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Chapter VI. Proclus and positive negation

Raoul Mortley

Bond University, raoul_mortley@bond.edu.au

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VI. Proclus and Positive Negation

Proclus has a great deal to say about negation, and seems to stand in a different tradition from Plotinus. They are both of course Neoplatonists, and it is true that negative imagining is at the heart of the metaphysical efforts of both: yet within this sameness there is a difference. Proclus has much more to say on the logic of the *via negativa*, and in terms which are far more technical. His discussion of it is cast in the language of Plato's *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, and represents a systematic contribution to the development of this tradition. It is also the product of Aristotelian logic, and benefits from the increasing Aristotelianization of Neoplatonism.

He came from Lycia, and worked in Athens. He is perhaps the greatest representative of the Athenian tradition, living from approximately 412–485. He is part of a line extending from Iamblichus and Syrianus to Damascius, and arguably stands within a different type of Neoplatonism from that of Plotinus, who lived two centuries earlier, and whose base was Alexandria and Rome. The shadowy figure of Ammonius Saccas lies behind Plotinus' philosophy, and behind that of some Christian Platonists, but not behind that of Proclus.

Discussion of his philosophy of desire belongs elsewhere, but it can be noted that, in typically Neoplatonist fashion, Proclus defines the human being as in a state of constant and unfulfilled desire, and he links this with the unknowability of the One.

The desirable is therefore the centre of all that exists, and around it all existents and all gods place their beings, potencies, and powers in operation. And beings have an inextinguishable tension and desire (ἐπιθυμία) for it, for such beings seek an object of desire which is unknowable, and unable to be grasped. (Platonic Theology I.22, 12)

The state of tension and desire is maintained because satisfaction is never gained, and it is this which constitutes the essential cosmic dynamism of Proclus' system. What ensures the constant pursuit of the Good (see I.22, 27) is its unattainability; knowledge of it would cause a cessation of the tension and creative striving which makes reality what it is. The Good is unknowable.

It may surprise those of us who have studied Plato's *Parmenides* in a positivist tradition, but it became a text-book of metaphysics for the Neoplatonists: not only of metaphysics, but if we are to believe Proclus, a source of high spiritual feeling. He speaks of the "Dionysiac ecstasy" to which the *Parmenides* can bring him, revealing the sacred way to "the unspeakable initiation into the mysteries" (Plat. Theol. III.23, 15): Proclus is using here the
Proclus' hymn of negatives

language of the Phaedrus about the Parmenides. These two dialogues, usually taken by Plato scholars as representative of the two sides of Plato, as if they were virtually incompatible, are seen in harmony by the later Platonists. Proclus has rendered logic corybantic: in doing so, he may be less wrong than those who see so clearly two, separate, Platos.

Beierwaltes (Proklos... 353) cleverly juxtaposes a remark of Proclus on the Parmenides, with a hymn he had written to the principle beyond all. Proclus describes the negations in Parmenides 139E as constituting "a theological hymn leading to the One through negations" (ἀποφάσεις: Cousin, col. 1191). In this case the One had been said, by Plato, "to be neither like nor unlike itself, or any other thing", and Proclus sees here a statement of the One's transcendence of the ten categories: the resulting negations appear to him to be like a hymn. Proclus himself was the author of a hymn once attributed to Gregory Nazianzenus, and as Beierwaltes observes, it fits perfectly well with his general philosophical thought. (This hymn is not included in Vogt's collection, but may be found in Jahn, Eclogae e Proclo . . ., p.49.) It is a hymn to a principle, whom Proclus nevertheless does not hesitate to call "Thou". The first five lines run as follows:

O thou beyond all. How else is it meet for me to sing of Thee?
What words can make thy hymn? For no word can describe Thee.
What mind perceive Thee? For no mind can grasp Thee.
Thou alone art unspeakable, though creator of all that is spoken of,
Thou alone art unknowable, though creator of all that is known.

The hymn continues along these lines, and it is clear that Proclus had no need of his God to be made flesh in order to reach those heights of religious aspiration attained by Augustine in the Confessions.

The two experiences are not totally dissimilar, however, since it is beauty, in Proclus, which turns the soul upwards towards the One. There are two aspects of beauty, says Proclus (Plat. Theol. I.24, 16); one being that it enlightens, and the second that it is "graceful" (ἀρετής). These are ideas which are both drawn from Plato's Symposium, and Proclus emphasizes that the beauty of which he speaks is compelling in character: it is that which inspires eros. This beauty "turns all things towards itself", "calls them to itself through love (ἐρως)", "awakens all things through desire and passion for itself". For these reasons the soul is turned upwards, and finds itself in a continuous state of a longing, a longing which is incapable of satiety, and which springs from the absence of one's essential being. That which one is most truly, is missing; it is to be found elsewhere, and is ultimately unavailable. Hence the tension of the human being, and this is the explanation of the agonizing for language (ὁδις) mentioned later in this chapter.

For these reasons Proclus attributes great importance to his state of mind;
he wishes to look upwards, and begins his commentary on the Parmenides with a long prayer, requiring of the gods that they give him that perfect reason which will give wings to his soul, and take him up to the heights to which he aspires. Once again Proclus deliberately juxtaposes the Phaedrus with the Parmenides (In Parm. I, col. 618): the ecstasy of the Bacchanal is combined with the logic of the Eleatic. This is Proclus' specific trademark in the matter of the interpretation of the Parmenides: he sees it in the light of the Phaedrus, which was by no means a loose end to him, as it has been for many contemporary scholars.

I pray simply that all the divinities will instil in me a state of perfect readiness for participating in the most spiritual and mystical contemplation of Plato, expounded to us by him in the Parmenides, with a profundity which fits the matters treated, and which was expounded through his own most pure ideas by him who travelled with Plato most truly into the Bacchic experience, and became replete with divine truth, becoming our leader in this pursuit, and veritably our hierophant in this divine discourse. (In Parm. I, col. 618)

Proclus here pays tribute to Syrianus, who must have developed a similar interpretation: he is the "hierophant", who leads Proclus into the mysteries of the Parmenides.

Before proceeding to the study of negation proper, two apparently conflicting accounts of the value of names (δορματα; nouns, or names) will be examined. The last part of the Commentary on the Parmenides (Latin version, Klibansky/Labowsky, p.61 ff.) contains an interesting passage on the value of names, and other means of grasping (comprehendere) things. Following Plato, Proclus argues that when we hear the word "circle", we hear nothing but the name, and we do not thereby grasp the essence of the circle. Similarly, a drawing of a circle fails to lead us to the essence: likewise with a definition. Only the intellect knows the essence of a circle, and these other forms of communication all fail. We may interpret this as placing value on the intuitive power of the intellect, and as dismissing the various other forms of communication as examples of reification, the manufacturing of copies, which simply multiply the original in its outward and nonessential form. A fortiori, the same applies to the One:

So the One is not nameable or expressible or knowable or perceptible by anything that exists. This is why it is beyond the grasp of all sensation, all judgment, all science, all reasoning, and all names. (loc. cit.)

Proclus is at pains to explain now that the One is in a different situation. It was already impossible that one should know the essence of a thing by some mechanical means, "by anything that exists" (nulli entium). It is because they exist, that these things are inappropriate, and all the more so for the One.
But the One is unknowable for a separate reason, "by its own nature". It is unknowable not because of defects in the knowing apparatus applied to it, but because of a quality in itself, namely its own super-excellence (p.63, l. 21). This is a point of great importance since it places the unknowability of the One in a positive light. Negative theology is built not on the incompetence of human vision, hearing, thought and logic, but on a specific and positive quality of the One. Its unknowability is not to be attributed to epistemological failure, but to a quality of the One which somehow must be represented in a positive light, like a kind of glow in an unearthly hue, which can neither be seen, nor registered as a colour. It is rarely that this point is made so clearly by the Neoplatonists, though it is clear to all that despite the apophatic strand, there is somehow a kataphatic, or positive set of statements to be understood of the One. As we might expect from Proclus' analysis of Euclid, the negation points to a higher reality, and the unknowability involved does more than merely negate the value of ordinary knowing procedures: it paves the way for a higher affirmation, by negation of the lower.

The second passage, which endorses the value of names, is explained as follows. The question of the validity of names is taken up in the manner which one might expect, that is through discussion of the Cratylus, but bolstered by discussion of the Parmenides (Plat. Theol. 1.29). The One of the first hypothesis is denied any name (ὄνομα) or any description (λόγος), but that of the second hypothesis has both. The names of the gods have a special value and Socrates' great awe of them is quoted with approval (see Philebus 12C). What follows is difficult, but it seems that there are some names of gods which have a natural and authentic being of their own: these names "are established among the gods themselves". (Saffrey translates: "... doivent être considérés comme établis au niveau des dieux eux-mêmes"; Budé p.124.) Such names are "genuinely divine", and enjoy the highest status. There are lower degrees, however, and the next grade down has the names as copies of the first. These are considered to be of the status of daimons, or intermediate spirits. There is a third level of names, "at three levels from the truth". This phrase of Plato's is used repeatedly by Proclus, as Saffrey points out (Budé p.164) and it comes from the discussion of art in Book X of the Republic (597 E), where Plato gives his well-known analysis of the low-level concerns of the artist. The notion of varying degrees of reality is applied to divine names by Proclus, who considers that this lower form of language comes of the same desire as that felt by the artist to manufacture copies, a desire of the human intelligence which needs such things for its own procedures.

... our mode of knowing constructs through discourse, after the manner of the intelligible production, likenesses of the other realities and indeed of the gods themselves, representing the non-complex by the complex, the simple by the variegated, and the unified by the multiple. Having moulded these names, it finally holds them forth as
images of the gods, producing each of the names as a statue of the gods, in the same way as theurgy, through certain symbols, invokes the unstinting generosity of the gods for the illumination of statues of human origin. Similarly our apparatus for the apprehension of the divine reveals the hidden being of the gods, by the composition and division of sounds. (Platonic Theol. I.29)

This is a remarkably interesting passage as much for the understanding of pagan piety, as for the philosophy of language it reveals. It demonstrates, in the first place, a fully-fledged philosophy of theurgy, and on the practical level, the belief that statues could be made to have symptoms of various sorts on the intervention of the gods. Secondly it shows a philosophy of language which bears some similarity to that found in Gnosticism. Some Gnostic systems show the same philosophy of language, working in terms of graduated levels. For the Gnostic Marcus, the greater the sonorisation, the lower the status of the word concerned. For Proclus the lowest type of noun/name is that which divides, or separates, and therefore multiplies. The primary names however, have the status of gods themselves: this remarkable claim must confer great power on certain words, in that some must contain the ability to act, to determine, and to endow with meaning. Proclus must have reserved such a place for certain divine names, and what is clearly at stake here is the basic material for a philosophy of word-magic. Even those words which belong to the lowest status, “removed from the truth”, are like statues in relation to the gods, in that they may become the vehicles of the higher words, and the recipients of their power. For these reasons, the names of the gods should arouse the “utmost fear”, as they did for Socrates.

Trouillard, with his customary perceptiveness, has seized on this theme in Proclus (L’activité onomastique selon Proclès...). He collects material on the power of names from various sources in Proclus, including the one already quoted, and others from the commentary on the Cratylus. It is worth quoting Trouillard’s account of Proclus’ thought: “To name is to create, to create is to express; naming is therefore an act of wisdom. The gods name and create by their act of thinking. For us, the power of imposing names is measured against the extent of our participation in the divine wisdom. To the extent that we yield passively to impressions, we introduce into language an element of chance and arbitrariness” (op. cit. 242). Names, for Proclus, have the power of discerning the essence of things (Comm. on Cratylus 20, 18–21). Names are created, along with other beings, by the gods. These divine names come into being as the procession unfolds, and are left throughout the universe of the real as signs (συνθήματα) and traces (γνη: Comm. on Cratylus pp.29 ff.). In these pages Proclus sums up the development of

1 See on this passage, M. Hirschle, Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie... 17 et passim. Hirschle gives a very useful collection and analysis of passages on the theme of the reification of names.
the idea of names which is so hotly debated by Eunomius and the Cappadocians, discussed elsewhere in this book.

It is worth reflecting on this philosophy of language. There is here a hardening, a conservatism on the power of language, and that on the part of probably the greatest ancient exponent of the via negativa. Proclus has taken up a position of linguistic realism: he has given objective reality to certain words. They happen to be the names of the gods, but nevertheless certain other words are said to exist as intelligible entities, and they have all the status of other such entities, as models, sources and causes of lower realities, and as guarantors and assessors of lower entities. Proclus is in the astonishing position of being a linguistic realist, and thus adopts a view which is virtually unknown in early Greek philosophy, though it is becoming familiar in his time. The Greeks usually discuss the question of whether names bear any natural relation to reality, or whether they are merely conventional. The idea that names (our "nouns" - ὄνομα) are the reality is a late departure in the world of Greek ideas, and an extraordinary one. That it should come from the pen of an exponent of the way of silence and the way of negation is all the more surprising, since it bespeaks a desire to give language an impregnable secure foundation. Discourse itself is guaranteed, though of course there are lower levels of it, and clumsy copies of the original: nevertheless it is language itself, in its essential form, which is given intelligible reality. There is very little to compare with this in the preceding works of Greek philosophy, with the exception of certain Gnostic theories, and one can compare Philo's discussion (see I, p. 89) of Adam's distribution of names. On this view names were given, by someone: Adam did this, but he could not name himself. Such a reflexive action was considered to be impossible, and it was God who gave Adam his name, thereby conferring on him, and it, a specially firm status. Similarly, Eunomius appears to believe in the existence of certain names (see ch. VIII).

Proclus gives certain divine names the status of gods. Herein lies the difference between the two passages discussed: Proclus reifies only certain names, those of the gods, and other nouns may well fall into the lower categories. This point is of equal interest to the philosopher of language: certain names are safeguarded by being declared sources and models of linguistic reality. It happens that these are of religious significance. Proclus thus guarantees the truth of Greek theological language, within the general limits of language. His linguistic realism is probably a response to the advance of the word in the form of the growing Christianization of the Roman Empire. The word made flesh finds a sophisticated rejoinder in Proclus' word made intelligible reality: he elevates the word rather than depreciate the divinity.

Before moving into the question of Proclus' interpretation of the Parmenides, and of the development of his negative theology, it is necessary to begin with some important information from his commentary on Euclid. This
material is crucial, and should be added to that discussed by Beierwaltes, in his Negative Dialektik (Proklos 339 ff.), and by Trouillard (Théologie négative...). Two factors should constantly be kept in view when considering the *via negativa*: one, that it is closely bound up with ontology, being predicated on a certain view of reality; two, that its origins almost certainly lie with the mathematicians' view of abstract reasoning. The connection with geometry is certainly most important, since this science was perceived to deal with reality in its various stages of accumulation. Starting with the point, geometry proceeded to deal with the line, and then with shape and volume. Reality was built up into its present massive state by a series of increments, added to infinitesimal beginnings.

Aristotle talks about both abstraction and negation in this context, as I have shown elsewhere (143), and seems to argue that negation is not an instrument to be used for grasping the refinements of geometry. This function, he seems to suggest, should be reserved for *aphairesis* (abstraction), and Aristotle here seems to be taking part in a contemporary debate over the relative merits of abstraction and negation, in respect of the geometers' methodology. Euclid was somewhat younger than Aristotle; he did not acquire his fame until about twenty years after Aristotle's death, and his base was Alexandria, not Greece. It is therefore not Euclid against whom Aristotle was identifying his own position, when he rejected negation as a means of conceptualizing geometrical abstractions. It is more likely to have been Eudoxus who formulated the method against which Aristotle protests, and whose interest in philosophy as well as geometry and astronomy, was well-known. (Unfortunately the remains of Eudoxus' work are only fragmentary and Lasserre's edition shows no mention of either negation or abstraction in the Wortregister.) Nevertheless Euclid begins his Elements with a negation, and a selection from the very first definitions of his work, shows how he deployed the negative.

I. The point is that of which there is no part.
II. The line, however, is length without breadth.
III. Points, however, are the extremities of a line.
V. A plane surface is, however, that which has length and breadth only. (Elements, Book I, Definitions, ed. Heiberg)

Now Euclid here uses neither the word ἀφαίρεσις, nor ἀπόφασις: he commits the act of negation, so to speak, without actually analyzing it. But there must have been discussion over the precise nature of the negative used in these definitions: the logic of Euclid's procedure is clearly a matter for discussion, and it is highly probable that both Eudoxus and Euclid knew what they were doing, logically speaking, when they did it. Euclid does not explain his method, he merely uses it, but we must note that in I, II and V, some
form of negative is used. The first definition is nothing but a negative. No statement is made. An implied statement, however, is negated. The second definition accepts a state of affairs which could be made into a statement, but adds a negation of a further state of affairs. The third adds, in order to form a definition: that is, a state of affairs is accepted, and a further is accepted and added to it in order to obtain the definition. The notion "point" is added to the notion "line", and this gives us an example of the function of the process which is exactly opposite to that of negation, namely addition. The fifth combines the methods of negation and addition, in that two given states of affairs are limited by the implied negation in the word "only", which means "without x".

These are the considerations brought out by Proclus in his discussion of the first book of Euclid’s Elements, as indicated in the following passages. Morrow has provided an excellent translation of Proclus’ Commentary on Euclid, but the following translations differ slightly.

(I) Wherefore the geometer added "only" to the two dimensions as the third dimension does not exist in the surface: this is equivalent to the negation of depth, in order that the superiority of the surface, in its simplicity in relation to the solid, might be shown through negation, or by means of an addition equivalent to a negation: its inferiority to the things which precede it is shown through affirmations. (Comm. on Elements I, Def. 5, ed. Friedlein, p.114)

(II) Euclid taught the point as the principle of all things of size, through negation alone, but the line he elucidated through both affirmation and negation. (Comm. Elements I, Def. II, ed. Friedlein, p.96)

(III) For negative statements are appropriate to originating-principles as Parmenides teaches us, through elucidating the first and ultimate cause by negations alone. For every originating-principle has a being other than that of the things which flow from it, and the negations of these show us the specific character of the former. (Comm. Elements I, Def. I, ed. Friedlein, p.94)

The collective significance of these passages is as follows. Every entity which has size, stems from the point as its ultimate source: only negation can formulate its nature, however. Positive statements are appropriate to that in a thing which is the inferior part, whereas the superior aspect will always be designated by negation. The point does not fall into this ambit of positive statements, since it has no combination of lower and upper facets: consequently it must be known by negation alone. Where positive statements are made, one can be sure that their referents are of the lower kind on the ontological scale. Negation is especially appropriate to principles (ἀρχαὶ), and this is a point worth noting. The principle may be a real entity, at work in the world of things, but it is an excessively refined type of entity, and difficult to grasp: in such a case the method of negation is well-suited. A further point is made in this connection: one may distinguish two aspects of a principle, that
which it is in itself, and that which flows from it. All principles have such a
twofold character, and of these negation captures the essence, while affirma-
tion captures the outflowing. It follows that Proclus considers negation to be
more appropriate to simple, unmultiplied, realities, whereas affirmation be-
longs to those which have acquired a more solid load of material characteris-
tics.

One may further observe that there is some linkage envisaged in this struc-
ture of negation and affirmation - they are twins. An attempt has been made
elsewhere by the present author to show a relationship between statement
and negation, and to show that negation operates not in an arbitrary or ca-
pricious way, but in a specifically determined way. The negation is in fact de-
termined by the preceding affirmation: it is therefore parasitic on positive state-
ments of specific kinds. This means that negation follows a predetermined
route, and at least in the case of the methods of the geometers, it climbs to
the point on the shoulders of the positive statements appropriate to the var-
ious stages. A combination of negative and positive statements is appropriate
to each stage but the ultimate one of the point, and such a combination will
have the effect of dealing with the lower stage and pointing to the higher si-
multaneously. The point, however, is grasped by a pure negation only, but of
course that negation must be of something, in that a specific characteristic
has to be labelled non-existent, and in this case it is the part which is declared
to be not present.

It is necessary to arm oneself with this background of geometrical ontolo-
gy in order to grasp the apparatus with which Proclus approaches the via ne-
gativa in general: it is my hypothesis that the geometrical view of the genera-
tion of reality is symptomatic of Proclus’ ontology, and indeed dominates it.
This may be held to be true of Greek philosophy as a whole. The interesting
work by Stanislas Breton (Philosophie et Mathématique chez Proclus...) makes
the point throughout that the philosophical thought of Proclus cannot
be divorced from his geometrical thought. Breton emphasises the link be-
tween the henology of the geometrical treatise and that of the other works,
and this is a most important observation. It has been emphasized by the pres-
et author that ontology and epistemology must be brought together in a
proper understanding of Greek philosophy: Breton insists here that the
mathematical mode of analyzing physical reality fertilized the metaphysical
perspective. On the other hand he says almost nothing about negation,
despite its importance in Proclus, and despite a lengthy section on the theory
of mathematical knowledge. For some remarks however, see p.129.

The prospect of joint negations and affirmations, found to be possible in
the realm of geometry will explain other passages in a metaphysical context,
which similarly hold out this possibility. The Commentary on the Parme-
nides (I, col. 639) speaks of applying to the One, which is said to be self-
identical (following Parmenides himself), firstly affirmations, then negations,
and then simultaneous affirmations and negations. The idea of the simultaneous application of both does not refer to any desire to create paradoxes, as one might superficially conclude. Given the above analysis of the remarks on Euclid, it can be seen that a claim combining negative and positive elements would simply represent a straddling of stages, the positive referring to the inferior, the negative to the superior element. As Trouillard notes (Théologie négative ... 253): “... each position has as its cause the corresponding negation”. A joint negative/positive claim would place the One in the situation of being a combination of cause and effect, a hybrid of the higher and the lower. The One in this particular context, and in this particular definition, cannot be of this kind.

Some definition of terms will be useful at this point, since the way of negation being advocated must be defined: ἀπόφασις is Proclus’ term, and this marks a change, since Plotinus and the Middle Platonists used the word ἀφαίρεσις. It may be assumed that Proclus was not an innovator here, but that in the Athenian tradition the word ἀπόφασις was already established. The crucial question is that of the difference: the present author must confess to having had the assumption that the move from abstraction to negation proper marked a radicalization of the negative method; that the later the date, the more radical the refusal of language. We will return frequently to this question, but it is of course entirely possible that the difference is innocuous, and that it reflects differences in school tradition only. For the present, the relationship of the technical terms in the field will be examined.

It is difficult to discover Proclus’ view of ἀφαίρεσις: he does, however, have a remark on the advantages of negation over other forms of thought. Things conceived by ἐπίνοια (hypothetical thought), and understood in a matter-free way, cannot possibly be the principles of any sort of reality (Comm. Parm. VI, col. 1054). Some sort of abstract thought is clearly being referred to here, since the method arrives at an idea which is matter-free (ἀνεύ ὤνης). It sounds suspiciously like the old method of abstraction, but Proclus notes that the type of thing conceived by such a method will not have genuine existence (ḥυποστάσις), but merely ἡγκαρξία, or secondary reality. If one ceases the mental act, the thing disappears: this cannot be the case with genuine principles, since they do not disappear; they have being in themselves, and are not dependent on our hypothetical thought (ἐπίνοια).

The question of privation is fairly fully discussed. In the Platonic Theology (I.12), Proclus speaks of a category of negations which are in fact privations (στερήσεις). As we have seen elsewhere (139), this accords with Aristotelian usage, since Aristotle accepts the view that negations may include privations. (On the other hand, not all privations are negations.) Proclus is speaking of the negations of the fifth hypothesis of the Parmenides; in this case, according to the Parmenides itself, things other than the One are neither identical nor different, mobile or immobile, and so on, because they are
deprived of the One (Parm. 160A). The negations of this hypothesis, says Proclus (Plat. Theol. I.12) are simply privations, whereas others “are the transcendent causes of all which springs from them”. The negations of the fifth hypothesis are not a function of the superiority of the higher principle, but are such κατὰ ἔλλειψιν, or “by default”.

Proclus sees the Parmenides as having distinguished between two types of negative: on the one hand a negative statement may derive from the superiority of the principle referred to. This idea we have already seen developed in connection with Euclid’s Elements, and we may take an example as follows. The negative involved in the statement “the point has no parts”, might, according to Proclus’ analysis of Plato’s logical exercise, derive from the fact that the point is other than the part, but connected to the part insofar as it is its source and originating principle. “Non-part” suggests, in this case, a higher grade of being within a general affinity. In the case of the fifth hypothesis, however, the One and the others are separated from each other, in such a way that the latter are deprived of unity: in the case of our example, “the point has no parts”, the negation would entail the point’s being deprived of something, and so is really a case of privation, in Proclus’ view. It is difficult to sympathize with the distinction being drawn, since all cases of negation seem to entail a deprivation of some element. But Proclus wishes to make the point that there is an ambiguity in negation which needs clarification, and it is this: when one says, for example, “he is not happy”, one may be implying that he is in fact more than happy, in fact in a state of delirious ecstasy. Alternatively, he may be non-happy in the adverse sense, in that he is unhappy. The lower and higher possibilities included in the negation are what Proclus has in mind here, and he uses mathematical terms to put his point. The one form of the negative points to a superiority (ὑπέροχι) implied in it, and the other to a defect (ἔλλειψις). Such a narrowing of the field had to be made, for in the theological conception of negation, it is obviously necessary that the negatives be heading in an upwards direction. However a further, and crucial, point should be noted: the negatives derive their significance from a certain ontological base. In the second case, that of deprivation, the lack of a certain sort of being gives the negative its content: in the first case, the presence of being gives substance to the superiority to which the negative refers. However the second case, it should be noted, implies some continuity between the higher stage and the lower. The notion of continuity has been investigated by Annick Charles in relation to Proclus’ doctrine of analogy, but it should be noted that it is also fundamental to his negative theology. For the negation of superiority to have any efficacy as a theological instrument, there must be some continuity between ontological levels. The higher principle may well have a being of its own, which is proper to it and separate from its lower manifestations, but there must be some link between it and that of which it is the cause and the source. If this ontological continuity is not pres-
ent, then there is no guarantee that the negative process is in fact an ascent. To put it differently, negation works as a means of ascent because it does respond to what is, and to how reality is structured. Elsewhere, Proclus has the following defensive remark:

Let no one attempt to devalue such a form of discourse, by claiming that these negations are privations, nor to dismiss this voyage upwards towards the very first principle by defining analogy as an identity of concepts, and the concepts as relations. (Platonic Theol. II.5)

I have followed loosely the translation of Saffrey, and I take it that the remark about analogy means that some argued against analogy as a means of knowing the divine, by claiming analogy to be capable of dealing with relations only. (A remark of Damascius, see p. 121, seems to be in the same context, and may help clarify this passage.) However whatever this means, it is clear that there was a context of debate over the value of these various approaches: negation was attacked, it would seem, on the grounds that it was really to do with privation only. (Proclus tried to counter this by his idea of the negation of superiority.) One is reminded of the Sceptics, and their attack on the notion of *aphairesis*, at a much earlier stage: and even in the time of Aristotle, it is clear that there is a debate going on over the use of the method for conceptualizing very abstract ideas. Against these critics, Proclus can direct the whole of his commentary on the Parmenides, which in the last analysis, is nothing more than a sustained critique of the idea of negation.

Proclus has a further tilt at the anti-negation party in the sixth book of his Commentary on the Parmenides (col. 1072). Are affirmations better than negations, he asks? There was evidently a school of thought which thought so, on the grounds that negation was merely privation. We have seen this already, but the element added here derives from Plato’s Sophist, and its discussion of being and not-being (258 A). Privation was clearly identified with not-being, a lack of some sort, whereas affirmation was perceived as implying being. On this view, apparently, all negation was reduced to privation, and held to signify the absence of something. Proclus replies by arguing that the Sophist envisages several possible meanings for “not-being”: it can designate that which is superior to being, or equal to it, or lower than it. Accordingly, if negation is to be allied with not-being, it has three possible meanings.

Taking up a point made by Aristotle, as well as the example he uses (see my Fundamentals . . .) Proclus observes (col. 1074) that “negations have an indefinite force”. “Not-man” has a much broader range of meaning than “man”:

Affirmations pare beings down, but negations open them up, taking them from the
circumscribed to the uncircumscribed, from the state of being divided within their own limits, to that of being unlimited. How then can they not be appropriate to the contemplation of the One? (Col. 1074)

Aristotle in fact classifies "not-man" as an indefinite noun, and does not see it as a genuine negative at all; it is true that one of the first things that strikes us about negation is its indefiniteness, in that it seems to leave open an enormously wide range of possibilities. It is non-specific. "Not-man", for example, could signify anything at all in the range of existents, except for one thing, man himself. Proclus makes a virtue of this openness, comparing it to the narrowness of selection inherent in affirmation. It is, he says, more appropriate to the One, and one cannot help suspecting that his concept of negation really makes it into a form of affirmation.

This interpretation of the Sophist constitutes an important part of his philosophy of negation, and he has recourse to it in the fifth book of the Commentary on the Parmenides (col. 1000). The Sophist was in fact vague on this point: the Eleatic stranger had initiated a discussion on the meaning of the verb "to be", in its copulative use. Affirmation seemed to require (256 ff.) some participating in being, for the word "is" to have any force in such a statement as "the boy is obstreperous". A negation, similarly, seemed to require participation in not-being, in order for the negative copula to have any force. The Sophist does not really take up a dogmatic position on either of these claims, but of course the discussion was there for the disciples to make dogma if they wished.

In this passage of the Parmenides Commentary, Proclus offers an interpretation of the non-being under discussion, in terms of otherness. Consistently with his attempt in the sixth book to argue that negation has the function of opening up the field of discourse, rather than closing it, Proclus interprets not-being as implying difference. The negation involved is not one of contrariety.

... when we say not-being, we are only expressing the negation (ἀνέκδοτον) of being, but not the opposite of being, where opposite would mean that which is the furthest removed from being, and that which has completely fallen outside it. (Col. 1000)

Against the anti-negation party, then, Proclus reduces negation to nothing more than a form of differentiation.

The issue of negation and privation must have been of considerable importance in Proclus' own circle, for he also devotes a number of pages of the Platonic Theology (II.10 ff.) to showing that the two must be distinguished. The following passage is well-known:

In the third place, in addition to what has been said, I specify that the negative mode is not a matter of privation of that to which it applies, but productive of what might be called opposites. (Plat. Theol. II.10)
As I have shown, Proclus does not really believe that negation produces opposition: in the first place the word here is ἀντικειμένων, not the ἐναντίον of the Sophist. In the second place, as Saffrey/Westerink point out (note p.118), the word ὁλον (“what might be called”) should be noted, since it introduces a tentative note. What Proclus means is that a negation is productive of a counter-balancing affirmation at the next lower stage: if one says, for example, that the One is not multiple, the result is the production of multiplicity at the succeeding stage. This is how he explains himself, and the word ἀντικειμένων might best be translated by “counter-weight”.

An interesting feature of the passage is that it was interpreted by Hegel in the wrong sense. Hegel translates ἀντικειμένων as “opposites”, his translation of the whole phrase reading as follows “...the negations are not an annulment (Aufheben) of being, of which they are used (of the content), but the production of determinations in accordance with their opposites...” (From Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, ed. C. L. Michelet, in Sämtliche Werke XIX, p.76.) Beierwaltes (Hegel und Proklos, and Platonismus und Idealismus, p.178) refers to this as a misunderstanding, and stresses the Hegelian tendency to generalize negation as the driving force in the production process of the One, which contains the “ideal” form of what follows. Against Hegel, Beierwaltes argues that Proclus negation constitutes the productive act of the One through the negation of the negation. This is a doubtful proposition (see below), and I should prefer to focus on the term Gegensatz in Hegel’s translation, that is “opposition”, “contradiction”. Proclus cannot mean that the negations are oppositions: he explicitly opposes this elsewhere. If Proclus was indeed interpreted as endorsing negation as opposition, it is probable that a highly distorted picture of his negative theology gained currency as a result of Hegel’s teaching: this interpretation radicalises the via negativa far more than is justified, at least in the case of Proclus. A little later (II.12) it is reiterated by him that “the not-many is not a privation, ..., but cause of the many.” In his continuing debate with the apologists of privation, Proclus is faithful to the view we have seen enunciated in the Euclid Commentary. One can only guess at the type of view held by Proclus’ opponents, and one cannot help wondering what their exact position was. Did they agree that negation had an epistemological value, whilst seeing as a privative operation or did they refuse the epistemological use of negation, on the grounds that its privative logic rendered it unsuitable?

What are hypernegations? The term ὑπεραποφάσεις is usually translated this way, though Rosán (The Philosophy of Proclus ... 123) uses “supernegations”. Rosán’s short account of negation in Proclus is a model of accuracy and clarity, and may still be recommended to readers: “… some negations are superior to affirmations, as in the case of something that does not possess a characteristic because it transcends this characteristic” (op. cit. 123). Proc-
Types of negation

Lucius says (Comm. Parm. col. 1172) that it has been shown in the Sophist that the One is itself the cause of "what are called hypernegations". The One does not participate in any of the genuses, and by this means it is demonstrated that the One transcends, and is established over and above the intelligible world. The genuses of the same and the different mentioned in the Sophist (256) do characterize the lower world (the demiurgic diakosmos): certain genuses, those of motion and rest, precede the former and characterize the zoogonic diakosmos, while the "in itself" and "in another" characterize the highest ranks of intelligible beings. There follows a lengthy discussion on the subject of which genuses are appropriate to which ontological levels, but in col. 1176 he returns to negation and the One.

There is a threefold classification of negation. "The One is unknowable to the knowing endeavours of those things which are secondary to it", and negations must fall into three categories, appropriate to three phases of the One's relations. In the first place, we have the One in the relation of itself to itself: secondly, of itself to itself and others; and in the third place of itself to others only. The three types of negation correspond to these three relations of the One. The three types of negation are in descending order. In the first and highest position come those negations which apply to the One's relation to itself, and under this relation movement and rest are denied of it. In respect of its relation to itself and other things, sameness and difference are denied; similarly, of the One in relation to itself and to others, the like and the unlike, the equal and the unequal, the younger and the older are denied. Thus the One is deprived of quality, quantity and temporality (col. 1176).

Proclus also notes that Plato goes further than Parmenides himself, in denying the same and the different of the One. The Fragment V.84 of Parmenides is quoted:

It remains the same in the same, and is in respect of it itself.

Thus Plato is seen to be more of a negator than Parmenides himself. The negation of sameness and difference is of crucial importance, and here Proclus goes beyond Parmenides himself in his attempt to define the otherness of the One. These genuses are the primary genuses, and constitute the highest category of predication possible. "Sameness" is the closest to the One, yet both sameness and difference are denied of it. It is thus taken beyond the rank of the one-in-being. Herein lies the real radicalism of Proclus, and the conservatism of his venerable predecessor, Parmenides. Proclus does not emphasise so much the poverty of language, as the transcendence of the One. That the essence of reality should be beyond Being itself could scarcely have occurred to Parmenides, since this ethereal substance was what he was trying to define as the essence. Yet Proclus wants it removed from any relations which could allow affirmative predication, and so it must go beyond Being itself:
For if that which participates identity and difference is not yet truly one, it is necessary that the genuinely One should exist prior to them, and be free of them. If it participates in them, it will not be purely One, being replete with things foreign to the One. For what you add to the One, through this addition obscures the unity, which is spurned, of that which receives the entirely other. (Col. 1177)

Genuine Oneness lies therefore beyond these relations of sameness and difference, and Proclus here restates the familiar paradox that addition results in substraction, when it is a matter of the One. The One is such that any addition decreases it. This may be true of any entity in the Neoplatonist system, since the accumulation of characteristics always constitutes a diminution, in the sense that it gives the entity in question a kind of downward thrust. In this way the paradox concerned is to be found right throughout the ontological system of the Neoplatonists: any increase brings about a corresponding decrease. Yet in the case of the One this principle is more outstandingly true, since the One is the very entity which is nothing else than its own singleness. An addition to it will transgress its very nature, leaving it no longer what it was. If added to, the One is completely destroyed: any other entity, however, retains its character in the face of addition. Proclus wishes to insist that even that which is the same as itself cannot be added to the One, without its unity being “spurned” and “obscured”.

For Proclus, then, the One is beyond being and therefore beyond the affirmations which can be generated from even the most lofty of the genuses, the same and the different. Yet he is a linguistic conservative, despite his ontological radicalism. Negation is the linguistic act most appropriate to the voyage towards the One, and it is, it is necessary to insist, a linguistic act. The negative turns out to have positively affirming capacities, and the term “hypernegation” captures most securely this notion. The negating procedure is not one of abandoning language, or arriving somehow at a linguistic terminus, but it is every bit a linguistic manoeuvre. Proclus is most concerned to keep negation within the category of discourse, and negative discourse is not the same thing as discourse negated. Negation and affirmation are intimately related: I have observed elsewhere that the negation seems to have to follow some affirmation, that it is therefore parasitic on a prior claim, but it is important to note that the reverse of this idea occurs in Proclus himself. On several occasions, Proclus speaks of negative statements producing positive ones.

In the sixth book of the Commentary on the Parmenides (col. 1097) an order of priority among negations is given. The first is that of multiplicity: the One is not many. The second is that of parts: the One is not a whole consisting of parts. And in accordance with the causal principle established above, the One engenders the multiple, and the second unity consisting of a whole complement of parts. Here Proclus is working towards the following claim:
If then, negations generate affirmations, it is clear that the first negation generates the first things, the second the second things. (Col. 1099)

The generating power of the negation is at stake, and prior to this Proclus makes two logical observations. Firstly, when in denying the first part of a conditional, the second is negated as a result, the first is always more general than the second. For example: “if he is not an animal, he is not human” (col. 1098). The negation of the first part has entailed the negation of the second, because the first part is more general, and includes the second. If on the other hand, by negating the consequence we are able to negate the condition, then the consequent is more “powerful”. This logical point having been settled, Proclus notes that the One is the most comprehensive of all, and that being is more comprehensive than life, for example. The key to what follows is the claim that in a hypothetical argument, that which annuls the other part is the more powerful.

Proclus’ argument is an ingenious reinterpretation of the Parmenides argument, and it runs like this. Take the proposition: “if the One is a whole (composed of parts), then it is many.” If one denies the first clause, there is no effect on the second: it may still be true, or it may be false. Negating the second, however (assuming that it is given an “if” form), would entail the negation of the first clause. From which it is deduced by Proclus that the many is more “powerful” than the whole-of-parts. It must therefore be closer to the One, and herein lies the interesting step: the notion of the logical “power” of one clause over another is given an ontological application. The logical power of a notion matches, and stems from, the existential power of the corresponding entity in the hierarchy of beings. From the behaviour of the logic, Proclus can deduce the status of the entity, and after various exercises in negating conditionals, he concludes that the many is closer to the One, than the whole or its parts. “The more comprehensive is closer to the One” (col. 1099): this is the main principle, and it is enunciated several times.

How then do we reach the following claim?

Thus if negations produce affirmations, it is clear that the first negation produces the first things, and the second the second things. (Col. 1099)

There are two ideas to be ferreted out here. Firstly, the exact manner in which negation can engender affirmation: secondly, the relation of language to reality in this particular context. In respect of the former issue, the explanation of Proclus’ thinking would go like this. The negative may be applied like a litmus test to certain conditional statements, and it will determine which of the two clauses in any such statement has the more “power”. In thus revealing one clause to be the more powerful, the negative has caused a recognition of its true worth: it has made it possible to make claims about it. In
the case of the argument set out above, concerning the One, the many, and
the whole-of-parts, the negative test has shown the many to be more "power-
ful" than the whole, or its parts. It has thus placed us in the position of being
able to say positively, or kataphatically, that the many is above the whole in
the order of being. It is in this sense that the negative produces affirmations:
it enables the uncovering of ontological facts.

The second issue is not easily accessible to the modern mind. Proclus' phi-
losophy of language is worthy of an entirely separate study, and one can only
hint at solutions here. It has been noted earlier that Proclus is a linguistic
realist, and in the passage twice quoted above, he speaks of negations engen-
dering "the first things", and subsequently "the second things". What is his
position? Do the negations correspond to a state of affairs, which is itself
productive of the successive states of affairs? In this case, saying that nega-
tions produce entities would be no more than a figure of speech. However it
would seem that Proclus considers the negations to be somehow in reality,
and that the distinctions between logic, language and being have no force for
him. It would seem that a state-of-affairs can itself be a negation.

That negations produce statements is a theme taken up by Proclus with
relative frequency, and one would expect this to be the case, since it is part of
his attempt to positivise negative theology. At the end of the sixth book (col.
1133), he refers to negation as "mother of affirmations", and is confident at
this point that he has shown through this procedure of kataphatic apophasis,
precisely how the middle order of realities is established. The intelligibles
and that which flows from them have now been treated, and the whole order
has been displayed in its relation to the One, thanks to the creative use of the
negatives used in the passage leading up to Plato's Parmenides 137 E. Later
still, in the seventh book (col. 1208) it is considered to be established that the
negative produces positive affirmations: "For the negative, as has often been
said, is the genesis of affirmation". In this case Proclus is no longer dealing
with the middle order of entities, but with the generation of positive state-
ments about the One itself. And in this case, inequality is removed from the
One, leaving it itself. Not-inequality can imply nothing other than pure uni-
ity, or so I would reduce Proclus' argument. As the hypothetical argument
has been developed, it is clear that it cannot be used of the One itself, since it
is impossible to deny unity of the One. It is the last in the series, and is incap-
able of submitting to the litmus test, for the obvious reason that there is no
higher power. For these reasons a series of linking arguments is proposed,
leading to the abstraction of inequality from the One (the verb ἀφαίρεω is
used here).

The last part of the seventh book, surviving in Latin only and edited by
Klibansky/Labowsky, with an English translation by E. E. M. Anscombe and
L. Labowsky, is crucial at this point, since it takes the discussion of negatives
up to the level of the One. The positive force of the negatives is reaffirmed,
but with certain qualifications now entered. In the words of the above translation (70, l. 5–10 Klibansky/Labowsky):

But negative propositions about the One do not really express anything about the One. For nothing at all applies to it, either formally or privatively, but, as we have said, the name “one” names our conception of it, not the One itself, and so we say that the negation also is about our conception, and none of the negative conclusions that have been stated is about the One, but because of its simplicity it is exalted above all contrast and all negation. So he rightly added at the end that these negative propositions do not express anything about the One.

In this crucial passage Proclus introduces an asymmetry in his philosophy of negation. In the first place, negations are said not to express anything about the One, whereas they can function at all lower levels. Yet it is obviously possible to formulate a negative statement about the One, to put it into words at least; such a negative can be nothing more than a linguistic phenomenon, applying to our “conception” of the One rather than the One itself. Negations about the One differ from those of the intelligible or sensible spheres, and the asymmetry introduced turns on the difference between “de” and “circa” in the Latin text. The translators, Anscombe and Labowsky, have seen the need to differentiate clearly between the two, and they correctly make the difference into one of two types of reference: a statement “de uno” is a statement “referring to the One”, and a statement “circa unum” is one which expresses something “about the One”: the former only is possible. What was the Greek original here? A note on page 97 provides a parallel passage from In Parm. book VII (col. 1191). If we are to juxtapose the two, it is clear that, contrary to what might be normal expectation, the equivalent of circa is not περί. The translation of the In Parm. passage reads as follows:

For our discourse is not, properly speaking, on the One (ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐνότ), and as we advance we will hear the philosopher proving this: we nevertheless make some utterances about (περι) it through the natural anguish of the soul about the One (περι τὸ ἔν). We produce language round about the One through the unsatisfied desire of our souls, but we cannot speak “on” the One: our language can oscillate around the One, so to speak, without ever coming upon it. The Latin “de” can suggest a loose relationship; “about the One”, in an imprecise way, and we must therefore suppose “de” to be the equivalent of περι, if we accept the comparison of the two texts.

Clearly the language about the One does not result from the ability to speak about it in the proper sense, but rather from the yearning to speak about it. Negatives applied to the One are similarly dismissed.

The asymmetry lies in the relation of language to reality: language does grasp lower realities, but it has no relation to the One. In this latter case
therefore, a psychological explanation of its origin is proffered: it comes from the aspiration of the soul. In the former case, an ontological explanation is offered. On the preceding page (Klibansky/Labowsky 68) Proclus says that the meaning of a negation is determined by the thing of which it is a negation: different types of realities are expressed in the different varieties of negation, such as the privative, and so on. An attempted negative about the One would have no such reality to determine its meaning.

We are left in the position of having no linguistic instruments appropriate to this highest reality, and it is here that it becomes clear that this last part of Proclus’ commentary, only recently made generally available through the Klibansky/Labowsky edition, is the most important of all. Neither negations nor affirmations can be used of the One, it is now claimed, and so the via negativa has come to its natural terminus, not at the One, but at the next lowest level. The negative way also falls short of its goal, and thus silence constitutes its completion. The negative is not a form of silence, but a speech-act. Proclus’ conclusion is simple:

For by means of a negation Parmenides has removed all negations. With silence he concludes the contemplation of the One. (p.76)

That the contemplation of the One should be carried out in silence is confirmed by a passage of the Platonic Theology II.9, where it is said that the One’s unspeakability and causeless causality must be celebrated in silence (see the note by Saffrey/Westerink, p.116). Again there is reference to the anguish (ἐνόεια) of the soul, “which desires both to know and speak of the One”, and these soul-pangs serve to produce words where there should be none. Silence then is the crowning epistemological achievement, after all the speech-acts have been accomplished, including those of the highest genre, negation. It is particularly fascinating to note that after the ascent into this rarefied Himalayan atmosphere, a coup de grâce is delivered, which ends the progress of language: negation finally dismisses itself. Proclus sees Parmenides as asking the last question and formulating the last negation in 142 A, where the conclusion is drawn that the One is neither named, nor spoken of, nor known. For Proclus negations are truer than assertions (Klibansky/Labowsky 70), but for a negation to be formulated there must be a name, which may be negated. If, now, names are ruled out, no negatives are possible. “Even the power of generating all things, which we said was a characteristic of negation, does not belong to the One, although it is said to generate and produce” (op. cit. p.72). All those aspects of the negation which lead us to see it as a transcendent power are now found to be inapplicable. It is the negation of negation which takes us into the appropriate silence.

I do not however see this negation of negation as a positive step like those of the previous stages, and I see no emphasis on the negation of negation in
The negation of negation

The concluding pages of the Commentary. Beierwaltes (Proklos 361–6) devotes a section to the development of this theme, and, I believe, overemphasizes it. 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 great fascination in the idea of this linguistic tool which manages to do the ultimate job required of it, but which disappears in and by the very act of doing so. However this idea is not developed in Proclus, and ought not to be presented as the key phase in demonstrating the primacy of silence (cf. Beierwaltes, op. cit., 364): there is no Aufhebung of the word into silence.

Proclus is not concerned with developing negation in this way. His intention is to dismiss negation from the new stage, in which the soul no longer knows, but abides with the One (Klibansky/Labowsky 75, l.31). His view is simply that negation is a form of language, and that it can no longer be used. It is not so much negation that is removed, but the whole of language, and it is this that Proclus is really concerned with in the final negation. Granted, the final words of the commentary seem to lend themselves to the above interpretation: *Nam per negari et ipse removit < omnes> abnegationes. Silentio autem conclusit eam que de ipso theoriam* (“For by means of a negation Parmenides has removed all negations. With silence he concludes the contemplation of the One”). Hochstaffl (Negative Theologie... 78) analyzes Proclus’ approach to negation as pointing to an aporia in religious philosophy, and finds in general in Neoplatonism a tendency to deploy this for the purpose of a “speculative stabilisation” of the system. The negation of negation does indeed point to an aporia so far as language is concerned, but we must not overlook the positive consequences of this procedure. The process we see described looks not so much like the development of an aporia, as the systematic use of a conceptual tool for purposes beyond its reach.

But the real point is that negation is not denied qua negation, but qua linguistic manoeuvre, and Proclus is more concerned to be rid of all forms of language at this point (see Klibansky/Labowsky, p.72, l.8, 31; p.70, l.25-33). Proclus is saying that negation has outlived its usefulness, that it brings the soul to the penultimate stage only. Its self-destruction is nothing more than its self-destruction: it is not an event with two facets, the one positive and the other negative.

But after going through all the negations, one ought to set aside this dialectic method also, as canvassing and introducing the notion of things denied with which the One can have no neighbourhood. (Klibansky/Labowsky 74, 75)

Such dialectical operations are the “preparation” for the tensio towards the One, but are not themselves this tensio (op. cit. 74, l.30). Negations tend to
be positive assertions in disguise (op. cit. p. 68, l. 30 ff.) and for this reason also cannot be used of the One. The fact that language can produce negatives about the One is not of importance, as we saw earlier: these are mere linguistic follies, whose origin is psychological.

For the deeper explanation of this point, one must return to the borrowing from Euclid of the key ideas of negative theology. As shown earlier in this chapter, coupled negations and assertions reveal the higher and the lower in the order of beings, but the point is grasped by negation alone. The pure negation demonstrates the nature of this principle: it is precisely this which Proclus wants to avoid claiming in relation to the One. For him negation reveals the higher being which stands above and as the source of any being which is the subject of an assertion. Even hypernegations, which illuminate the transcendence of some particular quality, by showing that it does not exist in a lower quality, are not applicable to the One, which is itself the cause of these hypernegations (see p. 110).

Proclus' metaphysics takes him beyond the point, beyond the pure Euclidean negative. He advocates now the annulment of negation, it having served its purpose as an inverted mode of assertion. The last negation, the negation of negation, including all language, reveals nothing about the One, and this is what differentiates it from all others. For Proclus, the purpose of the *via negativa* is the transportation of the soul to the penultimate stage, and here his treatment of it coincides with that of Clement of Alexandria and Plotinus. The negative method takes one high, but not to the Highest. Proclus does however give clear expression to that which has only been implicit hitherto: negation is a tool which causes its own supersession.