

What are the Sources of Pseudo-Dionysius' "Spiral of Love?"

Zdenek Lenner

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Prologue: The “spiral of love”: three or four erotic modes?

Since the end of the XIXth century, Pseudo-Dionysius’ dependence on Proclus has been famously demonstrated and almost unanimously acknowledged concerning his theory of evil as exposed in the second part of *The Divine Names* (chapter IV), actually summarizing a bit awkwardly the Proclean *De Malorum Subsistentia*.¹ On the contrary, his theory of love has much more puzzled the scholars, who all tend to recognize to some extent Dionysian originality on this crucial matter. Still, Dionysius himself acknowledges his dependence on Hierotheus’ *Hymns on Love*, thus explicitly unifying the source of his doctrine, which the commentators unfortunately multiplied. The most paradigmatic case of this paradox is what de Andia has appropriately called “the spiral of love”² in the first part of *The Divine Names*, chapter IV:

DN IV, 10 / 155, 8-13 Suchla (= Lilla-Moreschini 51)

For all, therefore, the Beautiful and Good is desirable, loved, and beloved. It is because of it and for it that inferiors love (ἐρῶσι) their superiors reversively (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς), and those of the same row love those of the same rank communally (κοινωνικῶς), and superiors love their inferiors providentially (προνοητικῶς), and each loves itself conservatively (συνεκτικῶς). And all, in desiring the Beautiful and Good, do and want all they do and want. (My translation)

In a famous pioneer article, de Vogel tried to trace down these four modes to their respective sources. According to her: (1) the reversive mode refers to Plato’s *erôs* universally extended by Aristotle; (2) the communal mode reveals Pythagorean origins through the words

¹ See Koch (1895) and Stiglmayr (1895). See also Klitenic Wear-Dillon (2007) chapter 5 and Schäfer in Edwards-Pallis-Steiris (2022).

² De Andia (2016) Vol. 1, 462 n. 1.

koinōnia, *homonoia*, and *philia*; (3) the providential mode is a direct heritage from Proclus which finds its Latin counterpart in Boethius' *amor quo caelum regitur*; (4) whilst the conservative mode reminds her rather of the Stoic *oikeiōsis* with a universal application. This spiral of love would thus reveal Dionysius' harmonization of different Greek sources about love. Later commentators have rightly noted that this quadripartite dynamics of *Erōs* is somehow linked to the structural Neoplatonic tripartition of remaining (*monē*), procession (*proodos*), and reversion (*epistrophē*);³ but have therefore irresistibly reduced the quadripartition to a tripartition.⁴ Now, these four different erotic modes of all beings striving after the Beautiful and Good find their direct counterparts in a previous passage, where Dionysius was reciprocally describing the causation of the One Good and Beautiful:

DN IV, 7 / 152, 12-19 Suchla (= L.-M. 45-6)

This “one”, which is good and beautiful at the same time, is the sole cause of beautiful and good things, which are many. From it originate the real existences of all beings (...) the providential activities (πρόνοια) of the superior beings, the agreement (ἀλληλουχία) between the beings belonging to the same row, the turning (ἐπιστροφά) of the inferior beings <towards the superior>, the abodes and foundations (μοναὶ καὶ ἰδρύσεις) of all beings guarding themselves and remaining unmoved...(tr. Lilla-Moreschini slightly modified)

Not only these four ontological and aesthetic modes of procession anticipated the four erotic modes of reversion, but their very order is meaningful, since while Beauty first provides, *Erōs* first reverts. This quadripartite dynamics of reversion, communion, providence and conservation is in fact an omnipresent pattern in *The Divine Names*.⁵ The aim of this paper is then to reunify the spiral of Love (and of Beauty), by explaining the neat reciprocity of its four modes, and finally by attributing its initial systematization to Proclus himself, most probably the “renowned guide and initiator” of Pseudo-Dionysius.⁶

³ See *Elements of Theology* §35.

⁴ See Rist (1966); Corrigan (2018); Ivanović (2019) 35, 38 and 49 (but 30); and Vasilakis (2021) (but 160 n. 4-5).

⁵ See notably *DN IV, 2 / 144, 18-145, 3; 7 / 152, 12-153, 3; 10 / 155, 14-20; 12 / 158, 13-18; and 15 / 161, 1-5.*

⁶ See notably *DN II, 9 / 133, 13 and IV, 15 / 160, 15-16.*

I. The reversion mode of love (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς): Proclus, Plotinus, and Plato

The first erotic mode characterized by the reversion of inferior beings towards their superiors (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς) comes directly from Proclus, drawing on the whole Platonic tradition, as scholars have unanimously acknowledged. But what is more proper to the Proclean conception of love is that this reversion of lower beings is itself ensured by the providence of higher beings leading them:

In Remp. I, 136, 23-26 Kroll

These are the sorts of desires belonging to the greater beings (οἱ τῶν κρειττόνων ἔρωτες): concerned with reversion (ἐπιστρεπτικοί) of the lower beings towards the first things, and with filling (ἀποπληρωτικοί) them with the good things that are in the higher beings themselves, and with bringing to perfection (τελεσιουργοί) those lower than themselves. (tr. Baltzly-Finamore-Miles)

For Proclus, just as for his follower Dionysius, reversion comes from providence and providence comes from reversion: it is because Zeus, the Demiurgic Intellect, contemplates the Intelligible realm symbolized by Mount Ida, that he can revert Hera herself towards this very model. This is a purely Late Neoplatonic conception of love, since from Plato to Plotinus *Erôs* was mainly, if not exclusively, concerned with reversion, being the universal desire for the Good in the human soul according to Socrates-Diotima,⁷ extended by Plotinus to the cosmic soul.⁸ Indeed, for the founder of Neoplatonism, *Erôs* was primarily linked to the Soul desiring the Intellect himself desiring the One, and was only *metaphorically* applied to the One.⁹

⁷ *Smp.* 205a5-9 Burnet: Diotima: "Do you think that this wish (βούλησιν) and this form of love (ἔρωτα) are common (κοινόν) to all human beings, and that everyone wants good things (τάγαθὰ βούλεσθαι) to be his own forever, or what is your view?" Socrates: "Just that," I said; "it's common (κοινόν) to everyone." (tr. Gill).

⁸ *Enn.* III, 2 (47) 3, 31-35 Henry-Schwyzler: "Everything in me desires the Good (ἐφίεται μὲν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ) and each thing attains it in proportion to its own power. For the whole heaven depends on the Good, as does my entire soul and the gods in my parts" (ed. Gerson).

⁹ *Enn.* III, 5 (50) and VI, 9 (9) for the Soul; *Enn.* VI, 7 (38) and VI, 8 (39) for the Intellect. *Contra* Lacrosse (1994) and Pigler (2002) who, drawing on *Enn.* VI, 8 (39) 15, 1-2, speak respectively of a "henological *Erôs*" and a "diffusive *Erôs*" of the One, denying thus Plotinus' *metaphorical* caution (οἶον cf. 15, 5-6). Vasilakis

II. The providential mode of love (προνοητικῶς): Proclus, Syrianus, and Plato

The first reversive mode of love is then closely linked by Proclus and Dionysius to the third erotic mode, characterized by the providence of superior beings for their inferiors (προνοητικῶς). This Proclean “*monstrum*”, according to de Vogel, merging *erōs* with *pronoia* in the oxymoron *erōs pronoētikos*,¹⁰ results from the *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*:

In Alc. 55, 20-56, 4 Westerink

How much more shall we suppose that the primary cause of love lies among the gods (τῆς ἐρωτικῆς ἐν θεοῖς εἶναι τὴν πρωτουργὸν αἰτίαν), “given by a gift divine”, as Socrates himself says in the *Phaedrus*? So gods too love (ἐρῶσιν) gods, the superior their inferiors providentially (προνοητικῶς), and the inferior their superiors, reversively (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς). (tr. O’Neill slightly modified)

We have to bear in mind that it is only in interpreting the specific erotic relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates, that Proclus comes to this very heterodox idea that Socrates must be moved by a *providential* love for Alcibiades in order to *revert* the young boy to the intelligible, just as *Zeus providentially* reverts Hera towards Mount Ida.¹¹

(2021) 43 rightly opposes these views but still discusses “Plotinus’ lack of incongruity with Proclus regarding the issue of providential eros” (63 n. 199 and 68-90). To be clear, whilst Plotinus speaks of the One as an *Erōs* of himself *from the standpoint of (hoion)* the reflexivity of the Intellect lacking of the unity of the One; Proclus never uses such a vocabulary about the One, because he identifies *Erōs* with the third level of the Intelligible gods of his own system, from which Love both *reverts* to the higher gods by an erotic vision or blindness and *proceeds* to the lower gods through an erotic series whose deductive character is foreign to Plotinus (*In Alc.* 30-33, 51-53, and 64-67).

¹⁰ *In Alc.* 44, 11-45, 5 Westerink: the divine lover, just as the intellect, has a *providential erōs* (ὁ ἔρως αὐτῷ προνοητικός).

¹¹ Interestingly enough, in *Platonic Theology* I, §15 Proclus never characterizes directly as an *erōs* the universal providence (πρόνοια) of the gods maintaining all things and providing their inferiors with the Good, even if he compares it with the care (ἐπιμέλεια) that fathers, leaders, and rulers have for their subjects, followers, and offspring. I thank Sonsoles Costero Quiroga for bringing this text to my attention.

It is very likely that this *providential* mode of love theorized by Proclus comes from his beloved master Syrianus and his original interpretation of the *Phaedrus* in light of the *Symposium* and the *First Alcibiades*:

In Phaedr. 35, 7-9 Lucarini-Moreschini

And the fact that Socrates follows Phaedrus and the book (which is an image of images) shows his godlike providential activity (τὴν ὡς θεοῦ προνοητικὴν αὐτοῦ ἐνέργειαν) in relation to young men and his wish to save them (σώζειν). (tr. Baltzly-Share)

Even if in the *Phaedrus* Socrates-Stesichorus described the divine lover as having foresight (*pronoia*) and taking religious care (*therapeia*) of his beloved,¹² Syrianus' reinterpretation of Socrates' providential activity and beneficence (*euergesia*)¹³ led probably to Proclus' innovation and neologism.

III. The communal mode of love (κοινωνικῶς): Proclus, Iamblichus, and Plato

So far, we have seen that the first and third modes of love, namely the reversive (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς) and the providential (προνοητικῶς), in their vertical correlation linking higher and lower beings, spring directly from Proclus. But is it also the case for the second and fourth modes of love, namely the communal (κοινωνικῶς) and the conservative (συνεκτικῶς)? Scholars have struggled with these two instances, sometimes merging them into a unique one, sometimes acknowledging Dionysius' radical originality. Concerning the *erōs koinōnikos*, due to the apparent absence

¹² *Phdr.* 254e5-255a4 Burnet, Socrates-Stesichorus: "now humbled it allows the charioteer with his foresight (προνοία) to lead (...) and the result is that then the soul of the lover follows the beloved in reverence and awe. So because he receives every kind of service (πᾶσαν θεραπείαν), as if equal to the gods, from a lover who is not pretending to be in love but genuinely in this state (τοῦ ἐρῶντος ἀλλ' ἀληθῶς), and because he naturally feels friendship for the man who renders him service (τῷ θεραπεύοντι)..." (tr. Rowe).

¹³ *In Phaedr.* 1, 5-6 L.-M.: "Socrates was sent down into [the realm of] generation as a service (ἐπὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ) to the race of men and the souls of the young" (tr. Baltzly-Share). This corresponds to the first kind of descent of the soul for the salvation (ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ) of things below as exemplified by Pythagoras according to Iamblichus (*De Anima* §29 and *VP passim*). It totally departs from Plotinus' conception of the descent as due to the imperfection of the soul (e.g. *Enn.* V, 1 (10) 1).

of the expression in Proclus, some were tempted to explain it rather by Dionysius' Christianity.¹⁴ On the contrary, we will try to show that this second erotic mode springs again directly from Proclus.

Pseudo-Dionysius attributes explicitly the communal mode of love (κοινωνικῶς) to the beings of the same row (τὰ ὁμόστοιχα) for the beings of the same rank (τῶν ὁμοταγῶν). Now not only these are fully Proclean terms, describing divine beings belonging to the same *taxis*, but Proclus describes several times these *homotageis* in terms of love and cooperation, most significantly, once again, in the case of Zeus and Hera:

In Crat. 169, 1-10 Pasquali (= Abbate p. 504)

The connection (σύζευξις) of the demiurgic Intellect with the life-bearing Causes is three-fold: it is attached to the springs prior to it; it communes with its coordinate orders (ταῖς συστοίχοις) by way of their common nature (ὁμοφυῶς); and it cooperates with those inferior to it. For it communes with Demeter, who is prior to it, through reversion (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς); with Core, who is later, by exercising providential care over her (προνοητικῶς); and with Hera, who is coordinate (συστοίχῳ), by indulging in love with her (ἐρασμίως). For this reason, Zeus is actually said to desire Hera erotically (ἐρᾶν),

As I now desire (ἔραμαι) you (*Il.* 14.328). And she is his lawful wife, but the other two seem unlawful. (tr. Duvick)

While Zeus, the demiurgic Intellect, reverts towards Demeter who is superior to him and provides Core with care as she is inferior to him, he is said to love more appropriately Hera who is coordinated with him

¹⁴ See Rist (1966) 241: he explains this Dionysian addition by the love between the persons of the Trinity and the altruistic love of one's fellow men. De Andia (1996) 161 judges it an absolute novelty: "seul Denys a parlé d'un ἔρωσ κοινωνικός entre égaux". Still de Vogel (1981) 72 attributes it, *en passant*, to Proclus: "and is it not interesting to see how the ἔρωσ κοινωνικός of Proclus, which plays so large a part in Boethius' vision of the cosmic order, in Dionysius' version clearly bears the mathematical features of its Pythagorean origin?". Finally, de Andia (2016) 463, n. 1 recognizes somehow its Proclean inspiration: "cependant C. De Vogel n'a pas vu que Proclus dit aussi que l'effet de l'amour est d'instituer une φιλία entre les êtres et avec le Beau lui-même". Yet Ivanović (2019) 33 returns to the originality thesis: "ἔρωσ κοινωνικός, which is a Dionysius's innovation", though after having quoted Proclus, *PT* I, §24. Vasilakis (2021) 142 still sees it as "an additional possibility to the instances of downwards and upwards eros, familiar to us from Proclus", referring to Ivanović (2015) 130.

(σύστοιχος).¹⁵ Furthermore, in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Proclus even attributes a kind of relational androgyny to the gods of the same ranks which have *common activities*, notably Zeus and Hera (κοινὰ τὰ ἔργα ἐστὶ τοῦ ἄρρενος καὶ θήλεος τῶν ὁμοταγῶν, *In Tim.* I, 46, 22-23). Finally, in the *Elements of Theology* proposition 21, Proclus systematized his taxonomy arguing that “in every order (τάξις) there is some common element (κοινωνία), a continuity (συνέχεια) and identity (ταυτότης) in virtue of which some things are said to be co-ordinate (ὁμοταγῆ) and others not (ἐτεροταγῆ)” (tr. Dodds).

Thus, even if this communal mode of love might go back to Iamblichus' theory of prayer and his insistence on a Pythagorean and theurgic *koinōnia* with gods,¹⁶ himself drawing on Plato's *Symposium* and the cosmological and theological communion praised by Eryximachus,¹⁷ it is really Proclus who most of all systematized this *erōs koinōnikos* between beings belonging to the same rank, and is therefore, for the third time, the direct source of Pseudo-Dionysius.

This becomes crystal clear when we read Pseudo-Dionysius' system of Hierarchies through the lens of Proclus' proposition 21 of the *Elements of Theology*, as has been recently suggested by Lilla-Moreschini's edition.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, Proclus' conception of each *taxis* as being unified by a *koinōnia* and being thus composed by *homotageis* is explicitly echoed by Pseudo-Dionysius hierarchical system. Firstly, each middle term of each Celestial order is said to be ὁμοταγῆς with the two others above and below himself;¹⁹ then the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy is said to mediate κοινωνικῶς between the Celestial Hierarchy and the Hierarchy of the Law;²⁰ and finally, the whole Creation is said to benefit κοινωνικῶς from the procession given by God, whose Trinity is itself linked κοινωνικῶς.²¹ Therefore, not only are Dionysius' Christian triads ordered according to a very Proclean

¹⁵ It is likely that Proclus is notably thinking of the threefold connection Zeus has with his feminine part (mother-wife-daughter) just as Phanes with the three Nights in the *Orphic Rhapsodies*.

¹⁶ *De Myst.* V, 26 (= Clarke-Dillon p. 274-279).

¹⁷ *Smp.* 182c3-4 Pausanias and 188b6-c2 Eryximachus.

¹⁸ Lilla-Moreschini (2018) 51 *apparatus fontium*.

¹⁹ *CH* 26, 19 (Heil-Ritter) for Cherubim between Seraphim and Thrones (see also *EH* 64, 17); *CH* 33, 16 for Authorities between Dominions and Powers; and *CH* 36, 11 for Archangels between Principalities and Angels.

²⁰ *EH* 105, 19 (see also *CH* 36, 14-15 for the third celestial triad).

²¹ *CH* 37, 12 and *DN* 124, 7.

pattern, but they also share a communal mode of love just as Zeus and Hera for Proclus. The mere *literary* absence of the expression *erōs koinōnikos*, at least in the extant Proclean *corpus*, should not have troubled the commentators so much, since, as we have tried to show, the whole idea was already there, and it is very likely that the same would hold for the word, in any of the unfortunately lost texts.²²

IV. The conservative mode of love (συνεκτικῶς): Proclus, the *Chaldean Oracles*, and Plato

The fourth and last mode of love, characterized by conservation of each being for its own sake (συνεκτικῶς) is surely the most enigmatic one, to the extent that many scholars have simply ignored it, or fused it with the second mode of love, or even tried to explain it again through Dionysius' Christianity.²³ On the contrary, we will try to show, once

²² See Perl (2007) 126 n. 35 (*contra* de Vogel): "To argue from this that Dionysius is significantly different from Proclus on this point is to focus on terminology to the exclusion of meaning, for it admits that everything Dionysius *means* by ἔρως is centrally present in Proclus". We would add that the absence of *erōs koinōnikos* in the *Commentary on the First Alcibiades* is not surprising, since it is concerned mostly with the vertical dynamics of the erotic relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades. More surprising is its absence in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* and even in the *Platonic Theology*. But we still think that it is very likely that Proclus might have used it to describe the communion and harmony of the world in his lost *Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles*, a sacred text hugely concerned with *Erōs* as we shall see. Nevertheless, we cannot agree with Perl (2007) 44-45: "thus we find in Proclus the same coinciding of transcendence and immanence that we find in Plotinus' doctrine of the One as productive overflow and in Dionysius' account of divine love. For Plotinus and Proclus, then, the One 'loves' his products (although they do not use this term), in that he is constitutively present to them, providing them with all that they are as the differentiated manifestation of himself"; precisely because as Perl himself acknowledges "to be sure, Dionysius is the first to use the terms ἔρως and ἐκστατικός to express this doctrine, and this terminological innovation may well be inspired by his Christianity". *Erōs* is primarily and fully divine and descending only for Dionysius, as the disciple of saint Paul.

²³ Rist (1966) speaks only of three kinds of love, just as Corrigan (2018) and Vasilakis (2021). Nevertheless, Vasilakis recognizes it in his footnotes. Firstly, he links it with Dionysius' Christianity: "this last possibility, not frequently stated by Dionysius, should be interpreted along the lines of Gospel's 'love your neighbor as yourself' (cf e.g. Mt. 19.19 and Mk 12.31 citing from Lev. 19.18). De Vogel (1963: 16) refers to possible Stoic and Pythagorean connotations." (160 n. 4); then he simply refers to the LSJ indication: "they refer to the occurrence of the word in

again, that this conservative mode of love is directly springing from Proclus, and that it is closely linked with the communal mode of love, *horizontally* so to say, just as the reversive and providential modes were vertically correlated. While Proclus does nowhere, at least in the extant texts, qualify *erôs* as being *koinônikos*, he nonetheless explicitly describes the love of the divine lover exemplified by Socrates as being conservative of his beloved:

In Alc. 55, 12-17 Westerink

Surely that such a love is provident (προνοητικός ἐστὶν ὁ τοιοῦτος ἔρωσ) and preservative of the beloved (σωστικός τῶν ἐρωμένων), able to perfect (τελειωτικός) and maintain (συνεκτικός) them? Surely, that is detached and unmixed, of the form of the good and undefiled? What origin do we ascribe to this characteristic of love (τοῦτο τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ἰδίωμα) in the souls of men, unless it previously pre-exists in the gods? (tr. O'Neill)

Proclus here directly links providential love (ἔρωσ προνοητικός and τελειωτικός) with conservative love (ἔρωσ σωστικός and συνεκτικός). Indeed, in loving Alcibiades in a providential yet detached way, Socrates achieves Alcibiades' own self-preservation, since the boy will be able – thanks to Socrates but on his own – to continue to strive in the best way after the Beautiful and the Good. In other words, Socrates is the cause of Alcibiades' conservation.

Now, what is true for mere human relationship is all the more true for divine relationships. And indeed, the conservative mode of love (συνεκτικῶς) springs directly from the divine Maintainers (*Sunokheis*), whom Proclus ranks in the perfect middle of the Intelligible-Intellective gods, themselves mediating between the Intelligible gods and the Intellective gods. While describing the procession of the triad *pistis-alêtheia-erôs* throughout his whole theological system, Proclus qualifies one mode as "conservative and binding" (συνεκτικῶς καὶ συνδεδεικῶς), which in fact corresponds to the *Sunokheis* of his *Platonic Theology*.²⁴

Proclus, in *Alc.* 52, 7." (160 n. 5) which is worth exploring, as we will try to argue. Ivanović (2019) recognizes the fourth mode but tends to fuse it with the second one.

²⁴ *In Alc.* 30-33 and 51-53. See D'Andrès (2020) 118-136, who nevertheless remains very cautious. According to us, the procession of *Erôs* corresponds very neatly in fact to the whole system of gods developed in the *Platonic Theology*. See also *ET* §13: the Good as conservative (σωστικόν) is identical to the One (σωστικόν καὶ συνεκτικόν).

This is actually a Neoplatonic reinterpretation of the *Chaldean Oracles*, where the Father “sowed the bond of Love heavy with fire (δεσμὸν πυριβριθῆ ἔρωτος) into all things” in order that “with this Love, the elements of the world remain (μένει) on course”.²⁵ This very world maintained by *Erôs* was also ordered by three kinds of entities: the Initiators (*Teletarkhai*), the Maintainers or “Connectives” (*Sunokheis*), and the mysterious *Iyunges*, who respectively ensured its perfection, conservation, and information.²⁶ Such a Middle-Platonic conception might itself be drawing on a harmonization of Plato’s *Timaeus* with the *Symposium* where it is famously stated that the *Erôs-Daimôn* “binds the universe to itself” (τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συνδεδέσθαι).²⁷ But Proclus, in his highly structured theological system, has intentionally placed the *Sunokheis* and their proper *erôs sunektikos* at its very noetic center, ensuring thus the continuity (συνέχεια) and conservation (συνοχή) of both the whole system and the particular beings within it. No doubt that Pseudo-Dionysius was more than happy to find this ultimate and conservative mode of love in Proclus for his own Christian and creationist purpose.

Epilogue: The God-Love: from authority to audacity?

At the end of the day, the four modes of *erôs*, namely on the one hand the reversive (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς) and the providential (προνοητικῶς), and on the other hand the communal (κοινωνικῶς) and the conservative (συνεκτικῶς), spring directly from the authority of Proclus which Pseudo-Dionysius acknowledges repeatedly through the pseudonym of “Hierotheus”. But if the “spiral of love”, thus re-unified, is a full-fledged Proclean theory of love, how is it that it seems not fully formulated as such in the extant Proclean *corpus*? In fact, both *erôs epistreptikos* and *erôs pronoêtikos* were coined in the *Commentary on the First Alcibiades* to explain the erotic relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, and even *erôs sunektikos* was quickly mentioned during a summary of Proclus’ reinterpretation of the Chaldean triad *pistis-alêtheia-erôs*. To venture a hypothesis, we would then suggest that the full spiral of love, including the very *erôs koinônikos*, comes from the lost *Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles* for at least four main

²⁵ OC §39 (= Proclus, *In Tim.* II, 54, 5-16 Diehl = Majercik p. 62-65).

²⁶ See Lewy (2011 [1956]) 126-131 and 345-353, who links *Erôs* and what he calls the “Connectives” (*Sunokheis*).

²⁷ *Smp.* 202e6-7 Burnet.

interconnected reasons: (1) when coining the *erôs sunektikos* Proclus refers explicitly to the *Chaldean Oracles*; (2) the role of *Erôs* in this sacred text was absolutely central; (3) its specific cosmological power and function might well suit Dionysius' own creationist purpose; (4) Dionysius repeatedly refers to the *Logia*, playing precisely on the ambiguity between the Neoplatonic sacred text, that is the *Chaldean Oracles*, and his own Christian sacred Scriptures, that is the *Bible*.²⁸ If this hypothesis is correct, then Pseudo-Dionysius would have merely transposed Proclus' spiral of love from a Chaldean context to a Christian one. But does this dependency necessary mean that Dionysius the Areopagite was a mere plagiarist? Not at all, since just after having endorsed the Proclean spiral of love, he departs from Neoplatonic authority and turns towards Christian audacity:

DN IV, 10 / 155, 14-20 Suchla (= L.-M. 51)

Our true speech dares (παρρησιάσεται...ὁ ἀληθῆς λόγος) also to say that it is due to the excess of its goodness that the universal cause itself loves (πάντων ἐρᾷ), makes (πάντα ποιεῖ), brings to perfection (πάντα τελειοῖ), holds together (πάντα συνέχει) and turns towards itself all things (πάντα ἐπιστρέφει); and due to the good divine love is good and characteristic of a good principle (ὁ θεῖος ἔρωσ ἀγαθὸς ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν). In fact love, the good maker of beings (ὁ ἀγαθοεργὸς τῶν ὄντων ἔρωσ), pre-existing abundantly in the good, does not let it remain unfruitful in itself (ἄγονον ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένειν), but stirs it to action by means of the excess of its generative power (γενητικὴν ὑπερβολήν).

Nobody should believe that we honour particularly the name "eros" against the prescriptions of the oracles (παρὰ τὰ λόγια)...(tr. Lilla-Moreschini)

What was a genuine Neoplatonic and Proclean quadripartition of love ascending *spirally* towards the Beautiful and Good (*DN IV, 10 / 155, 8-13*) is immediately and boldly referred to one unique and universal cause: God himself identified with Love and caring *providentially* for the whole Creation according to the very Christian and Pauline doctrine (*DN IV, 10-12 / 155, 14-158, 18*). By merging Greek *Erôs* with Christian *Agapê*, Dionysius achieves thus a complete reversal of perspectives: while *Erôs* was first and foremost ascending, intermediary, and *reversive* for the whole Platonic tradition, the Areopagite fuses it

²⁸ See Saffrey (1979) 12 and Klitenic Wear-Dillon (2007) 13 and n. 45.

with God himself and his *Agapê*, taking care of his Creation by a *provident*, productive, and descending love which ensures the procession, remaining, and reversion of all things back to himself according to the very Neoplatonic scheme. Going back to “Hierotheus”, he then distinguishes a twofold love: the Divine Love for the Creation (ὁ θεῖος ἔρωσ) and the Universal Love of the Creation for God (ὁ ὀλικὸς ἔρωσ; 161, 6-16), which he finally fuses into a unique simple power (μία τις ἔστιν ἀπλῆ δύναμις, 162, 1-5) revolving on itself like an eternal circle (ὥσπερ τις ἀίτιδος κύκλος, 160, 11-15).²⁹ Such a Divine Love springing constantly out of God (*theios erôs ekstatikos*, 158, 19) is the real coinage of Dionysius which makes him a true Christian believing in God’s descending Love, Christ’s philanthropic Incarnation, and Paul’s ecstatic revelation.³⁰

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²⁹ See Miller (1986) 483-521 and Karfik (2021).

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