, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1952): “Nulla ergo negatio, nihil negativum deo competit, nisi negatio negationis, quam significat unum negative dictum ‘deus

“combination of negative theology with the affirmation of pure Being”. As to Proclus, the negation of negation cannot have any *affirmative* power: it *only* brings us to the state of *absolute silence*.⁵⁸

Raoul Mortley⁵⁹ admits that “there is clearly some attractiveness in the idea of the paradox of a final negation which illuminates and destroys itself in one act; the last conceivable linguistic move, which has at once a positive and negative force, but which is final”. There is indeed a great fascination in the idea of this *linguistic instrument* which manages to carry out the last task that it is asked to perform, but which disappears *in* and *by* the very act of doing it. Nevertheless, Mortley warns us, “this idea is not developed in Proclus, and ought not to be presented as the key phase in demonstrating the primacy of silence.”⁶⁰ Proclus does not seem concerned about developing negation in this logic. Rather, his intention is to *dismiss* negation from the new stage, in which the soul no longer knows, but “abides in the One.”⁶¹ The Proclean approach underlines the decisive idea that negation is a form of language and it cannot be used further. Not so much is negation removed, but the entire language, and this constitutes the main interest

unus est’. Negatio vero negationis purissima et plenissima affirmatio: ‘ergo sum qui sum’” (trans. B. McGinn, in *Eckhart Preacher-teacher*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1986, p. 68). See also “The negation of negations is Divine Affirmation”, in C.F. Kelley, *Meister Eckhart on Divine Knowledge*, Frog Books, 2008, Berkley, California, p. 106-113. On *negatio negationis* in Meister Eckhart, see V. Lossky, *Théologie Négative et Connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1998, p. 68 sq.; B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogy, Univocity and Unity*, trans. O.F. Summerell, B.R. Grüner Publishing Co., Amsterdam, 2001, p. 95 sq.; Markus Enders, “Meister Eckhart’s Understanding of God”, in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2013, p. 359-388 (esp. p. 366 sq.). On the differences between Eckhart and Proclus related to this formulation, see W. Beierwaltes, “Exkurs IV: *Negatio negationis*”, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 395-398.

⁵⁸ Cf. C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 367-368.

⁵⁹ See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 117. Mortley does not see in Proclus’ statement a particular emphasis on the negation of negation theme, in the last part of the *Commentary on Parmenides*, and amends W. Beierwaltes’ tendency (“*Negation der Negation*”, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 361-366; “*Exkurs IV: Negatio negationis*”, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 395-398) to excessively highlight this subject in Proclus.

⁶⁰ As W. Beierwaltes seems to present it, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 364: “Da jegliches Denken, das sich im Wort ausspricht, die unmittelbare Einheit mit dem Ursprung zerstörte, ist nach der Negation der Negation die gemässe Weise, in der allein sich das Ereignis der Einung zu vollziehen vermag, das Schweigen.”

⁶¹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.63-64 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 603).

of Proclus in relation to the final negation: “negation is not denied *qua* negation, but *qua* linguistic manoeuvre, and Proclus is more concerned to be rid of all forms of language.”⁶²

But since, as he advances, he has taken away from it not only everything else but also participation in substance and Being, which itself is of high value, and has shown that it is neither expressible nor knowable, now at the end he rightly removes from it even the negations themselves – *Quoniam autem progrediens interemit ab ipso alia omnia, et participare essentia, et le esse ipsum ualde honorabile unum, et ostendit quod neque dicibile est neque cognoscibile, merito ultimas utique dicet et ipse abnegationes ab uno.*⁶³

He is therefore right in ending with the removal even of the negatives, saying that it is impossible that they should express anything about the One, which is inexpressible and unknowable – *Merito ergo ultimo et ipsas abnegationes remouit ab uno, impossibile dicens has esse circa unum indicibile et incognoscibile existens.*⁶⁴

Proclus suggests only the fact that negation would have consumed its utility, leading the soul on the penultimate stage only. The self-suppression of negation is nothing more than self-suppression:⁶⁵ it is not an event with two sides – one positive and another one negative.⁶⁶ “I do not see this negation of negation as a positive step like those of the previous stages,” Mortley concludes. The final negation, “the negation of negation, including all language, reveals nothing about the One.”⁶⁷

⁶² R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 117.

⁶³ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky (518.89-92 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 600).

⁶⁴ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 72k Klibansky/Labowsky (519.0-2 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 601).

⁶⁵ For Proclus, “the purpose of the *via negativa* is the transportation of the soul to the penultimate stage”, and its handling coincides with the one of Clement of Alexandria and Plotinus. The negative method leads one upwards, but not to the Supreme One. Proclus gives an actual phrase for what had been only implicitly understood till then: “negation is a tool which causes its own supersession.” Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.50-52 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 602): “But after going through all the negations, one ought to set aside this dialectical method also, as being troublesome and introducing the notion of the things denied with which the One can have no neighbourhood.”

⁶⁷ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116, 118.

Mortley's interpretation of the *negatio negationis* seems to find itself in divergence with Beierwaltes' view – which identifies the entire process of negation with that preparation for the ultimate goal of unification.⁶⁸

However, as noted by Carlos Steel,⁶⁹ the dialectical reasoning by way of negation can never be a substitute for this tension: “these dialectical operations are the preparation for the strain towards the One, but are not themselves the strain” – *Preparatio enim est hec eius que in illius tensionis, sed non tensio*.⁷⁰

If the negations themselves are not removed, we run the risk of making the One multiple.⁷¹ Even negations can divert the soul and obstruct its pure vision: the soul must relinquish the attempt of reaching something, for even “the strain” (*tensio*) – which is not a dialectical method – must be abandoned.⁷² After this moment, words are no longer necessary, as nothing more can be said, and so we must resort to the last move, beyond the dialectical level. The voiced word exercised its function and sounded to its best; for the rest, it requires “contemplation in silence”. The silence points beyond itself to the One who is beyond all silence. It is the means whereby we can rise beyond all level of discourse.⁷³

⁶⁸ See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116 sq.; W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzuge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 361 sq. Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 182-183.

⁶⁹ C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus' *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 598, n. 62.

⁷⁰ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem VII*, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.61-62 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 603). Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 117.

⁷¹ Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem VII*, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (520.46 sq. Steel).

⁷² Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem VII*, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.61 sq. Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 603): “...not only must it be eliminated, but the strain as well (*magis autem non hec solum, sed et tensio*). Finally, when it has completed its course, the soul may rightly abide with the One. Having become single and alone in itself, it will choose only the simply One (*eliget solum le simpliciter unum*).”

⁷³ Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, *Hermathena*, no. 157, 1994, p. 49.

Proclus concludes the discourse about the One by moving towards the unspeakable – *indicibile*, τὸ ἄρρητον.⁷⁴ If the procedure of negation of negation were not initiated, the negative theologians “would arrive in the end at an empty space neatly fenced by negative dogmas, which is not at all where they want to be.”⁷⁵

While the soul cannot know the One, it can attain likeness to the One, experiencing its unity: the way of negation is the precondition for this, purifying the soul for the inflow of divine inspiration.⁷⁶

The Silence

Even if we submit to the idea that negations are more proper than affirmations, when we speak of the One, these too must be abandoned; for a negation is a type of proposition and, therefore, belongs to the same genus of discourse as the opposite affirmation. All negations are somewhat mixed with affirmations, as a negation always takes the form of an assertion in which something is negated of a particular thing. Due to this fact, even negations cannot be true of the One. To rest assured, it is better – when we speak of the One – to use negations rather than affirmations because they will not be so easily conducive to the error of imagining a certain “nature” or “essence” of the One. Strictly speaking, however, both affirmations and negations are entirely false when they are applied to the first principle. At the point when we ascend to the level beyond all knowledge and discourse, the fact of discriminating between truth and falsehood disappears. Thus, whatever we declare about the first principle – however ingenious our discursive strategies might be when using affirmations and negations – everything which is told is false; in this way, the principle of contradiction is suspended.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (520.42 Steel; cf. 264.695-696 Steel/Rumbach; trans. D. Gregory Maclsaac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ Commentary on the Parmenides: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 265).

⁷⁵ See A.H. Armstrong, “On Not Knowing too much about God. The Apophatic Way of the Neoplatonists and other influences from Ancient philosophy which have worked against dogmatic assertion in Christian thinking”, in *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1999, p. 137-138.

⁷⁶ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1094.22-1095.2 Cousin. Cf. R. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, p. 58.

⁷⁷ Cf. C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, Brill, Leiden, 2003, p. 596-597.

The last part of the seventh book from the *Commentary on Parmenides*⁷⁸ is crucial, as it guides the discussion about the negation in an “upward” direction, towards the level of the One:⁷⁹

But negative propositions (*abnegationes*) about the One do not really express anything *about* the One (*circa unum*). For nothing at all applies to it, either specifically or privatively (*priuatō*), but, as we have said, the name ‘one’ (*unum*) names our conception (*conceptus*) of it, not the One itself (*sed non ipsius unius*), and so we say that the negation (*abnegatio*) also is *about* (*circa*) our conception, and none of the negative conclusions (*abnegatiuarum conclusionum*) that have been stated is *about* the One, but because of its simplicity (*simplicitatem*), it is exalted above all contrast and all negation (*omni negatione*). So he rightly added at the end that these negative propositions (*abnegationes*) do not express anything *about* the One (*circa unum*).⁸⁰

Raoul Mortley emphasizes the decisive significance of this excerpt because we witness here the insertion of an asymmetry in the Proclean philosophy of negation. Firstly, it is said that “negative propositions do not really express anything about the One” – while they can work on inferior levels. Nevertheless, it is possible to formulate a negative statement about the One: such a negation would be nothing less than a linguistic phenomenon, applied rather to our conception of the One than to the One itself. Negations about the One are different from those pertaining to the intelligible or sensible realms and the inserted asymmetry turns into the difference

⁷⁸ The last section of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides* was preserved only in the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke (translated between 1280 and 1286). Klibansky – who discovered the work – and Labowsky published an edition and English translation of this work, *Parmenides usque ad finem primae Hypothesis nec non Procli Commentarium in Parmenidem pars ultima adhuc inedita interprete Guillelmo de Moerbeka ediderunt praefatione et adnotationibus instruxerunt* (*Plato Latinus*, Vol. III = *Parmenides, Proclus in Parmenidem*, eds. R. Klibansky and C. Labowski, Warburg Institutem, London, 1953). A critical edition of the Latin translation was published by Steel (*Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, 2 vols., ed. Carlos G. Steel, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1982/1985). Of interest is the Greek retroversion, originally the work of Rumbach, corrected by Steel, and published along with an English translation by Gregory Maclsaac (“The Final Section of Proclus’ Commentary on the *Parmenides*: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, eds. Carlos Steel and Friedrich Rumbach, trans. D. Gregory Maclsaac, in *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, VIII, 1997, Brepols, Turnhout, p. 216-267). This retroversion was revised in the more recent edition of Steel (*Procli In Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria* III, Libros VI - VII et Indices Continens, eds. Carlos Steel and Leen Van Campe, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009).

⁷⁹ See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 114 sq.

⁸⁰ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky (518.72-79 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 600).

between “*de*” and “*circa*” in the Latin text: a declaration “*de uno*” is a declaration “referring to the One”, and a declaration “*circa unum*” is one that expresses something “about the One”;⁸¹ for Mortley,⁸² only the former is possible.⁸³

It would have been interesting to know how the Greek original looked on this point.⁸⁴ If we were, however, to juxtapose this text with a parallel excerpt,⁸⁵ we would find – contrary to our belief – that the equivalent of *circa* is not *περὶ*: “For our discourse is not, properly speaking, *on* the One (ἐπὶ τοῦ ἑνός), and as we advance we will hear the philosopher proving this: we nevertheless make some utterances *about* it (περὶ αὐτοῦ) through the natural anguish of the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ὠδίῳ) *about* the One (περὶ τὸ ἔν).”⁸⁶

⁸¹ Syrianus also distinguishes between *referring to the One* and *talking about the One*. The construction with the genitive indicates a discussion where the noun in the genitive is the general subject matter, but does not imply anything about the subject matter. The construction with the accusative, however, indicates that something is being said about the subject matter in particular – such an accusative construction is, according to Syrianus, impossible when the “One” is the object in the accusative. See Sarah Klitenic Wear, *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato’s Timaeus and Parmenides*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2011, p. 309–311.

⁸² See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 115.

⁸³ Negative propositions can *refer* to the One but they do not *express* anything about it: “*quare et dicte abnegationes non sunt circa unum, sed de uno*” (Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k.14–15 Klibansky/Labowsky). Cf. also Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 176.

⁸⁴ See *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 518.623–630 Steel/Rumbach (trans. D. Gregory Maclsaac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ Commentary on the Parmenides: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 261): “But now, the negations belonging to the One (τοῦ ἑνός ἀποφάσεις) are not about the One (περὶ τὸ ἔν), for in general nothing is present to it, neither as Form nor as privation (στέρησις). Rather, just as we said that this name ‘One’ belongs to the conception in us, but not to the One itself, so likewise we say that negation (ἀπόφασις) also is about this conception, and none of the preceding negative (ἀποφατικῶν) conclusions are about the One itself; rather, it transcends all antithesis and all negation (πάσης ἀποφάσεως) on account of its simplicity. So then it is fitting that he appended to the end that these negations (ἀποφάσεως) are not ‘about the One’ (περὶ τὸ ἔν).”

⁸⁵ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 1191.5–9 Cousin.

⁸⁶ I preferred the translation of R. Mortley (*From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 115). Unfortunately, the translation of G.R. Morrow and J.M. Dillon fails to capture the shades that R. Mortley discusses, since both terms (ἐπὶ and περὶ) are rendered “about”: “For that in fact we say nothing in the proper sense *about* the One (ἐπὶ τοῦ ἑνός), we will hear the philosopher demonstrating a little later. Nevertheless, we do talk *about* it (περὶ αὐτοῦ) because of the natural striving of the soul *towards* the One (περὶ τὸ ἔν)” (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 539).

We generate language round about the One through the unsatisfied desire of our soul, but we cannot speak “on” the One: our language oscillates around the One, without really meeting it. Consequently, if we were to subscribe to the parallelism of the two mentioned texts, it would be inferred that the Latin “*de*” rather appears as the equivalent of the Greek “περὶ.” Indisputably, language “about” the One arises not from the ability to speak properly about it, but rather from the yearning to speak about it. Similarly, negations applied to the One must also be removed. The asymmetry resides in the relation of language to the reality: language grasps the inferior realities, but does not have any relation to the One. In this instance, we could distinguish a “psychological” explanation of the origins of language: it derives from the aspiration of the soul towards the One. In the first situation, we were given an ontological explanation: Proclus⁸⁷ asserts that the meaning of negation is determined by the thing which is applied to it – so that the different kinds of realities should be expressed by different varieties of negation.⁸⁸ But an attempted negative *about* the One could not possess such a reality which would determine its meaning.⁸⁹

The negative discourse removes one by one all the levels of existence with which our thinking operates, culminating in its own removal, in order to be understood that “not even the negative way of thinking can have direct access to the principle beyond being.”⁹⁰ Negations do not possess the ability to reveal the nature of the One: they lead to the transcendence of the principle.⁹¹

There are three levels of discursive removal with regard to the principle beyond being: firstly, the principle is denominated “the One”, knowing that the One is just a “negation of plurality” and that it does not directly imply the principle; secondly, the being of the One is removed,⁹² arriving at the conclusion that “the One is not even one”; and then, by means of the last question of the Hypothesis,⁹³ it is

⁸⁷ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 68k Klibansky/Labowsky (517.49-52 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 599).

⁸⁸ Such as: the privative one, etc.

⁸⁹ Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 115-116.

⁹⁰ Therefore, negations do not possess the capacity to reveal the nature of the One: they refer to the transcendence of the first principle. Cf. Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 265.

⁹¹ Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 176.

⁹² Plato, *Parmenides* 137c4.

⁹³ In Plato, *Parmenides* 142a6-8, the Parmenides character asks: “Is it possible that these things are so for the one?” (ἴδυνατόν οὖν περὶ τὸ ἐν ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχειν;), and the answer of the character Aristotle is a negative one: “I certainly don’t think so (Οὐκ οὖν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ)” (trans. Mary Louise Gill and P. Ryan, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, p. 376). Proclus

claimed that *not even the negation* (the fact that “the One is not one”) is suitable to the first principle. Nonetheless, as Marilena Vlad notices, “the keystone of the Proclean interpretation concerning the apophatic discourse in the *Parmenides* is even more subtle than this necessary suppression of negations”. Proclus will question his own interpretation, according to which “the negations of the First Hypothesis generate the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis.”⁹⁴ Thus, “if the negations express the One’s power to generate the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis (corresponding to the whole level of being), then the last question of the First Hypothesis negates even the fact that the One should have this power to generate all things, thus placing the One *beyond* power, as it is *beyond* being (*i.e.*, beyond the things that exist, beyond generated things).”⁹⁵

Consequently, on one hand, the One generates all things, remaining transcendent to all the things which it generates; on the other hand, not even the power to generate all things can be properly attributed to it because it remains inexpressible and nothing can alter its transcendence: neither the fact that it generates all things nor the fact that we affirm that it generates all things.⁹⁶ If, in the first instance, the negations are more proper than the affirmations in regard to their application to the first principle – due to the fact that they make easier the access to the principle –, nonetheless, subsequently, even these negations must be removed.⁹⁷

notices that, although the argumentation starts from the hypothesis that “the one is” (137c4), it concludes in denying being to the One (141e9-12) and through the last question it is suggested that not even the negation of being from the One is appropriate to the first principle because even this suppression does not express anything about the One (see Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky [518.72-79 Steel]; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 600). However, this decoupling of being from the absolute One corresponds, in the Neoplatonic interpretation, precisely to the principle beyond being of *Respublica* 509b9. Therefore, it would seem that in the end of the First Hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, even “the fact of being *beyond being*” is repealed. “The ultimate expression of the principle beyond being seems to be that it is not even *beyond being*.” See Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 265.

⁹⁴ Corresponding to the entire level of *being*.

⁹⁵ Cf. Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 265-266.

⁹⁶ The One generates things, but it generates them by denying them (*i.e.*, remaining *transcendent* to them), and, ultimately, the mere fact that it generates them has to be denied (so that even this thing is not understood as a positive feature of the One).

⁹⁷ See Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 266-267.

The logic of transcendence determined us to transcend the logical principle, but not in order to begin “a new type” of discourse, using – this time – negation; in fact, neither the negations nor the affirmations can be used in reference to the One,⁹⁸ so that, as Mortley concludes, “*via negativa* has come to its natural terminus, not at the One, but at the next lowest level.”⁹⁹

We are faced with the situation of not having any more no linguistic instrument suitable for the supreme reality¹⁰⁰ and, at this point, the last part of Proclus’ *Commentary on Parmenides* is decisive.¹⁰¹

According to Proclus’ interpretation, Plato “removes (ἀφελεῖν) even the negations (τὰς ἀποφάσεις) and every account, wishing to conclude the argument on the One (περὶ τοῦ ἑνός) by moving towards the unspeakable (ἄρρητον);”¹⁰² “for by his denial he too removes (ἀφελεῖν) [all] of the negations (τὰς ἀποφάσεις). It is in silence (σιγῆ),¹⁰³ then, that he brings to completion the speculation about the One”¹⁰⁴ – *Nam per negari et ipse remouit abnegationes. Silentio autem conclusit eam que de ipso theoriam.*¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Negative statements do not have the ability to express anything about the One. Nothing applies to it in the proper sense: neither affirmation nor negation; it is beyond all opposition and negation: “sed exaltatum est propter simplicitatem ab omni oppositione et omni negation” (*In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky [518.77-78 Steel]). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena* p. 176. See also S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero greco classico”, *Helikon*, vol. 29-30, 1989-1990, p. 145 sq.

⁹⁹ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁰ See Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10 (63.18-64.9 Saffrey/Westerink). “There is nothing astonishing if in wanting to know the ineffable through discourse, one’s discourse is led into the impossible, for all knowledge which is applied to an object of knowledge which does not apply to it, destroys itself” – Καὶ θαυμαστόν οὐδὲν τὸ ἄρρητον τῷ λόγῳ γνωρίζειν ἐθέλοντας εἰς τὸ ἀδύνατον περιάγειν τὸν λόγον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πᾶσα γνῶσις τῷ μηδὲν αὐτῇ διαφέροντι γνωστῷ συναπτομένη τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀπόλλυσι δύναμιν (*Theologia Platonica* II.10, 64.2-5 Saffrey/Westerink). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, *Hermathena*, no. 157, 1994, p. 55, n. 26.

¹⁰¹ Cf. C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 363.

¹⁰² Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (cf. 520.695-696 Steel/Rumbach) (trans. D. Gregory Maclaasac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides*: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 265).

¹⁰³ For a collection of citations from late ancient authors regarding silence (*sigē*), see S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero Greco classico a quello patristico e bizantino”, *Helikon*, vol. 31-32, 1991-1992, p. 32, n. 963.

¹⁰⁴ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 76k Klibansky/Labowsky (cf. 521.721-723 Steel/Rumbach; trans. D. Gregory Maclaasac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides*: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 267).

¹⁰⁵ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 76k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.68-69 Steel). Cf. H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 4, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 116.

The model of the contemplation in silence (σιγή)¹⁰⁶ of the One is also confirmed by a fragment of the *Platonic Theology* II.9: “but we should celebrate in silence this ineffable nature and this perfectly causeless cause which is prior to all causes” – ...τῶν ὄντων οὔτε εἰ γεννητικόν, ἢ γινῶναι τοῖς δευτέροις θεμιτὸν ἢ λόγῳ διελεῖν, ἀλλὰ σιγῇ τὸ ἄρρητον αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸ τῶν αἰτίων πάντων ἀναιτίως αἴτιον ἀνυμνεῖν.¹⁰⁷

There is here a reference to the “anguish” (ὠδισ)¹⁰⁸ of the soul, “which desires both to know and to speak to the One” – τῆ μὲν ὠδίνι τῆς ψυχῆς τῆ περὶ τὸν ἐνιαῖον θεὸν συγγνωστέον καὶ νοεῖν ἐκεῖνον,¹⁰⁹ and the anguish serves to generate words when, in fact, there should not be any. Silence is thus “the crowning of epistemological achievements”, after all the discursive acts were fulfilled, including the highest genre – negation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ This silence is based on the Platonic dialogue *Timaeus* (28c4-5): “Now to find the maker and father of this universe [to *pan*] is hard enough, and even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible” (trans. D.J. Zeyl, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, p. 1235), to which the interpretation of Proclus is added, in *Platonis Timaeum commentaria* I, 303.5-8 (ed. E. Diehl, B.G. Teubner, Leipzig, 1903): “The person who has found him is unable to tell this to others as he has seen it, for the discovery is not made by the soul who makes a statement, but by the soul who is initiated in and lies outstretched towards the divine light (πρὸς τὸ θεῖον φῶς), not moving with its own movement, but keeping its own silence as it were (οὐδὲ κινουμένης οἰκείαν κίνησιν, ἀλλὰ σιωπῶσης τὴν οἶον σιωπήν)” (trans. D.T. Runia and M. Share, in Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, vol. II, Book 2, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, p. 157). Cf. Proclus, *De providentia et fato et eo quod in nobis ad Theodorum mechanicum* 31.11 (ed. H. Boese, *Procli Diadochi tria opuscula*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 1960): ἀφθεγκτος γενομένη καὶ σιγήσασα τὴν ἔνδον σιγὴν. Cf. also H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 4, in Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne*, livre II, p. 115-116. On the theme of silence in Proclus, see also A.H. Armstrong, “The Negative theology of Noûs in Later Neoplatonism”, in *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, no. 3, 1983, p. 34 sq.; W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzuge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 366, n. 124.

¹⁰⁷ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II, 2.58.21-24 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/ Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 58). See also *Theologia Platonica* II.11, 65.13 Saffrey/Westerink (καὶ ὡς πάσης σιγῆς ἀρρητότερον). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1115.32 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 459).

¹⁰⁹ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II, 58.27-59.1 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/ Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 59).

¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note that, after the ascent “into this rarefied Himalayan atmosphere”, a *coup de grâce* is applied, which ends the progress of language: “negation finally dismisses itself”. See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116.

When we try to formulate propositions about what is ineffable, we should not be surprised if, by this effort, knowledge itself becomes impossible and needs to be dismissed.¹¹¹ Therefore, at the end of our dialectical approach to grasp the One through negations, we must abandon all inquiry, all questioning, “all knowledge and its instruments”, all discourse – even if it is only a negative discourse.¹¹²

The theme of silence is extremely important within the Proclean view of union with the One and it is reached only after intense striving and intellectual effort:

Nor is it at all wonderful that the discourse of those who wish to know the ineffable by words should terminate in that which is impossible; since all knowledge, when conjoined with an object of knowledge which does not at all pertain to it, loses its power – Καὶ θαυμαστόν οὐδὲν τὸ ἄρρητον τῷ λόγῳ γνωρίζειν ἐθέλοντας εἰς τὸ ἀδύνατον περιάγειν τὸν λόγον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πᾶσα γνώσις τῷ μηδὲν αὐτῇ διαφέροντι γνωστῷ συναπτομένη τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀπόλλυσι δύναμιν.¹¹³

It is clear that silence is the natural conclusion of negative theology.¹¹⁴ The last pages of the *Commentary on Parmenides* are among the most innovative and profound. The way Proclus argues that all dialectical process – including the entire negative discourse – must be abandoned in favour of an experience of mystical union and silence has been admired and intensely highlighted by researchers.¹¹⁵

Moreover, Carlos Steel surprisingly advances his statement: “Proclus has no negative theology,¹¹⁶ if one means by this term a negative discourse whereby one indirectly expresses what the divine cause is: incorporeal, immobile, without time, without space, without division.”¹¹⁷ For Proclus, the path through dialectic is a

¹¹¹ Cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.64.2-9 Saffrey/Westerink.

¹¹² See Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.63.18-64.9 Saffrey/Westerink. Cf. C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 597. Cf. also C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 363.

¹¹³ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.64.2-5 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 64).

¹¹⁴ H.-D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, n. 4, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 116.

¹¹⁵ See W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 361-366. Cf. C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 364.

¹¹⁶ See also R. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 54-62 (esp. p. 58 sq.)

¹¹⁷ C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 598.

preparation for the ultimate goal of unification.¹¹⁸ “For the unspeakable must be the end of all speech, and unification the end of knowing” – *Oportet enim esse finem sermonum quod indicibile et omnis cognitionem unionem*.¹¹⁹ In fact, the entire dialectical method, even if it operates by way of negations, is nothing but a preamble to the mystical union, removing whatever impedes the contemplation of the One.¹²⁰ “It is with silence, then, that he brings to the completion the study of the One.”¹²¹

The silence that is the consequence of removing all negations points beyond itself to the One who is beyond all silence.¹²²

Conclusion

Proclus confronts the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* with the Fifth one and differentiates between the “Non-being” of the One and its specific negations, respectively, the “non-being” and the negation corresponding to Matter. The One is a Non-being “by excess”, and any addition pertaining to being would limit and diminish it, while Matter is a non-being “by defect” which tends to receive a form, to become a particular being. The negations of Matter indicate the privation of being, while the negations of the One denote the exceeding of being.

There are three kinds of negations: inferior negation refers to the being which is superior to non-being (as defect), the coordinated negation refers to the being which has the same rank as non-being and, finally, the type of negation superior to affirmation reflects the type of Non-Being which is beyond being.

It is better, when we speak of the One, to use negations rather than affirmations because they will not be so easily conducive to the error of imagining a certain “nature” or “essence” of the One. The negative discourse removes one by one all the levels of existence with which our thinking operates, culminating in its own removal, in order to be understood that not even the negative way of thinking can have direct access to the principle beyond being.

¹¹⁸ Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, p. 49.

¹¹⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 520.43-44 Steel.

¹²⁰ C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 598.

¹²¹ This is the conclusion of the commentary on the First Hypothesis, coinciding with the end of the *Commentary to Parmenides*, as we know it. On dialectics as preparation of the soul, see Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* V, 993.36-994.12, 1015.38-41 Cousin.

¹²² Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, p. 49.

At the end of our dialectical approach to grasp the One through negations, we must abandon all inquiry, all questioning, all knowledge and its instruments, all discourse, even if it is only a negative discourse. The negation of negation is the one that introduces us in the appropriate state of silence.

The Proclean approach underlines the idea that negation is a form of language and it cannot be used further. Not so much is negation removed, but the entire language. We are faced with the situation of having exhausted all linguistic instruments suitable for the supreme reality.

Proclus concludes the discourse about the One by moving towards the unspeakable: silence is the natural conclusion of negative theology. Silence is thus “the crowning of epistemological achievements”, after all the discursive acts were fulfilled, including the highest genre – negation.