

Damascius on the Ineffable

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My purpose in this essay is to address an issue of rather general significance for later Platonism, the supposed infiltration of irrationality into the Platonic tradition with the postulation, initially by Plotinus, but more definitely from Iamblichus on, of a first principle which transcends the capacity of rational thought to grasp it, and which itself is superior to any sort of intellectual activity. I take my start from some remarks of the distinguished authority on Later Platonism, Père H.-D. Saffrey, in an article of his on theurgy,¹ where he shows an inclination (common, it must be said, to many other scholars before him) to link the postulation of such an ineffable first principle with the infiltration of irrational, or 'extra-rational' elements (of a magico-religious nature) into later Greek philosophy.

I do not wish to deny, of course, that such infiltration occurred. The whole phenomenon of reliance on infallible or inspired authority – both that of Plato himself (and to a lesser degree, for Peripatetics, Aristotle), and of a growing pantheon of more 'theological' authorities such as Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, Linus, Musaeus, and then Thrice-Greatest Hermes and the gods of Chaldea (speaking through the Chaldaean Oracles) – lends itself to the growth of irrational acceptance of dogma, while the desire to accommodate the gods of traditional Greek religion (as well as others not so traditional) into a philosophico-religious framework, evident at least from Iamblichus on, and

¹ "La théurgie comme pénétration d'éléments extra-rationnels dans la philosophie grecque tardive", in *Wissenschaftliche und Ausserwissenschaftliche Rationalität. Referate und Texte des 4. Internationalen Humanistischen Symposiums 1978*, Athens, 1981, 153–169, repr. in his collected essays, *Recherches sur le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris, 1990. Richard Wallis, also, in an *obituary dictum* towards the end of his survey of Neoplatonism (*Neoplatonism*, London, 1972, p. 158), makes the surprising statement that "while [Damascius] was doing no more than bring out some of the traditional teaching's implications, yet with him [...] the consequences were little less than annihilation of the whole Neoplatonic hierarchy". I wish that he had had time to expand on that remark.

partly, no doubt, a defensive reaction in face of the growth of Christianity, militated against what we would regard as pure rationality.

However, as I have argued elsewhere,² in the mind of Proclus at least, but also, I think, in that of Damascius, the authority of the 'theologians', or even of the gods, despite the great honour that is accorded to it, is not allowed to outweigh that of Plato – at least Plato as interpreted by Proclus – and to that extent rationality, I feel, maintains its ascendancy in the later Platonic school.

The issue of the total ineffability and unknowability of the first principle, however, is, I think, a different question from the broader issue of the infiltration of irrational elements, and it is this on which I would like to concentrate here. Of course, the claim that any one of a variety of higher principles or levels of being, such as Intellect, Pure Being or the realm of Forms as a whole, not to mention the One itself, is ἀρρητον, ἀκατονόμαστον, or ἄγνωστον is one that goes back to Plato himself. Such key passages as *Republic* VI 506D–509B, *Timaeus* 28C and *Epistulae* VII 341C–344B were seen as delivering the message that, although dialectic and the practice of analogical reasoning could bring one to an intuitive grasp or vision of such entities as the Good, or even the essence of a Form, they are not in themselves within the range of rational discourse. As regards the One, the famous passage from the end of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (141E–142A), to the effect that "it is not nameable or to be spoken of, not an object of opinion or of knowledge, nor is anything to do with it available to perception"³, was taken as a clear statement that the One was graspable only by some supra-rational faculty.

As we know, the most significant move made by Plotinus in opposition to his Platonist predecessors in the field of metaphysics was the firm rejection of the notion that the first principle, if it was to be thought of as a radical unity, could be regarded as an intellect of any sort. Even such an acute predecessor of his as Numenius, who seems to have seen the problem, was unwilling to accept the solution, preferring to

² "Philosophy and Theology in Proclus", in *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays in Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O'Meara*, eds. F. X. Martin and J. A. Richmond, Washington D. C., 1991, 66–76. Cf. also the useful remarks of H.-D. Saffrey, in his essay "Proclus, Diadoque de Platon", in *Proclus, lecteur et interprète des Anciens. Actes du Colloque international du CNRS 1985*, Paris 1987, xi–xxviii (repr. in his *Collected Essays*).

³ Οὐδ' ὀνομάζεται ἄρα οὐδὲ λέγεται οὐδὲ δοξάζεται οὐδὲ γινώσκεται, οὐδέ τι τῶν ὄντων αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεται. These negations are couched in the form of verbs, but clearly the important denials are that of any ὄνομα or λόγος of the One, nor any γνώσις of it, which puts it outside the range of rational discourse.

speak of the First God as an 'intellect at rest', as opposed to a secondary, demiurgic intellect, which is 'in motion.'⁴ Plotinus, however, having made the daring postulate that the first principle, or One, was both superior to all intellection itself, and not graspable by any human intellection, was still left with a problem which he never really solved (although he certainly was aware of it), and which he bequeathed to his successors.

That problem is the contradiction between a One which is the source of all being for all entities whatever, from Intellect on down even to Matter, and a One which is absolutely transcendent and without connection with anything below it. On the one hand, we have such passages as *Enneads* 3. 8 [30], 10, 26 ff., or 6. 7 [38], 36, 15 ff., or 5. 3 [49], 14, or the great passage at the end of 5. 3 (17, 15 ff.), and many others,⁵ where the complete transcendence and unknowability of the One are eloquently described; and then we have other passages, such as 6. 7, 8, 17 ff., or 5. 3, 15, 1 ff. – in many cases from the very same treatises from which passages can be adduced in support of the One's absolute transcendence – which describe it as the origin and producer of all things. Indeed, we have a passage in 6. 8 [19], 18, 32 ff., where the One is described as "the cause of the cause (αἴτιον τοῦ αἰτίου)": "It is then in a greater degree something like the most causative and truest of causes, possessing all together the intellectual causes which are going to be from him, and generative of what is not as it chanced but as he himself willed." (Note the masculine αὐτός in the final phrase!)⁶

Plotinus manages to maintain the two aspects of his supreme principle in equilibrium, without admitting any contradiction (and perhaps, after all, there is no such contradiction), but to the more scholastic minds of his successors there did seem to be a problem. Porphyry, first of all, though remaining firmly loyal to his master in most things, seems to have felt it necessary to reformulate his doctrine of the One in ways that are somewhat obscure to us. I have attempted to deal with this problem elsewhere,⁷ so I will simply summarise my conclusions here. Damascius, in a notable

⁴ Cf. Fr. 15 Des Places: ὁ μὲν πρῶτος θεὸς ἔσται ἔστῳς, ὁ δὲ δεῦτερος ἔμπαλιν ἔσται κινούμενος.

⁵ The whole early tractate 6. 9 [9] is pervaded both by assertions of the One's transcendence and unknowability, and of its role as the cause of all things, cf. e. g. ch. 6. In 6. 9 Plotinus also advances the concept that the One, while being absolutely transcendent, is also 'within us' (ch. 7).

⁶ *Enn.* 6. 8 is admittedly remarkable for the positive nature of its description of the inner life and activity of the One, but it cannot be dismissed for that reason. It is not an early treatise. For an excellent discussion of the complexities of Plotinus' doctrine of the One and its relation to what proceeds from it, see John Bussanich, *The One and its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, Brill: Leiden, 1988 (on 6. 8 in particular, see pp. 201–220). Cf. also Plotinus' description of the One as 'the potentiality of all things' (δύναμις πάντων), at *Enn.* 3. 8, 10, 1 and 5. 1, 7, 9.

⁷ "Porphyry's Doctrine of the One", in ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΡΕΣ, "Chercheurs de sagesse": *Hommages à Jean Pépin*, ed. M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, etc., Paris, 1992, 356–366.

passage of his *De Principiis*,⁸ criticises Porphyry for identifying the first principle of all things (in contrast to Iamblichus, whose position we will deal with in a moment) with 'the Father of the intelligible triad', and thus seriously compromising its transcendence. I have argued, however, that this cannot be the whole story, because of conflicting evidence on Porphyry's view of the One, both in his *Sententiae* (particularly ss. 43 and 30 f.) and in the *Parmenides Commentary* (which, I now think, we may safely follow Pierre Hadot⁹ in attributing to Porphyry), Frs. 2 and 4. In those passages, it is plain that Porphyry is asserting an absolute transcendence of the One over Intellect.

My suggestion, based on a passage of Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary* (1106, 31 ff.), is that what Porphyry wished to do, in connection with his exegesis of the first two hypotheses of the *Parmenides*, was to make God, or the One, in itself the subject of the first hypothesis, and God as object of intellection (νοητόν) the subject of the second. What Porphyry would then be doing does involve a degree of 'telescoping of hypostases' (such as he has been accused of), but his real concern would be to distinguish two aspects of the first principle, such as were left in solution by Plotinus.

If that is Porphyry's answer to the problem bequeathed by Plotinus, then the answer provided by Iamblichus (also discussed by Damascius in the same passage of the *De Principiis*, n. 8 above) is very different. Iamblichus, it seems, wished to postulate¹⁰, above the Plotinian One (which in turn he declares to be transcendent over the 'intelligible triad' – which may be understood as the Chaldaean triad 'Father – Power – Intellect' or its Platonised equivalent (derived from the *Philebus*) of 'Limit – Unlimitedness – Mixture (or 'One-Being')' – a 'totally ineffable' (πάντη ἄρρητος) first principle.

We do not, unfortunately, have any indication from Iamblichus himself as to why he postulated this entity – we are dependent here entirely on the evidence of Damascius – but it is not difficult to construct a plausible line of argument for it. The entity revealed in the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, after all, is not easy to reconcile, as Plotinus tries to do, with such an entity as the Good of the *Republic*, nor yet the Cause of the Mixture of *Philebus* 23C, since the latter principles assume actively creative roles, whereas the One of the First Hypothesis is to all appearances an entity totally hedged about by negativities. Since Damascius is confessedly adopting the position of Iamblichus against his more immediate predecessors, Syrianus and Proclus,¹¹

⁸ Ch. 43, I p. 186 f. Ruelle; II 1 f. Westerink-Combès.

⁹ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 vols., Paris, 1968 (text in Vol. II).

¹⁰ In his (lost) *Chaldaean Theology*, which was presumably an exposition of the doctrine of the Oracles, suitably reinterpreted. It is interesting that Porphyry's discussion of the nature of the One in his *Parmenides Commentary* (Fr. 4) comes in the context of a critique of an Oracle (Fr. 3 Des Places) on the relation of the Father to the triad dependent on him (cf. also Fr. 27).

¹¹ Cf. *De Princ.* 43, II, p. 2, 11 ff.; 45, II, p. 6, 16 ff. C-W. We may note, however, that Damascius refines somewhat Iamblichus' position (cf. *De Princ.* 47, II, 16, 1 ff. C-W), in that he takes the pair of monad and dyad following on the second One as aspects of that One (the ἐν πάντα), rather than as distinct principles, such as Iamblichus would have them.

we may reasonably assume that much of his argumentation may also be attributed to Iamblichus, but it is more prudent, perhaps, to reserve this for our study of Damascius himself, and it is to that that I will now turn.

The *De Principiis* is a remarkable work, deserving, I think, to take its place along with Plotinus' *Enneads* and Proclus' *Elements of Theology* as one of the chief literary and intellectual monuments of later Platonism. Its qualities have been obscured hitherto, I feel, by the lack of a good modern edition. This is not to set at naught the considerable achievement of Ruelle, but the text-critical acumen of Westerink and the translation and notes of Combès in their Budé edition have been of great importance in casting light on the structure of the work. What emerges is a highly critical and probing intelligence at work, questioning the first principles of the Platonist system in a manner worthy of Plotinus himself, and with a stylistic liveliness worthy of the author of the *Life of Isidore*.¹²

Damascius begins in ch. 1, as befits the title of the work (*Problems and Solutions on the First Principles*), with an *aporia*, which appears to set up problems of equal weight whether one postulates that the first principle (ἀρχή) is to be regarded as transcending the totality of things (τὰ πάντα) or as itself one of them. This is indeed the basic contradiction which any postulation of an ἀρχή faces: either it is external to the totality of things, the 'universe', and then the 'totality' is no longer a totality; or it is to be regarded as itself part of the totality, in which case it cannot be an ἀρχή, in the sense of a *creative* principle, of the totality of which it is a part (assuming that it cannot create itself as one of its own products). But the difficulty is that we *do* think of a first principle as being *of* the things of which it is a principle, and thus inevitably ranked with them as part of a single combination (μὴ σύνταξις). And after all, as Damascius adds (I p. 2, 4 ff. Combès), in normal speech, when we speak of a πόλις, we include in that concept both rulers (ἄρχοντες) and ruled, and (which is perhaps an even better analogy) when we speak of a γένος, or clan, we include in that the founder of the clan as well as all his descendants.

On the other hand, if the ἀρχή is to be included in the universe, we are faced with the situation that it has to be reckoned as one of its own products, since it is by definition the first principle of *all things*. But of

¹² Joseph Combès has discussed this topic in an article, "La théologie aporétique de Damascius", appearing originally in *Les Cahiers de Fontenay*, nos. 19–22, 1981, *Néoplatonisme: Mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, 125–139, repr. in his collected articles, *Études néoplatoniciennes*, Grenoble 1989, 201–221, but he fails to bring his study to any positive conclusions.

each thing it must be said that it is either the product of a first principle, or itself a first principle; it cannot be both, and there cannot be a situation where a totality exists without a first principle. So there must after all be a first principle external to the totality. And yet if the first principle is not to be regarded as connected with the totality, it is hard to see how it can have any relationship with it at all, since any relationship of productivity involves being part of a single σύνταξις.

This is the basic ἀπορία. However, Damascius has not introduced this to baffle us completely, but simply to exercise our minds, and make us more receptive to the solutions which he proposes. He is not concerned to show that the concept of a first principle is incoherent, but rather to argue that it is a complex concept, which must be properly picked apart. There are at least two (he actually would maintain *three*)¹³ aspects to be considered: on the one hand, a first principle of all creation which must admit some degree of connection with its products, and indeed must somehow contain within itself the seeds or potencies of all of them; and on the other hand, an absolute first principle which is somehow the condition of there being anything at all without itself being related to anything else. It is this latter entity to which Damascius now turns, in the second chapter of his work, and on which I wish to concentrate on this occasion, since, as I have said, its postulation has brought with it widespread accusations of irrationality.

Damascius begins his second chapter (p. 4, 13 ff.) with the following statement:

Our soul has, after all, an intimation that, of all things of which we have any conception, there is a first principle beyond all, and unrelated to all. Therefore it should not be called a principle, nor yet a cause, nor first, nor indeed prior to all things, nor even beyond all things; far less, indeed, should it be celebrated as being all things; nor indeed should it be celebrated at all, nor conceived of, nor even hinted at.¹⁴

Now what, one might ask, is one to do with an entity of which there cannot be an ἔννοια, nor even a ὑπόνοια (however one is to understand that)? First of all, what is our view of Damascius' assertion that we do divine the existence of such an entity? There are very few nowadays, I

¹³ That is to say, a unitary mode, a unified mode, and a plurified mode (ἐνιαίως τε καὶ ἠνωμένως καὶ πεπληθυσμένως, p. 3, 17 Combès), but we need not, I think, follow him in this in the present context.

¹⁴ Μαντεύεται ἄρα ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ τῶν ὀπωσοῦν πάντων ἐπισουμένων εἶναι ἀρχὴν ἐπέκεινα πάντων ἀσύντακτον πρὸς πάντα. Οὐδὲ ἄρα ἀρχὴν, οὐδὲ αἰτίον ἐκείνην κλητέον, οὐδὲ πρῶτον, οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πάντων, οὐδ' ἐπέκεινα πάντων· σχολῆ γὰρ ἄρα πάντα αὐτὴν ὑμνητέον· οὐδ' ὄλως ὑμνητέον, οὐδ' ἔννοητέον, οὐδ' ὑπονοητέον.

imagine, who would assent to that proposition, though it is perhaps not an unreasonable supposition for a late Neoplatonist to make. On the other hand, I think that one can find analogies for such a basic intuition as Damascius is postulating here in various disparate branches of modern thought – not perfect analogies, to be sure, but not entirely inapposite either.

First of all, I would suggest, there is something similar in Heidegger's postulation, not in *Sein und Zeit*, but in his later thought, as represented in particular by the lecture *Zur Sache des Denkens*¹⁵, of a mysterious entity behind both Being and Time which is in some way the 'Es' in 'Es gibt Sein' and 'Es gibt Zeit', and which ultimately becomes identified with what Heidegger terms 'Appropriation' (Ereignis). This concept, despite Heidegger's various approaches to characterizing it, remains essentially ἀρρητον, in very much the same way as Damascius' must be, while constituting a necessary basis for thinking the relationship between Being and Time. I do not of course wish to suggest any very close analogy between Heidegger's concept of 'Es' and Damascius' Ineffable, but they have this much in common, I think, that they are both 'liminal' concepts, as being conditions for the comprehension of the world in general, without themselves being susceptible of rational definition or comprehension.

Another analogy that may throw some light on what I have in mind may be drawn from contemporary astro-physics. One of the more fascinating entities postulated by modern astronomers is that of the 'black hole'. Now, as I understand it (though my understanding of these matters is unfortunately rather rudimentary), a 'black hole' is a cosmic phenomenon (resulting from the collapse and implosion of a star) which is on the one hand a necessary postulate to explain certain other phenomena, in particular the process by which stars generate energy and heat, but which (by reason of the fact that no light or radio waves can leave it, because of the enormous density of matter created by its collapse into itself) is not susceptible to direct observation.¹⁶

¹⁵ Tübingen, 1969 (publ. in English as *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York, 1972, p. 20). I am indebted to Prof. Dorothea Frede for drawing my attention to this analogy.

¹⁶ I must confess that most of what I know of these matters I owe to a perusal of Stephen Hawking's book *A Short History of Time*. Strictly speaking, it is not quite true that black holes are not susceptible to observation, since their presence does seem to affect the light or other waves emanating from neighbouring stars, though this is still not *direct* observation. A better example, however, might be 'super-strings', which are a purely intellectual postulate, for which, as I understand it, no direct evidence can be conceivably gathered. However, it must be

Here the analogy is rather less close, I fear, than with Heidegger's *Es*. A black hole is not a first principle, nor is it an *a priori* condition for all scientific thought; but it does have in common with the Ineffable, I think, the characteristic of being something which we postulate (μετατευόμεθα) in order to make sense of a lot of phenomena which we can observe, and that is the aspect of it which I wish to highlight here.

These analogies from other traditions, both philosophical and scientific, are not particularly close, but may serve to indicate that the postulation of an entity which is not itself subject to rational analysis need not necessarily be a manifestation of irrationalism. Before one can pronounce judgement on that one must observe how the concept is arrived at, and what role is reserved for it in the system in question. My contention is that for Damascius the postulation of the Ineffable is the result of an eminently rational dialectical process – based, no doubt, on the theorizing of Iamblichus before him, but very probably carrying that theorizing a good deal further. The first forty-two chapters of the *De Principiis* (subject of the first book of the Budé edition) are largely taken up with the analysis of the concept of the One, its transcendence, and at the same time the process of emanation from it and return to it, while still maintaining that such a concept, basic and primary though it is, cannot entirely satisfy our intuition that there must behind it be something more basic still, about which absolutely nothing can be said.

But that cannot after all be the last word on the subject. In spite of all Damascius' employment of negative theology (e.g. p. 22, 15 ff.: "And if we must indicate something about it, we must make use of the negations of these (aforementioned) concepts, and declare that the Ineffable cannot be *either* one *or* many, either productive or unproductive, either causative or non-causative – and even these negations must somehow or other be absolutely stood on their heads."¹⁷) he still recognizes that if we 'divine' the existence of such a principle, there must be *something* in us which responds to such a principle, and there must even be some sense in which we, and the universe as a whole, *participate in* (μετέχει) such a principle. This paradox he addresses in a set of three ἀπορίαι which form the conclusion of what Combès and Westerink discern as the first section of the work (pp. 23–26).

admitted that such concepts as these do not play the same comprehensive role as does Damascius' Ineffable, and thus remain very imperfect analogies.

¹⁷ Εἰ δὲ ἄρα ἀνάγκη τι ἐνδείκνυσθαι, ταῖς ἀποφάσεσιν τούτων χρηστέον, ὅτι οὐδὲ ἐν οὐδὲ πολλά, οὐδὲ γόνιμον οὐδὲ ἄγονον, οὔτε αἴτιον οὔτε ἀναίτιον, καὶ ταύταις μέντοι ταῖς ἀποφάσεσιν ἐπ' ἄπειρον ἀτεχνῶς οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως περιτρεπομένας.

The first ἀπορία, after first making a distinction between the non-existence above all existence and that below it (to wit, Matter), raises the question whether Matter, though being the absolute negation of Being, is yet encompassed by the One, and even more so, by the Ineffable, if these two latter, even as they transcend Being at the higher level, must also be taken as extending beyond it at the lower level. Interestingly, this causes Damascius no difficulty. It was already accepted in Neoplatonic theory, at least from Proclus on,¹⁸ that higher principles extend their influence further down the scale of existence than lower beings, so that e.g. Matter no longer participates in Being, but does participate in Unity. What Damascius is here prepared to assert is that it also partakes in the Ineffable (23, 15–22). This interesting line of thought is carried further in the response to the third ἀπορία,¹⁹ which raises the question whether after all no influence at all passes to things of this world from the ineffable. Rather surprisingly, in view of much of what has been said before, Damascius here declares that of course there is such influence (24, 12 ff.). As it turns out, what the ineffable transmits to the rest of the universe is precisely the element of ineffability intrinsic in every individual:

And as for us, how could we make any suppositions of any kind whatever about it, if there were not within us also some trace (ἵχνος) of it, which is as it were striving towards it? Perhaps, then, one should say that this entity, ineffable as it is, communicates to all things an ineffable participation, in virtue of which there is in each of us some element of ineffability? It is in this way, after all, that we recognise that some things are by nature more ineffable than others, as the One is than Being, Being than Life, Life than Intellect, and so on, according to the same ratio – or taking the inverse ratio, starting from Matter and proceeding to rational Being, this latter sequence taking its start from the inferior, the former from the superior, if one may so express it. (24, 24–25, 9)

It emerges from this line of reasoning that the ineffable in fact pervades the universe, going in tandem with the effable at every level (25,

¹⁸ Cf. *ET* prop. 57: “Every cause both operates prior to its consequent and gives rise to a greater number of posterior terms.”

¹⁹ The second is less significant, but still not without interest. In this Damascius denies that the ineffable forms a θριγκός, in the sense of a ‘boundary wall’, around the effable, since it should not be seen as being juxtaposed to it in any sense. In the denial of this role to the ineffable, Damascius seems to come strangely close to the concept in astrophysics of the ‘event horizon’ which surrounds a black hole. The ‘event horizon’, if I understand it correctly, is a kind of boundary which is not a boundary, but a notional threshold separating two incompatible modes of existence. However, one should not, I suppose, push these analogies too far.

10–12). Every level of reality, Being, Life, Intellect, Soul and so on, and every individual entity, contains an element of ineffability, inasmuch as there is in each level, and in each individual within that level, an element which cannot be comprehended in a definition, but which makes that entity what it is. We seem to be here quite close, after all, to the Heideggerian *Ereignis*.²⁰

However, I do not want to insist too much on the validity of such comparisons. I introduce them merely in an attempt to set Damascius’ theory in a wider context, and to indicate that a postulate of this sort can perfectly well form part of a highly rational world-view. Whatever we may think about *Ereignis*, we have here, at any rate, an entity which is the condition of everything (what Damascius calls “the outer periphery not only of beings, but even of non-beings”²¹), without strictly being the *cause* of anything, and which is ungraspable in any ordinary sense, but which actually calls forth in our minds what Damascius likes to term a ‘reversal’ (περιτροπή),²² by which he presumably means the propensity of talk about the ineffable first principle to ‘stand on its head’, or cancel itself out, forcing one to contradict oneself irrespective of what one tries to say about it. At the same time, however, this principle penetrates to the core of our world, and makes each of us what we are, an individual, with just that little touch of ineffability which differentiates us from everybody else.

²⁰ Lest we get carried away, however, Damascius follows this ‘positive’ passage about the Ineffable with a περιτροπή (25, 18–26, 7), arguing that after all *nothing* definite can be predicated of the Ineffable, and that it cannot after all be said to communicate anything of itself to anything else: “So it is not the case, then, that it allows itself to be participated, nor that it gives a share of itself to those things which proceed from it, nor that every god is ineffable prior to being one, even as it is one before it is a being.” In Heideggerian terms, then, one might say that the ‘giving’ of the Ineffable is also a ‘withholding’.

²¹ P. 4, 22f.: ἡ ἐσχάτη περιφερεία, οὐ τῶν ὄντων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν μὴ ὄντων.

²² Cf. e.g. p. 9, 3; 9, 21; 22, 19; 23, 3; 26, 3. This concept seems to be derived by Damascius primarily from an interesting passage of Plato’s *Sophist* (238Df.), though Plato does not there use the verb or the noun (περιτρέπειν/περιτροπή).