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Chapter V. The logic of negation; between Plotinus and Proclus

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V. The logic of negation; between Plotinus and Proclus

Plotinus taught in Rome, Proclus in Athens. About two centuries of intellectual development separated the two, as well as the constraints of locality. The middle period of classical Neoplatonism has always seemed to be a shadowy one, and the nature of its development has not been well traced. The reader of Damascius is plunged into a philosophy which is obviously Neoplatonist, but at the same time light years away from the exploratory excursions of Plotinus. There seems to have taken place a development whose lines have not yet been clearly delineated in scholarly work on the area, though they could be, if more detailed work was carried out on the late Greek commentators on Aristotle. The key figures in this uncharted development are Plutarch of Athens, Syrianus, Dexippus, and Alexander of Aphrodisias. All of these writers have a strong sense of the importance of Aristotle, and they seem to represent an increasing Aristotelianization of Neoplatonism. Dexippus stands in the Roman line, following Porphyry and Iamblichus; Syrianus follows Plutarch of Athens in the Athenian line, and both Proclus and Damascius depend on Syrianus. The really important figures, then, are Syrianus and Dexippus, since their use of Aristotle is not dissimilar, and yet they stand in different lines of tradition. Both show the trend towards the increased deployment of Aristotelian logic in the development of Neoplatonism, and both take us quite close to the better known world of Proclus and Damascius. Of course the little known figure of Plutarch of Athens must also be crucial, since he stands at the beginning of the Athenian line, and his influence must have been of great importance. What was his approach? Who and where were his teachers? These questions are of great importance, yet little progress can be made on them. (One notes with dismay that the Oxford Classical Dictionary does not even have entries on Dexippus, Plutarch of Athens, or Damascius). A similar sort of question exists, of course for the history of the Christian Platonists, and Rist has recently endeavoured to redraw the lines leading up to the Platonism of Basil (Basil's "Neoplatonism" . . .). Porphyry and his influence play a large part in this, and the influence of Alexandria is of crucial importance as well. The evolution of pagan Neoplatonism is an entirely different one, and only detailed studies of the relevant volumes of the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* will solve the problem. It is a difficult one, since it requires study of the Aristotelian texts themselves, together with the ability to perceive interpretative glosses on the part of the Neoplatonist commentators. Over-interpretations, or shifts of perspective, often indicate the path which this Aristotelianized Neoplatonism is treading.

In what follows, the commentaries of these authors on the texts of Aristotle which deal with negation will be studied, together with some which deal with privation. On many occasions the Neoplatonist commentators simply reiterate the Aristotelian teaching on negation, but at times they add interpretations of their own, and this is a highly significant step in the development of negative theology.

Plotinus' word for the negation of the *via negativa* is *aphairesis*, or "abstraction". Athenian Neoplatonism, however, uses the term *apophasis*, or "negation" proper. The words do have different meanings, and it is worthwhile inquiring whether there is therefore any substantial difference between the negative theology of Plotinus and that of the Athenian school. It lies along these lines: that of Plotinus is fundamentally the *via negativa* of Middle Platonism, with its emphasis on the progressive removal of attributes with a view to forcing an understanding of the transcendent. That of the Athenian Neoplatonists follows a tradition of revived study of Aristotle, during which the logic of negation as explored by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* and elsewhere, was considered and developed. As a consequence, the term *aphairesis* disappeared from usage in the context of the *via negativa*, and the richer possibilities of the logic of negation proper were exploited. The way in which the logic of the relevant terms was developed will be illustrated in the texts which follow. Because these are not generally available in Greek, and are not translated, I have given both my translations and the Greek texts where necessary. It is worthwhile observing to start with, that the same usage of *steresis* that is found in Aristotle, is also found in the late commentators. (I stress this in view of van Winden's artificial distinction between ἀπόφασις and στέρησις in *Vigiliae Christianae* 36, 1982, 70–75, reviewing my *Gnosis in the Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*: see appendix I.) There is a tendency to treat *steresis* both as an epistemological and an ontological concept, and this can be attested by reference to Syrianus (CAG VI, 16, 10 ff.):

For if one knows and is able to say something about a thing through privation or negation, such as knowing that the point has no parts or that the divine is immortal...

(εἰ γὰρ οἶδε μὲν πως καὶ ὁ διὰ τῆς στερήσεως ἢ τῆς ἀποφάσεως εἰπεῖν τι περὶ τοῦ πράγματος δυνάμενος, οἶον ὁ εἰδὼς ὅτι τὸ σημεῖον ἀμερὲς καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἀθάνατον...)

Syrianus here treats both privation and negation as ways of knowing, and shows no consciousness of the later Thomist tendency to limit *privatio* to states of being. It may be noted that the examples he chooses both use the α privative as the means of negating or depriving of characteristics. One further notes that Syrianus speaks of considering things στερητικῶς (CAG VI, 56, 34), which can only mean "privatively". The difference between saying that things are considered "privatively" and that things are considered "nega-

tively”, is not very great. As with Aristotle, negation is a broader concept, and privation a narrower one: privation simply specifies the type of negation involved.

Syrianus develops his interpretation of the Aristotelian privation/negation on page 61, 1.29 ff. (CAG VI). He is commenting on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and Aristotle in 1004^a has been dealing with the study of opposites: he talks of plurality as “the negation or privation of unity”. Syrianus proceeds to attempt to distinguish between the two, and Aristotle himself says a few words about this. Aristotle’s own view (*Met.* 1004^a) is that in privation there is a substrate (ὕποκειμένη) of which the privation is predicated, but that negation is an absence (ἀπουσία) of the thing in question. Aristotle seems to think he has made a distinction here, and it can be glossed like this: a privation is predicated of a certain “base”, of which a thing is said to be absent, but a negation refers to the absence of a thing without any reference to a “base” which might support it. Syrianus offers his own gloss as follows, and it is instructive to note how he builds on the terms:

Plurality is either the negation or the privation of the one. These opposites differ from each other, in that negation is true of everything beyond the one which is denied. For “not horse” is true of everything apart from the horse, but this is not the case with privation. For privation does not supply <the notion> of the simple absence of a state (it is not the case, for example, that being blind is not having sight, since a stone would then be blind), but of the state’s absence from what is naturally disposed to bear it. “Deaf”, then, applies not to everything which does not hear, but to the ear (if it fails to hear), since it has the natural capacity to hear. For it is necessary to postulate one nature in the state, and in the privation. This difference between privation and negation is the very greatest. If then privation or negation of the one is plurality, since through each contemplation of the one occurs, knowing the one and the many is the same thing. Overall, knowing opposites which are distinguished from each other in this manner is a single science.

(τὰ γὰρ πολλὰ ἦτοι ἀπόφασις τοῦ ἑνὸς ἢ στέρησις. διαφέρουσι δὲ ἀλλήλων αἱ ἀντιθέσεις αὗται, ὅτι ἡ μὲν ἀπόφασις ἐπὶ πάντων ἀληθεύει τῶν παρὰ τὸ ἕν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἀναιρούμενον · τὸ γὰρ οὐχ ἵππος ἐπὶ πάντων ἀληθὲς τῶν παρὰ τὸν ἵππον, ἡ δὲ στέρησις οὐχ οὕτως · οὐ γὰρ ἀπλῶς ἀπούσης τῆς ἕξεως <ἐννοίαν> παρίστησιν ἡ στέρησις (οὐ γὰρ τυφλὸς ὁ μὴ ἔχων ὄψιν, ἐπεὶ καὶ λίθος ἂν ἦν τυφλός), ἀλλ’ ἀπούσης τοῦ πεφυκότος αὐτὴν δέχεσθαι · κωφὸν οὖν οὐχὶ πᾶν ὃ μὴ ἀκούει, ἀλλὰ τὸ οὐδ’ ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούῃ, ὅτι πέφυκεν ἀκούειν · δεῖ γὰρ ὑποκεῖσθαι μίαν φύσιν τῇ ἕξει καὶ τῇ στερήσει. καὶ διαφορὰ μὲν αὕτη μεγίστη στερήσεως καὶ ἀποφάσεως. εἴτε μέντοι στέρησις ἐστὶ τοῦ ἑνὸς τὰ πολλὰ εἴτε ἀπόφασις, ἐπειδὴ δι’ ἑκατέρας ἐστὶ τὸ ἕν θεωρῆσαι, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶ τό τε ἕν εἶδέναι καὶ τὰ πολλὰ.) (CAG VI, p.61, l. 30 ff.)

One notes firstly that negation proper is said to be a matter of indefiniteness, since “not horse” is true of everything but “horse”. On this view negation liberates thought, opening up to it a limitless range of possibilities. “Green”,

“yellow” and “Wednesday” are all cases of “not horse”, and in fact everything else is as well: everything is “not horse”, except of course that single thing, “horse” itself. This appears to be the major feature of *apophasis* which is stressed by Syrianus. Privation, on the other hand, contains a hidden statement about the capacity or nature of the thing which is the subject of discussion: blindness implies a nature capable of possessing sight. Blindness cannot be attributed to a stone, for example, and so predicating blindness carries with it two kinds of information: firstly the absence of the ability to see, and secondly that the capacity to see could logically belong to the subject under discussion. Privation, on this view, carries with it a clearly kataphatic aspect, in that absence is coupled with an implied statement about the nature of the object under discussion.

In this way *apophasis* and *steresis* emerge as types of negation which are very different in function: the latter actually reveals something in the course of making a negative statement about a thing, but the former reveals nothing at all by negating something about the subject under discussion. Syrianus’ explanations here are quite consistent with what Aristotle himself says in various places. The observation about *steresis* is already contained in the Aristotelian passage under discussion (Met. 1004^a), but the observation about the indefiniteness of *apophasis* is to be found elsewhere, at least implied elsewhere. In the *On Interpretation* 16^a 31 the difficulty of classifying “not-man” is discussed: it is said to be neither a sentence (λόγος) nor a negation (ἀπόφασις), but an indefinite noun (ὄνομα ἀόριστον). Despite the fact that Aristotle refuses to call this verbless utterance a negation, it is instructive to note that he considers a negated noun to be indefinite in character. A proper negation requires a full sentence with a verb, but one may deduce that since indefiniteness results from the use of οὐκ in this case, it would result from the negation of a full sentence.

Syrianus’ commentary seems to be alluding to some such consideration as this, when it says that “not horse” is true of everything apart from “horse”. The negative, in effect, opens up the field so that the range of possible meanings is limitless, and this appears to be the view of the *On Interpretation* passage. It is worthy of note that Alexander of Aphrodisias echoes this view in his commentary on the *Sophistic Elenchos* (CAG II³ 98, 1.22 ff.): ... αἱ ἀποφάσεις ἀόριστοὶ εἰσιν · ἡ γὰρ λέγουσα ἀπόφασις ‘τόδε οὐ λευκὸν ἐστίν’ ἀόριστος... Negations are indefinite, Alexander says, and confines his example to a non-verbal expression, in the manner illustrated above.

Returning now to Syrianus, there are two crucial passages for the *via negativa*, both of which illustrate a certain development over and above Aristotle’s view. Syrianus here makes certain remarks about being and negation which are distinctly un-Aristotelian, and which therefore pinpoint the moment of transition. This transition, occurring in the course of Neoplatonism, is effected through advances in the interpretation of Aristotle. This may seem

odd, but then the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions have never been so inseparably removed from each other as students of Western thought have sometimes imagined. The first of these passages is drawn from Syrianus' Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1003^a 21 ff.

And what is remarkable, if we make negative statements about accidents and being itself? "Not white" and "not man" are examples. In this a certain remarkable and miraculous power emerges within the essence of being. For if it gives a part of existence to such opposites to being as this, it surely fills all with existence and brings succour without stinting to all things, from itself. Thus the good would be the cause of that which is said to be evil, and the light of darkness, and thus being could be the cause even of that which does not exist. Whenever then we say that not being does not exist, we rightly predicate being of it.

(καὶ τί θαυμαστόν, ὅπου καὶ τὰς τῶν συμβεβηκότων ἀποφάσεις καὶ τὰς αὐτῆς τῆς οὐσίας εἶναι φαμεν; ἔστι γάρ πως καὶ τὸ μὴ λευκὸν καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος. οὐ δὴ καὶ θαυμαστὴ τις καὶ δαιμονία τῷ ὄντι τῆς οὐσίας ἢ δύναμις ἀναφαίνεται· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τοῖς οἷον ἀντικειμένοις αὐτῇ τοῦ εἶναι μεταδίδωσι, πῶς οὐχὶ πάντα τοῦ ὄντος πληροῖ καὶ πᾶσιν ἀφθόνως τὴν παρ' αὐτῆς ὀρέγει βοήθειαν; καθάπερ οὖν τάγαθὸν καὶ τῶν λεγομένων κακῶν αἴτιον καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ σκότους, οὕτω καὶ ἡ οὐσία τοῦ καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι πως αἰτία· ὅταν γοῦν λέγωμεν τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι μὴ ὄν, ἀληθεύομεν τὸ εἶναι κατηγοροῦντες αὐτοῦ.) (CAG VI, 57, l. 4 ff.)

Syrianus is dealing with what is presented as a conundrum by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* 1003^b 10, namely that "we even say that not being *is not being*". Aristotle is more concerned with the classification of things which deal with being, and whether they form one science (*episteme*) or not. There are no lyrical testimonies to the power of being, such as we find in Syrianus' commentary. Syrianus develops the ontological side of Aristotle's statement, dwelling on the "miraculous" power of being to sustain all types of reality, even those standing in opposition to each other. Thus even the statement "not being is not" attributes being of some kind: otherwise it could not have been made. Its negative character does not deprive it of the ability to attribute being. Syrianus marvels at the sustaining power of this being, but we note that even the negative statement about the existence of being implies being of some sort. In other words, we have a second example of a way in which a negative statement can carry a kataphatic, or positive, statement implied within it.

Elsewhere however Syrianus raises the possibility of that which is beyond being. In an unfortunately passing reference, Syrianus raises the question of the *hyperousios*, the being which is transcendent. Aristotle asserted (*Met.* 996^b 30) the principle that everything must be either affirmed or denied as one of the received principles of the demonstrative sciences. Syrianus confirms this, but asks the following question:

But if something is transcendent and has neither name, nor science nor is in any way

capable of utterance, how then must it be capable of affirmation or negation, in respect of which all discourse is false?

(ἐπεὶ εἴαν τι ὑπερούσιον ἦ καὶ μήτε ὄνομα ἔχη μήτε ἐπιστήμην μήθ' ὅλως ῥητὸν ἦ, πῶς ἀνάγκη τοῦτο τὴν κατάφασιν ἢ τὴν ἀπόφασιν δέξασθαι, ἐφ' οὗ πᾶς λόγος ψευδής;) (CAG VI, 18, l. 25 ff.)

It is unfortunate that Syrianus does not pursue this question, which is probably the result of applying the Parmenides of Plato to the present passage of Aristotle. The One which is beyond being, and is not capable of being referred to in discourse, and is not subject to either negation or affirmation, appears among the hypotheses of the Parmenides (160 B ff.) and is most likely in Syrianus' mind here, where he is focussed on Aristotle's view of what is demonstrable.

Syrianus is clearly pitting the sceptical elements of Platonism against the logocentric views of Aristotle. In the immediately preceding passage of the *Metaphysics* (996^b 10 ff.) Aristotle has defined wisdom as the knowledge of being (*ousia*). Aristotle continues:

While there are many ways of knowing the same thing, we say that he who knows what a certain thing is, knows more than he who knows what it is not. (Met 996^b 14)

Aristotle does not develop this, but it is an intriguing remark. It is of course obviously true, but he may just have had in mind some view which is the forerunner of the *via negativa*, and may be criticizing it. I have argued elsewhere that he seems to know of the negative method of conceptualizing abstract ideas, and that he seems to object to it (I, p. 143). We may have another case of that here. Syrianus, however, is not so interested in this part of it, but rather highlights the confidence with which Aristotle speaks of the knowledge of being. He asks the question which Aristotle does not ask, and which a Neoplatonist commentator had to ask, namely what of that being which is beyond (*hyper-...*), or transcendent? Such being is not subject to the normal rules, and there is no sense in which such being must either be affirmed or negated. The rules of discourse simply do not apply to it. Aristotle's concern here is entirely with the speakable, whereas the Neoplatonist commentator wants to raise both the question of the speakable, and that of the unspeakable simultaneously.

It should be noted that in both of these passages Syrianus accepts that negatives apply to being. In the last passage discussed, the implication is that kataphatic and apophatic statements apply to being, in both cases. In the former passage this is also true, and Syrianus appears to be saying that despite appearances, negations such as "not white" or "not man" carry with them an implication of the existence of being. The *hyperousios* is beyond both affirmation and negation.

Here is the clear preparation for the view of Proclus (see pp. 107 ff.), for

whom negations serve a useful purpose, but only up to a point. When one has reached this point, the method of forming concepts by negatives is no longer useful, and so the final negation of negation itself occurs. Proclus tries to deal with the transcendent being, the *hyperousia*, through the hypernegation, and in this it is as if he is replying to the question raised by Syrianus: how can the transcendent admit of negation or affirmation? But in the end Proclus too seems to connect negation with being, and abandons it for pure silence. Negation is treated as part of a series of linguistic manoeuvres, which have only a pretranscendental applicability.

We move now to Dexippus, another little-known precursor of later Athenian Neoplatonism, whose importance is very great. Like Syrianus, he deserves more study if the gap between Plotinus and Athenian Neoplatonism is to be better understood. We have Dexippus' commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, and through this medium a few quite important observations on the nature of negation. It is worth noting, in passing, that Porphyry also left a commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*: he, however, did not rise to the occasion on the subject of negation, and made no remarks of any importance about it, at least in this commentary. Dexippus did feel that the subject was worthy of extended comment within the framework of this exercise.

We begin with a passage which compares negation with affirmation, and has negation revealing the "truest essence of things".

But that is worth querying, since it does not tell us what essence is, but what it is not, and that it causes us to know other things, but not itself, since if we say in response that man is neither horse nor dog, we have said what he is not, none the more defining what he is through the negation, than when man was undefined at the outset. For we would not give a particular characteristic, knowing it already, for example that man is capable of laughter.

But it must be added, that it is not a definition which is proffered, but a description, and that many definitions are given by negation, whenever that which is affirmed is familiar. Thus, with the good and the bad being familiar, some define the indifferent, which is neither bad nor good. And thus one makes a statement about that which is in the subject, or in respect of the subject, in order that through their negation one might display essence in the truest sense. And one is not satisfied with negation alone, but adds an example, as one might say that man is neither horse, nor ox, and then add, "for example, Socrates".

(Ἀλλὰ μὴν κάκεινο ἄξιον ἀπορῆσαι, ὡς οὐ διδάσκει, τί ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία, ἀλλὰ τί οὐ, καὶ ὅτι ποιεῖ τὰ ἄλλα γινώσκειν ἥδε, ἐαυτὴν δὲ οὐ, ἐπεὶ καὶ εἴ τις τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀποδιδούς μήτε ἵππον εἴποι μήτε κύνα, ὃ τι μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν εἴρηκεν, ὃ δὲ ἐστὶν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ἀφωρίσατο διὰ τῆς ἀποφάσεως ἢ ὅτε ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀόριστος ἦν ὁ ἄνθρωπος · ἐπεὶ οὐδ' ἂν τὸ ἴδιον εἶπη τις, ἥδη ἐγνώκαμεν τί ἐστὶν, οἶον τὸν ἄνθρωπον γελαστικόν.

Ἄλλὰ πρὸς ταῦτα λεκτέον, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὄρος ὁ προκείμενος ἀλλ' ὑπογραφή, καὶ ὅτι πολλοὶ ὄροι κατὰ ἀπόφασιν λέγονται, ὅταν γνώριμα ἢ τὰ καταφασκόμενα · οὕτως γοῦν γνωρίμου γενομένου τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ τὸ ἀδιάφορον ὀρί-

ζονται τινες, ὃ μήτε ἀγαθόν ἐστι μήτε κακόν. καὶ ἐνταῦθα δὴ οὖν διὰ τοῦτο προ-
εἶπε περὶ τοῦ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ καὶ καθ' ὑποκειμένου, ἵνα διὰ τῆς ἀποφάσεως αὐτῶν
τὴν κυριωτάτην οὐσίαν δηλώσῃ. καὶ οὐκ ἤρκεσθη μόνῃ ἀποφάσει, ἀλλὰ καὶ
παράδειγμα προσέθηκεν, ὥσπερ εἶ τις λέγων εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον μήθ' ἵππον μήτε
βοῦν προσθεῖη ἐφεξῆς 'οἷον Σωκράτης'. (CAG IV², 44, l. 4 ff.)

This passage is prompted principally by Aristotle Categories 2^a 11 ff., and here Aristotle asserts the impossibility of affirming or denying predicates of a subject. Dexippus takes a step which is not given any underpinning in the text of Aristotle, when he claims that by negation "essence in the truest sense" (τὴν κυριωτάτην οὐσίαν) is revealed. This corresponds to Aristotle's οὐσία ἢ κυριώτατα ... λεγομένη (Cat. 2^a 11), and this Aristotle claims cannot be asserted of a subject, or found in it. He reiterates and develops this in Cat. 2^a 28, where it is argued that the names and definitions of things found in a subject cannot be predicated of that subject. Now on this point Dexippus makes a claim which is not adumbrated by Aristotle, namely that the "truest essence" can be revealed by negation: this is an epistemological innovation, added by Dexippus to the themes being developed by Aristotle. Dexippus further notes that many definitions are given through negative statements, and his own desire to introduce the negative method of conceptualizing things is quite clear: his gloss on Aristotle adds a theme. It is also to be noted that Dexippus couples knowledge of the familiar with the ability to make a successful negative statement: in other words, the use of the negative depends on the ability to make positive statements first. These positive, or kataphatic, statements serve to pinpoint the concept being defined negatively. That such is Dexippus' view is confirmed in the following passage:

Wherefore number is prior, just as we become familiar with the negation through the affirmation, and for this reason affirmation is prior...

(διὰ τοῦτο ὁ ἀριθμὸς προτέτακται, ὥσπερ διότι τὴν ἀπόφασιν γνωρίζομεν διὰ τῆς καταφάσεως, διὰ τοῦτο κάκεινη προτέτακται...) (CAG IV², 68, l. 4 f.)

Affirmation and negation have a close relationship, in which negation takes second place. Clearly enough negation is logically secondary, since it cannot negate without a prior positive claim having been made. Dexippus sees the two as working together, and does not envisage negation as some kind of solo epistemological function, putting paid single-handedly to all accumulations of kataphatic statements. One is sometimes tempted to see the *via negativa* in isolation like this, and it is useful to note Dexippus' presentation of the apophatic method as part of a prior kataphatic procedure.

Another passage tending to link apophasis and kataphasis is as follows:

Aristotle himself treated this better in the Notes. Having expounded the categories together with their modes, negations, privations and indefinites at the same time, he

dealt with them calling the modes "inclinations". Thus barefootedness will be of the same category as being shod, and breathing a horse is of the same category as driving it, and similarly of harnessing it. And the negations of these things will be of that of which the affirmations are part, and their indefinites of that of which their definitions are part. For in general it is in this that negations and privations have being, in that they are not the things denied... Concerning the one, it could be demonstrated in many contexts, that it does not fall outside the categories.

(Περὶ δὴ τούτου βέλτιον αὐτὸς Ἀριστιοτέλης ἐν τοῖς Ὑπομνήμασιν ἀνεδίδαξε · προσθεῖς γὰρ τὰς κατηγορίας σὺν ταῖς πτώσεσιν αὐτῶν καὶ ταῖς ἀποφάσεσι καὶ ταῖς στερήσεσιν καὶ τοῖς ἀορίστοις ὁμοῦ συνέταξεν αὐτῶν τὴν διδασκαλίαν πτώσεις τὰς ἐγκλίσεις ὀνομάζων. ἔσται δὴ οὖν τὸ ἀνυποδετεῖν τῆς αὐτῆς κατηγορίας, ἧς καὶ τὸ ὑποδεδέσθαι, καὶ τὸ ἀναπνεῖν τῆς τοῦ ἔχειν κατηγορίας, ὥστε καὶ τὸ ὀπλισθαι. καὶ αἱ ἀποφάσεις οὖν τούτων ἔσονται ὧν καὶ αἱ καταφάσεις, καὶ τὰ ἀόριστα τούτων ὧν καὶ τὰ ὀρισμένα · καθόλου γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ ἔχουσι τὸ εἶναι αἱ ἀποφάσεις καὶ στερήσεις ἐν τῷ τὰ ἀναιρούμενα μὴ εἶναι ... περὶ δὲ τοῦ ἐνός, ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἔξω πίπτον τῶν κατηγοριῶν, πολλαχοῦ ἂν τις ἀποδείξειε.) (CAG IV², 33, l. 10 ff.)

In this brief discussion of the Notes (probably lecture records, not by Aristotle himself; see Grayeff, *Aristotle ...*, p.78) the same general assertion is made about negation and affirmation, that they are of the same thing. What links "shoelessness" and "being shod" is that they fall within the same category. And since the one is said not to fall outside the categories, the same link between negative and positive statements about the one must exist. The underlying category unites the two, so that they are part of the one discourse (*logos*). Again we see the use of negation, not as an isolated epistemological tool, but as part of a web of discourse, and dependent on various other forms of speech. It is a tool which can only be used in a reciprocal relationship with other such linguistic tools.

We turn now to the evidence of Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose Greek is somewhat more limpid than that of Dexippus. Alexander, however, is somewhat less useful as a source for the transitional stage which has been the object of inquiry here. The real advances over Aristotle seem to lie with Dexippus and Syrianus. A study of the following passage will show why. In a crucial passage (Met. 1022^b 32) Aristotle says that there are as many privations as there are negations formed by the alpha privative. I have studied this elsewhere (*The Fundamentals ...*, and vol I, 139), and one might have hoped for some illuminating comment from Alexander on the passage, or at least some sign of another point of view on the passage coming into existence. But Alexander writes as follows:

"And", he says, "there are as many privations as there are negations derived from the alpha [sc. privative]". He says that alpha negations are privative denials. This is properly the case of the negation arising from the use of "not". As many, he says, as there are denials through the use of the alpha, which are negations of things, to the same

extent these are said to be privations. For the alpha negation is indicative of a privation. And he explains the difference between them by means of example: unequal [alpha + ἴσον] is that which has equality by nature, but is said not to have it, so that the privation indicates this as well.

(καὶ ὁσαυχῶς δέ, φησὶν, αἱ ἀποφάσεις αἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄλφα λέγονται, τοσαυταυχῶς καὶ αἱ στερήσεις. ἀποφάσεις δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄλφα λέγει τὰς στερητικὰς ἀναιρέσεις · κυρίως γὰρ ἀπόφασις ἢ διὰ τοῦ οὐ. ὁσαυχῶς δὲ, φησὶν, αἱ διὰ τοῦ α ἀναιρέσεις τε καὶ ἀποφάσεις τινῶν γίνονται, τοσαυταυχῶς λέγεσθαι καὶ τὰς στερήσεις · στερήσεως γὰρ ἢ διὰ τοῦ α ἀπόφασις δηλωτικὴ. καὶ παρατίθεται καὶ διὰ τῶν παραδειγμάτων δείκνυσιν αὐτῶν τὴν διαφορὰν. ἄνισον μὲν γὰρ τὸ πεφυκὸς ἰσότητα ἔχειν καὶ μὴ ἔχον λέγεται, ὥστε ἡ στερήσις καὶ τοῦτο σημαίνει.) (CAG I, 419, l. 22 ff.)

Alexander simply says what Aristotle says, but in more words. Nor does he take advantage of his own prolixity to solve problems, raise further questions, or fill in gaps. Alexander's commentary here, and at other crucial points, is limited to mere repetition of Aristotle. In this sense he is a real doxographer. Syrianus and Dexippus over-interpret by comparison, and are more in the style of the Neoplatonist blend of innovation and traditionalism. For this reason they tell us more of the evolution of late Greek philosophy: their relative lack of fidelity as commentators is more revealing than Alexander's repetitions are.

A similar case occurs when Alexander comes to comment on Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1003^b 10: "Hence we say that even not being *is* not being". This apparent paradox is of great interest for the student of Neoplatonism, who will want to know about the extent and function of being in the later Greek writers, but Alexander's comments on it offer no elucidation. Here again (CAG I, 243, l. 8 ff.) Alexander simply repeats Aristotle, using his words but in different combinations. One word of interest might be the word "strength" (ἰσχύς), in that Alexander observes that this principle shows "the strength of essence in relation to existence and being" (l. 10). This is probably not a word which would have been chosen by Aristotle to describe οὐσία, and may reflect the more dynamic later Greek view of it. A sort of expansion of this thought can be found in the commentary of Syrianus on the same passage, translated on page 89, where Syrianus refers to being "giving succour", and "giving unstintingly". Alexander does not go this far, but this virtual personification of being hints at it. Apart from this un-Aristotelian term, however, there are no further clues as to the author's own thoughts, and nor is it clear whether he had any.

In conclusion: with Syrianus and Dexippus we have the preparation for Proclus and Damascius. Their specific contribution lies in the development and scrutiny of the Aristotelian logic of negation. This enriches the Neoplatonist understanding of the hypotheses of the Parmenides, since it provides penetrating insights into what might be meant by the use of the negative in such expressions as "not-one" and "not-being". Plato's own analysis of nega-

tion does not go very far: Aristotle's is far deeper, and for this reason the "middle" Neoplatonists found it useful as an instrument for extending the insights of Plato. Given their tradition-centred approach it must have seemed the obvious thing to do: it must have appeared that Aristotle could tell them what Plato really meant.

In particular, the following themes can be isolated. Firstly, it is Syrianus who raises the question of the *hyperousios*, the realm above being which may not be subject to either negation or affirmation. This comes in the middle of a discussion of Aristotle's view that in the demonstrative sciences everything must be either affirmed or denied, and it would thus appear that Syrianus is raising a transcendentalist question of the text of Aristotle, itself uninterested in the issue. The hypotheses of the Parmenides appear to be making their way into Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Syrianus raises the question of the unspeakable, and this helps to explain Proclus' view that both affirmation and negation are appropriate to a lower order of being only, and that silence is most appropriate to the realm of that which lies beyond being (see p. 116). Even negatives, on this view, will apply to the mundane level of being itself.

Secondly, it has been noted that Proclus sees affirmation and negation as being in a reciprocal relationship, functioning together and interdependently (p. 114 ff.). This finds its antecedent in Dexippus (p. 92 ff.), who speaks of becoming familiar with the negation through the prior affirmation. The statement comes first, and is followed by the negation which is intended to clarify it, as for example in Augustine's statement that God is a perfume, which is not borne away by the breeze. The negation follows, and depends for its meaning, on the preceding statement. Proclus makes ample use of the interaction of negation and affirmation in his *Commentary on Euclid's Elements*.

Thirdly, negation is said by Dexippus to reveal the "truest essence" of a thing (p. 92 ff.). In this he takes a step not taken by Aristotle, from whom the phrase "truest essence" comes, but who does not recommend trying to know it by negation. On the other hand Dexippus provides a clear precedent for the use of negation by Proclus, again as indicated in his discussion of Euclid.

Fourthly, privation is treated by Syrianus (p. 90 ff.) as a type of negation which tends to be virtually kataphatic in character: the adjective "blind" is a privation which reveals a great deal about the subject under discussion, such as that it is an animal with the logical capacity for sight. For this reason it tends to be passed over as an instrument of negative theology, since *apophasis* formulates the absence of a thing without any kataphatic implications about it or its underlying substance. *Apophasis* involves the indefinite: to this extent its use as a precision instrument seems paradoxical. It is less indefinite when seen in the light of an accompanying affirmation, but it is true that we are in the end presented with the idea that precision in thought requires opening it up rather than narrowing it down.

We appear to have found, through these sources, the explanation of the difference in the terminology of the *via negativa*, between the Middle and Later Platonists. Middle Platonism uses the word ἀφαίρεσις and sometimes ἀνάλυσις, for the negative method, whereas Proclus and Damascius use ἀπόφασις. This is not a merely superficial difference, in that real conceptual issues are part of the variation in terminology: the philosophical differences will be outlined later, but it is noted here that Dexippus, Syrianus (and, one surmises, Plutarch of Athens) provide some of the missing pieces of the puzzle. The study of Aristotle provided a wealth of information about the logic of negation, and the use of negative statements. These ideas could readily be adapted to the transcendentalist purposes of the Neoplatonists. Where Aristotle limited himself to the discussion of essence and substance in the context of negation, the late Greek thinkers were able to see further possibilities. Advances in logic, made by Aristotle, fertilized the understanding of Plato by the late Greek thinkers, and this is particularly so in the case of negation. The term abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις) is limited to a narrowly mathematical context by Syrianus and Dexippus; it is now scaled down and limited in its scope, after a period of enlargement with the Middle Platonists. Negation proper absorbs the field, so that by the time of Proclus, even Euclid's negative methods of definition are described by Proclus as cases of *apophasis*.

The entry of the Parmenides of Plato into the Metaphysics of Aristotle has been noted above. Gersh, in his highly erudite *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (137, n. 61), draws attention to this in a different way. He sees the interpretation of the first and second hypotheses of the Parmenides, as given by Syrianus in relation to the Metaphysics (CAG VI¹ 46, l. 42 ff.), as crucial for the development of negative theology. This passage of Syrianus is indeed significant, since the integration of the One of the Parmenides with that of the Metaphysics provides the basis on which all such developments rest. But we have argued elsewhere that negative statements of the first hypothesis had contributed to negative theology since the days of the Middle Platonists (see Clement), and in any case Syrianus does not develop the point in the above passage.

The real contribution of these Aristotelian commentators is their exploration of the *logic* of negation, carried out with the assistance of Aristotle. They are at the stage where it is taken for granted that negation will be used in metaphysics. Their question is to determine exactly what negation is. Since Plato left this question open, it was natural to turn to Aristotle for the logical refinements. Negation is a complex concept, and Plato's Parmenides raised more questions than it answered. It is all very well to say "not-One", but it is quite another thing to draw out the whole range of meanings for this. The later Platonists, accordingly, went to the logic of Aristotle for some enlightenment on the "theology" of the Parmenides, that "hymn of negations" as Proclus called it (see next chapter). This is where the real advance in the negative theology of the period is to be found.