

# Marsilio Ficino and Nicholas of Methone on Platonic Theology

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Marsilio Ficino concludes a passage discussing the contrast between the two principles named the “one-many” (*unum multa*) and the “absolute one” (*simpliciter unum*) respectively with an important remark:

For if there were to be a multitude in it [sc. the first One], to speak in the Platonic manner, this will not be the One itself but something made one and consequently will be made one not by itself but by the absolute One itself that is superior, in the way that something formed has the source

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1 The following editions have been used for the citation of texts in this essay: Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*, ed. A.D. Angelou (Athens / Leiden: Academy of Athens / Brill, 1984); Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato*, vol. 2, *Parmenides*, ed. M. Vanhaelen (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2012); Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plotinus*, vols. 5–6 *Ennead III–IV*, ed. S. Gersh (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2017–2018); Marsilio Ficino, *Plotini divini [...] De rebus philosophicis libri LIII in Enneades sex distributi, a Marsilio Ficino e graeca lingua in Latinam versi et ab eodem doctissimis commentariis illustrata* (Basel: Pietro Perna, 1559); Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, vols. 1–6, ed. M.J.B. Allen, J. Hankins (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2001–2006); Marsilio Ficino, *On Dionysius the Areopagite*, vols. 1–2, ed. M.J.B. Allen (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2015); Marsilio Ficino, *Platonis Opera Omnia quae extant Marsilio Ficino interprete [...]* (Frankfurt: Claude Marne and Johann Aubry's heirs, 1602). Notes regarding the Ficino editions: 1. I have replaced the translations in most of these editions with my own versions and I have occasionally emended the texts (where noted below); 2. Citations from parts of the Plotinus commentary outside my edition published so far are according to the chapter and page numbering in the standard but corrupt *Marsilii Ficini [...] Opera et quae hactenus extitere et quae in lucem nunc primum prodire omnia [...]* (Basel: Heinrich Petri, 1576—photographic reprints: Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus 1959, and later). For *Enneads* v–vi, the chapter-numbering in this edition is identical with that in the forthcoming volumes of my edition.

of its formation elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> However, Nicholas the Greek theologian and bishop of Methone clearly shows how the Platonic arguments removing a multitude from the first principle do not count against the Christian Trinity in which, with the simplicity and unity of its nature maintained, a certain relation alone produces distinction albeit without any composition: something we also indicate briefly in certain annotations on his work.<sup>3</sup>

This passage is interesting for a number of reasons: in the first place, because it provides evidence of Ficino's reading not only of such philosophical and theological authors from the Byzantine world as Michael Psellos and Gemistos Plethon but also of the twelfth-century bishop Nicholas of Methone, and more importantly because the very work of the bishop that is here alluded to—the *Refutation (Anaptyxis) of Proclus' Elements of Theology*—survives in one MS—Paris, BnF, gr 1256—equipped with Ficino's own Latin glosses on its first five leaves.<sup>4</sup> In addition, that Ficino seemingly goes out of his way to cite his own manuscript annotations at a crucial point in his discussion of what is arguably the pivotal text of Platonic theology seems to underline the importance of the doctrinal issues raised. In fact, the Florentine commentator at least by this time in his career<sup>5</sup> seems to refer only to earlier works of his that have already been

2 In other words, the attribution of multiplicity to the first one would—in a self-contradictory manner—render it simultaneously a first and a second one.

3 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, c. 56. 6, II, p. 46: *Si enim multitudo sit in eo, ut platonice loquar, non unum ipsum erit sed unitum nec a seipso unitum—sicut et quod formatum est aliunde formatum—igitur ab ipso simpliciter uno superiore erit unitum. Quomodo vero platonicae rationes multitudinem primo tollentes Christianae trinitati non detrahant in qua, servata penitus simplicitate et unitate naturae, relatio quaedam sola quandam distinctionem facit, compositionem vero nullam, Nicolaus theologus Graecus Methones episcopus evidenter ostendit ac nos in annotationibus quibusdam in eum breviter designamus.*

4 On this manuscript see M. Sicherl, "Neuentdeckte Handschriften von Marsilio Ficino und Johannes Reuchlin", in *Scriptorium* 16 (1962), pp. 50–61, at p. 61, no. 23; J. Monfasani, "Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy", in M.J.B. Allen, V. Rees (with M. Davies) (eds), *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy* (Leiden: Brill 2002), pp. 179–202, at pp. 200–201—for the transcription of the Ficinian glosses in this article see below—; and C. Förstel, "Marsilio Ficino e il Parigino Greco 1816 di Plotino", in S. Gentile, S. Toussaint (eds), *Marsilio Ficino. Fonte, testi, fortuna. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Firenze 1–3 ottobre 1999)* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura 2006), pp. 65–88.

5 Ficino wrote the definitive version of his commentary on the *Parmenides* between 1492 and 1494, although there may well have been earlier drafts. See P.O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum. Marsilii Ficini Florentini philosophi platonici opuscula inedita et dispersa* (Florence: Olschki, 1937), I, cxx. The commentary was printed for the first time in 1496.

printed: i.e. especially the *Platonic Theology* and *De Amore* (commentary on the *Symposium*).<sup>6</sup>

The cross-reference in the *Parmenides* commentary to the glosses on the *Anaptyxis* noted above<sup>7</sup> is actually embedded in a more complex system of intertextual allusions that needs to be summarized before we turn to the important philosophical and theological questions that Ficino wishes to address.<sup>8</sup> The intertextual framework indicated by the latter's various explicit citations has the following components:<sup>9</sup> *a.* Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, referring to Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* which in its turn refers to Plato's *Parmenides*—this material in conjunction with Nicholas of Methone *Anaptyxis*;<sup>10</sup> *b.* Ficino's *Commentary on Plotinus' Enneads* referencing Plotinus' *Enneads*—this material again in conjunction with Nicholas of Methone's *Anaptyxis*;<sup>11</sup> *c.* Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* referring to Ficino's *Commentary on Plotinus' Enneads*.<sup>12</sup> The contexts of Ficino's cross-references also include citations of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus (or unspecified *Scotisti*)<sup>13</sup> and—in this case both directly and indirectly via the *Anaptyxis*—of Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory Nazianzen.<sup>14</sup>

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- 6 These were printed in 1482 and 1484 respectively. Ficino does on rare occasions refer to writings still in manuscript form: for instance, in the Plotinus commentary he mentions his commentary on Priscianus Lydus' *Metaphrasis*. However, this was at the time undoubtedly a more substantial and organized work clearly destined for publication, eventually appearing in print together with the version of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* and other Platonic *opuscula* in 1497. By contrast, we do not know to what kind of "work in progress" (if any) the extant glosses on Nicholas of Methone were intended to contribute.
- 7 The glosses must be dated before 1492 since they are also used (if not explicitly cited) in the commentary on Plotinus first printed in that year. On the latter work see below.
- 8 Obviously, an understanding of Ficino's relation to Proclus is an important component in understanding the broader context here. Materials fundamental to this issue have been studied especially by H.-D. Saffrey, "Notes platoniciennes de Marsile Ficin dans un manuscrit de Proclus (Cod. Riccardianus 70)", in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et de Renaissance* 21 (1959), pp. 161–184; D. Robichaud, "Fragments of Marsilio Ficino's Translations and Use of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* and *Elements of Physics*: Evidence and Study", in *Vivarium* 54 (2016), pp. 46–107. For a useful general survey see M.J.B. Allen, "Marsilio Ficino", in S. Gersh (ed.), *Interpreting Proclus. From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 353–379.
- 9 That is, in addition to the obvious reference of Nicholas' *Anaptyxis* to Proclus' *Elements of Theology*.
- 10 See Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 6 and 57. 7, 11, p. 46, 54–56.
- 11 See Ficino, *In Enneadem*, v. 3. 12 and (implicitly) v. 6. 3.
- 12 See Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 57. 4, 11, pp. 50–52.
- 13 See Ficino, *In Enneadem*, v. 3. 12 and v. 6. 3.
- 14 See Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 57. 7 and (implicitly) 57. 8, 11, pp. 54–56 and 56–58. Of course,

A careful comparison of the material in these cross-references not only indicates the extraordinarily high level of hermeneutical complexity that Platonic studies had reached at their peak towards the end of the fifteenth century but also pinpoints the philosophical-theological topics that were for Ficino most urgent and which we should therefore consider in some detail in the present essay. These topics are: first, the relation between God and multiplicity in Platonism and the relations within the divine Trinity of Christianity;<sup>15</sup> second, the dynamic character of relations within the divine Trinity and between the divine Trinity and the created world;<sup>16</sup> and third, comparison of the divine Trinity of Christianity with the “false” trinity of post-Plotinian *platonici*.<sup>17</sup>

## 2 Translation of Ficino’s Autograph Notes in MS Paris, BnF, gr 1256<sup>18</sup>

Before turning to these three philosophical topics developed in relation to the bishop of Methone’s text by Ficino, it will perhaps be useful for the reader to have a full English translation of the relevant glosses:

1. P 2r at R 4. 3–18: ἀρχόμενος ... ἀνακαθαίρουσιν

He says the Proclus erred because he contradicted himself, saying that every multitude wholly participates in unity, and then that unity is un-participated. He also erred because he says that the One itself is outside of all number, while nevertheless saying that it was the First One, given that what is first is related to subsequent things and coordinated with them.

2. P 2r at R 4. 21: Διούσιον. Dionysius.

3. P 2r at R 4. 21–30: Dionysius says that the Divinity is both one and three; also, that neither the one nor the three is numerable, but that they are above such things, being also their cause and measure.

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Ficino also had an extensive direct knowledge of Dionysius the Areopagite on whom he eventually wrote a formal commentary (printed s. d. but probably in 1496 or 1497).

15 See Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56–57, II, pp. 36–58.

16 See Ficino, *In Enneadem*, v. 3. 12 and. v. 6. 3.

17 See Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, c. 58. 1, II, pp. 58–62.

18 I have relied upon the transcription by Monfasani, albeit proposing one minor correction. For the reader’s convenience, the numbering introduced by this scholar (##1–15) has been retained. Also following Monfasani, the notation *P* = the MS Paris, BnF Gr 1256, and the notation *R* = Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation of Proclus’ Elements of Theology* [see note 1].

4. P 2 r at R 4. 31–5. 3: The divine Trinity is not measured by number and does not participate in unity, this being the property of number. However, the Trinity is not a number.

5. P 2 r at R 5. 5–15: The Nazianzen says that the Divinity is also a trinity on the grounds that it is a unity and *vice versa*, this being because it does not lack [*careat coni.*, *caveat Monfasani*] the good things that come from it. Fertility and self-motion are good things: that is to say, they are in God. For if God were infertile, whence would fertility arise? If he were immobile, whence would motion arise? These could not come about from another beginning, since there are not two beginnings. Therefore, fertility and motion are in God. But motion in God signifies actual effecting. Therefore, the Nazianzen says that “unity from the beginning having moved towards a duality emerges in the end as a trinity”. Therefore, because it is a unity—indeed, a unity that is fertile and self-moving—it is therefore a trinity, and because it is a trinity that is not numerable but is the cause and measure of number, it is therefore the One itself above number, essence, and intellect.

6. P 2 r at R 5. 10–11: The Nazianzen

7. P 2 v at R 5. 20–6. 6: The divine Trinity is above every multitude, even a multitude that is imagined. Therefore, it is not included in that proposition which says “Every multitude ... etc.” and does not participate in unity but is the One itself. Rather, it is above the quantitative unity that is divided in opposition to multitude. A proposition of Proclus follows concerning the multitude that is opposed to unity and concerning the unity that is opposed to multitude. For these things are coordinated, whereas God is not coordinated.

8. P 3 r at R 6. 17–21: Dionysius says that the soul has an intellect by which it perceives intelligible things, and also a unity superior to intellect by which it is united in an ineffable manner with the divine unity which is above intellect and intelligible things.

9. P 3 r at R 7. 6–8: The divine Trinity does not participate in unity, for it itself is unity in itself. Moreover, the Trinity itself is in a formal sense the beginning of all union and number in things.

10. P 3 v at R 7. 23–24: Unity itself is in the divine Trinity and in each Person. And the Trinity is the Unity itself.

11. P 3v at R 8. 4–16: In the Trinity, neither does union produce a confusion of the Persons nor does the difference of the Persons produce separation. Moreover, one should not say that the Trinity is something unified but that it is both unity itself and the Trinity itself above essence, and that it is not only above quantitative number and essential composition but also above all union and division that can be thought about. And since it exists above all things as the cause of all, it is coordinated with none. It does not fall under the proposition concerning things to be enumerated among everything unified: that is, when it is said: “Everything that is unified ... etc.”

12. P 4r at R 8. 23–27: We say that unity itself in God is the Trinity itself, neither dividing the unity itself on account of the Trinity nor confusing the Trinity on account of the essential or rather super-essential unity.

13. P 4v at R 9. 17–29: That every multitude is after the One follows from the multitude that is distinct from the One and participates in it and in some way is coordinated and compared with the One. But in God the Trinity itself is the Unity itself, this very thing being superior to every unity and multitude that can be coordinated or on the other hand be distinguished.

14. P 4v at R 10. 3–4: Proclus understands the multitude of unities to be a number of gods.

15. P 5r at R 10. 8–17: Where multitude is, there is a thing separated from unity itself but composed of unities or unified things. However, the same Divinity is both unity and Trinity. In this Trinity there is one essence, power, act, and will, the distinction being however only through hypostatic properties.

### 3 Three Principal Topics within Ficino’s Response to Nicholas of Methone

#### 3.1 *The Relation between God and Multiplicity and the Relations within the Divine Trinity*

The first of our selected topics is that of the relation between God and multiplicity in Platonism and the relations within the divine Trinity of Christianity. This is for Ficino by far the most important topic, being explored in almost all of his glosses on the *Anaptyxis* and in the arguments of chapters 56–57 of his com-

mentary on the *Parmenides*, chapter 12 of his commentary on *Ennead* v.3, and chapter 3 of that on *Ennead* v.6. Its starting-point is—following Plato: *Parmenides* 137c—the first negative conclusions of the first *suppositio* (= hypothesis) of the second part of the dialogue: “If there is a One, that One will certainly not be many, and therefore neither should there be any part of it nor should it itself be a whole” (“si unum est, non utique multa erit ipsum unum (...) neque igitur partem esse illius aliquam neque totum ipsum esse oportet”).<sup>19</sup> Through Nicholas’ *Anaptyxis* these conclusions are connected by Ficino especially with the propositions of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* comprising the statement<sup>20</sup> that every multitude somehow ( $\pi\eta$ ) participates in the One, and including the statement<sup>21</sup> that the One is un-participated ( $\acute{\alpha}\mu\acute{\epsilon}\theta\epsilon\chi\tau\omicron\nu$ ).<sup>22</sup> The relation to Christian dogma was obviously underscored for Ficino by Nicholas’ remark in the same passage that Proclus was perhaps scoffing at the worshippers of the Trinity in elaborating these propositions<sup>23</sup> and is reinforced by his subsequent reference to Dionysius’ statement that Christians worship a God who is both one and three and neither one nor three.<sup>24</sup>

The teaching of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* that the One has no multitude (or number) and no opposition of whole and parts<sup>25</sup> leads, in the various texts embodying Ficino’s commentary, to the consideration primarily of three questions. The first relevant question might be formulated as: “Of what principle or principles can the multitude denied of the primary One conversely be affirmed?” The answer in the *Parmenides* commentary is that multitude is here asserted “of the second principle: that is, the intellectual and intelligible multitude: that is, a multiplicity such as that which befits the first intellect which knows itself being replete with the Ideas and the Genera, and likewise befits the pure and divine intellects that follow”.<sup>26</sup> The nature of this second principle is further clarified in a passage of the same work where Ficino contrasts the nature of opposition in relation to a “subject” (*subiectum*) and in

19 Ficino, *Platonis Opera Omnia* 1117.

20 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 1, 2, 1–14.

21 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 24, 28, 8–20.

22 Ficino, annotation #1 on Nicholas of Methone, *Anaptyxis*, 4, 3–18. In this passage Nicholas also notes the remark within the proof of prop. 5, 6, 2–3 that multitude in every way ( $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\eta$ ) participates in the One.

23 Nicholas of Methone, *Anaptyxis*, 4, 3–18.

24 Nicholas of Methone, *Anaptyxis*, 4, 3–18 4, 19–24 (citing (Ps.-)Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus*, 13, 3, 980c–981d).

25 For denial of multitude see Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56–58, 11, pp. 36–62; for denial of number, *In Parmenidem*, 57, 4 and 57, 7, 11, pp. 50–52 and 54–56; for denial of whole and parts, *In Parmenidem*, 57, 1–3, 11, pp. 48–50.

26 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56, 5, 11, p. 44: *de secundo: id est, intellectualem intelligibilemque*

relation to “essence” (*essentia*) respectively. In the latter case, “just as the multitude is not separate from union, so is the one not separated from the multitude (...) insofar as it is a one, it cannot be many, although, insofar as it is a unity of a multitude, it can certainly be called ‘the One-Many.’”<sup>27</sup> The final phrase allows us to identify more precisely the principle which Ficino has in these passages described as the first intellect and as an inseparable unity and multitude, since his words recall a foundational doctrine stated in his *Platonic Theology*. Here, a doctrine is attributed to the Pythagoreans of “five levels of all things” (*quinque rerum omnium gradus*): in ascending order, body which is “many” (*multa*), “quality” which is “many and one” (*multa et unum*), soul which is “one and many” (*unum et multa*), “angel” which is “one-many” (*unum multa*), and God who is “one” (*unum*).<sup>28</sup>

After identifying the multitude denied of God in the *Parmenides* with the multitude affirmed of angel(s),<sup>29</sup> a second pertinent question might be formulated as: “What kind of multitude is denied of God but affirmed of angel(s)?” Here, we can perhaps best trace the development of Ficino’s much more complicated response—in both the commentary on the *Parmenides* and in that on the *Enneads*—by distinguishing the following points: *a*. The multitude is determined by *ratio* (“reason” or “reason-principle”); *b*. the multitude is an evolving triad comprising: *b1* being, life, and intellect, or *b2* number, Genera, and Ideas; *c*. the multitude is an order of intellectual unities. In developing these points, Ficino is elaborating the second negative conclusion of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*: that the One cannot have parts or be a whole.

*a. The multitude is determined by ratio*

Three passages from the commentary on the *Parmenides* elaborate this concept: first, Ficino notes that the various constituents of the second principle “are in reality one substance, although they differ there accord-

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*multitudinem: id est, multiplicatam talem qualis convenit intellectui primo seipsum intelligenti idearum generumque pleno, eademque sequentibus convenit intellectibus puris atque divinis.*

27 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 6, II, pp. 44–46: *sicut multitudo non est seorsum ab unione, ita nec unum seorsum a multitudine (...) neque qua ratione unum est esse potest multa, sed qua condicione est multitudinis unum, hac utique “unum multa” nominari potest.*

28 Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, I. 1. 2 and III. 1. 1, I, pp. 14–16 and 212.

29 We here employ the graphism “angel(s)” in order to account for the ambivalent unity and multiplicity indicated by the phrase *unum* [no connective *et*] *multa*. On this point see further the discussion below. At *Platonic Theology*, I. 5. 10–14, I, pp. 72–78, Ficino cites the authority of Aristotle, Avicenna, and Dionysius for the innumerable character of the angelic *gradus*.

ing to a certain reason-principle” (“re ipsa unam esse substantiam, haec autem ibi quadam ratione differre”);<sup>30</sup> second, he informs us that these constituents “are ideal reason-principles, differing among themselves in an absolute way, of the properties of lower things” (“ideales inferiorum proprietatum rationes sunt absolute inter se differentes”);<sup>31</sup> third, Ficino notes that “certain reason-principles of nature are inherent in and precedent in the first formal being which is the source of the many beings” (“in primo ente formali entium multorum fonte naturales quaedam rationes inessent atque praecedent”).<sup>32</sup> A fundamental doctrine of the Florentine—especially prominent in the commentary on Plotinus—is clearly at issue here. According to this, the emanation of the five levels of reality is coordinated with and by a descending series of reason-principles consisting primarily of the ideal, formal, and seminal types.<sup>33</sup> On the second or angelic level there is probably to be understood an emanative transition from an absolute status of reason-principles in the angelic essence to an ideal status in the angelic mind proper.<sup>34</sup>

*b1. The multitude is an evolving triad comprising being, life, and intellect.*

Ficino also explains that the second principle is structured internally as a dynamic triad beginning with essence—or the intelligible—and ending with intellect. “For since the first essence possesses all the perfections of essence, it possesses life and intellect ... we are compelled to join the intellect to the intelligible in the same essence ... this is the universal intelligible sphere of which Parmenides sings in his poem.”<sup>35</sup> The reference to Parmenides emphasizes the agreement with respect to this doctrine between Plato and the earlier philosophical tradition. The Florentine adds that “these differentiae should be placed within the first being, although they indeed do not unfold at the first level, where being

30 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 1, II, pp. 36–38.

31 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 2, II, pp. 38–40.

32 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 57. 4, II, pp. 50–52.

33 There are various further complications in that the ideal reason-principles are identical with absolute reason-principles, the lines of demarcation between the levels are somewhat fluid, and there is additionally a single material reason-principle.

34 From the cognitive viewpoint, a concurrent transition from notional to real distinctions is also to be understood.

35 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 1, II, pp. 36–38: *essentia enim prima cum omnes perfectiones essentiae habeat, vitam habet et intellectum (...) intellectum cum intelligibili in eadem essentia copulare coacti (...) universam hanc sphaeram intelligibilem Parmenides in poemate canit.*

*simpliciter* resides, but at a certain subsequent level, where it proceeds through life and intelligence.”<sup>36</sup> The differentiae mentioned here correspond to the items mentioned in the next passage.

*b2. The multitude is an evolving triad comprising number, Genera, and Ideas*

Ficino further explains that the dynamic triad which structures the second principle internally also begins with number—i.e. the multitude—and ends with the Ideas.

How, just as the One precedes being, so does multitude or number in the intelligible world precede the numerous beings and all the compositions of wholes ... we have stated sufficiently in commenting on Plotinus in his books *On the Ideas*, *On the Genera of Beings*, and *On Numbers*.<sup>37</sup>

The agreement with respect to this doctrine between Plato and the later philosophical tradition is underlined by the reference to Plotinus. The commentator further notes that “surely the five Genera unfold more broadly in the essence that is now living, the Ideas doing so rather in the living thing that is now intellectual, for within essence these things are hardly differentiated, although the properties that are generally necessary to all beings are inherent there.”<sup>38</sup>

*c. The multitude is an order of intellectual unities.*

An extended passage in the commentary on the *Parmenides* develops this idea. Here, Ficino argues that the primal cause of multitude—i.e. the absolute One—is also the source of union, and also that the multitude that is at issue here is not a particular kind of multitude but “certain unities propagated and distributed everywhere by the absolute One itself in its fertility” (“unitates quaedam ab ipsa simpliciter unitate fecunde

36 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 2, II, pp. 38–40: *differentias illas in ente primo ponendas, sed eas non primo quidem gradu quo simpliciter ens est, sed sequente quodam gradu quo per vitam intelligentiamque progreditur explicari.*

37 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 57. 4, II, pp. 50–52: *quomodo vero sicut unum antecedit ens, sic et multitudo vel numerus in mundo intelligibili antecedit entia numerosa et compositiones totorum quaslibet (...) satis in libris De Ideis, et Generibus Entis et Numeris diximus cum Plotino.*

38 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 2, II, pp. 38–40: *quinque sane genera in essentia iam vivente, ideae potius in vivo iam intellectuali latius explicantur. Vix enim in essentia discernuntur; insunt tamen ibi propria cunctis entibus communiter necessaria.*

propagatae passim atque distributae”).<sup>39</sup> Ficino continues by noting the difference between the Platonic and Peripatetic teachings regarding the priority or non-priority of unity and being. The passage then concludes by saying that beings obtain their existence from the absolute One, their determinateness from the first being,<sup>40</sup> and their multiplicity “only from the absolute One by which the number of the unities also is infused into beings” (“ab ipso solum simpliciter uno a quo et unitatum numerus entibus est infuses”).<sup>41</sup> Another fundamental doctrine of the Florentine—elaborated most fully in the commentary on Dionysius—is here under review. According to this doctrine, the multitude of emanative unities constituting the second principle which is infused by the absolute One corresponds to a multitude of the intellectual unities through which the angels are joined to God. It is through these unities that the angels receive the supernatural light and enjoy their creator albeit without fully comprehending his mysteries.<sup>42</sup>

We have argued that the teaching of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*—i.e. that the One has no multitude (or number) and no opposition of whole and parts—leads to the consideration primarily of three questions in the various texts embodying Ficino’s commentary. The third relevant question might be formulated as:

How does the denial of multitude to the primary One in Platonism—in whatever way that multitude is understood by them—impinge upon the Christian attribution of relational number to the Trinity?

In order to answer this question, we should recall Ficino’s view that the Platonic arguments removing a multitude from the first principle do not count against the Christian Trinity in which a certain relation alone produces distinction within the divine simplicity and that this point had been well established by Nicholas of Methone. Now, although Ficino to the greatest extent stands by this statement, he does make a tentative step towards establishing a *rap-*

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39 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 57. 5, II, pp. 52–54. The word *fecundae* transcribed by Vanhaelen from the 1496 edition is probably a typological variant of *fecundē* (adverb) which here perhaps makes better sense both syntactically and doctrinally.

40 On this “first being” (*primum ens*) see below.

41 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 57. 5, II, pp. 52–54.

42 On this doctrine see Ficino, *In De Divinis Nominibus*, 21. 3, I, pp. 146–148; et 99. 2–4, I, pp. 336–338. It is also mentioned in his annotation #8 on the *Anaptyxis*.

*prochement* between Platonists and Christians on this issue in the *Parmenides* commentary. Here, in noting that  $\langle a \rangle$  according to the former, in relation to the primal One multitude is judged to be “not so much opposite as different” (“non tam opposita ... quam diversa”) and  $\langle b \rangle$  that according to the latter, there is in the Trinity “a certain relation” (*relatio quaedam*) that produces distinction without composition<sup>43</sup> he seems to suggest an approximation between the peculiar differentiation within the Platonic duality of first principles and the relational number within the triune godhead. In the Plotinus commentary, as we shall see, he moves a little further along this path of *rapprochement*.

### 3.2 *The Dynamic Character of the Trinity's Internal and External Relations*

In connection with the second of our selected topics<sup>44</sup>—the dynamic character of relations within the divine Trinity and between the divine Trinity and the created world—, we should turn to the other work of Ficino that refers to Nicholas of Methone: that is, the commentary on Plotinus' *Enneads*, the relevant passages occurring in the commentaries on *Ennead* v. 3, c. 12 and on v. 6, c. 3.<sup>45</sup> In Ficino's discussion of treatise v. 3, the reference is quite explicit. Having brought into question the best discursive attempts to grasp the intratrinitarian relations, he concludes that “a mystery must be believed in relation to the divinity, as Nicholas the Greek philosopher maintains strenuously against Proclus”.<sup>46</sup> The passage in the *Anaptyxis* to which Ficino's annotations #7–8 are attached seems to be loosely paraphrased here.<sup>47</sup> In Ficino's discussion of treatise v. 6, the reference is more indirect. Ficino here explains that

43 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 6, II, pp. 44–46.

44 For the three topics see p. 425.

45 The commentary on Plotinus is one of the most important (but hitherto least studied) of Ficino's works and—together with his commentary on Dionysius the Areopagite—can be seen as the definitive statement of his later philosophy. Introductions to the Plotinus commentary can be found in S. Gersh, “Marsilio Ficino as Commentator on Plotinus. Some Case Studies”, in S. Gersh (ed.), *Plotinus' Legacy. The Transformation of Platonism from the Renaissance to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 19–43; S. Gersh, “Styles and Methods of Philosophical Interpretation in Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plotinus”, in A. Corrias, E. del Soldato (eds), *Harmony and Contrast. Plato and Aristotle in the Early Modern Period* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2022), pp. 17–40; S. Gersh, “Analytical Studies” in the two volumes of the edition of the commentary on *Enneads* III–IV [see note 1]; A. Corrias, *The Renaissance of Plotinus. The Soul and Human Nature in Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Enneads* (London: Routledge, 2020).

46 Ficino, *In Enneadem*, v. 3. 12: *mysterium denique divinitati credendum, quod et Nicolaus Graecus philosophus defendit strenue contra Proclum*.

47 Nicholas of Methone, *Anaptyxis*, 5,16–7.2.

“the divine Trinity (as Dionysius the Areopagite establishes and Gregory Nazianzen asserts) is the same as unity itself there [sc. in the godhead]”, adding that this can be grasped through the analogy of light and heat forming a unity in heaven.<sup>48</sup> The development of the commentator’s argument surrounding this passage—with its telling doxographical reference—directs us clearly to his annotations #2–6 (especially #5) and the passage in the *Anaptyxis* to which they are attached.<sup>49</sup> Leaving aside the rather vague and generic character of the reference to the divine mystery, we will here concentrate on the major philosophical-theological issues raised primarily by annotation 5.

Ficino’s annotation deals primarily with two issues: *a.* that of the fertility and motion of the godhead vested in its motion from unity through duality to trinity, this being expanded in the Plotinus commentary into a discussion centred on the divine *act*; *b.* that of the number of the godhead which is rather what transcends and is the source of number, the Plotinus commentary expanding this into discussion centred on the divine *number*. In a formal sense, both passages in the commentary interweave a discussion of the unity and plurality of the first principle’s act with a discussion of the relational number applicable to the Trinity and with the introduction of various analogies between the created and the creator.

In his commentary on *Ennead* v. 3, c. 12, Ficino explores the relationship between the divine act and the divine number in such a manner as to emphasize the continuity between the internal and the external act.<sup>50</sup> The exegetical starting-point is Plotinus’ criticism of certain anonymous Platonists who within the first principle “posit an essence that is indeed one but a multitude of acts absolutely distinct from one another” (“essentiam quidem unam ponunt, actus vero multos inter se absolute distinctos”).<sup>51</sup> Ficino argues that the Greek writer first performs a *reductio ad absurdum* on his opponents’ thesis, and then states his own position: namely, that the principle which is absolutely one produces all things—and especially, being, life, and intelligence—“without any act

48 Ficino, *In Enneadem*, v. 6. 3: *divina Trinitas (ut Dionysius Areopagita confirmat et Gregorius Nazianzenus asserit) idem ibi est quod et ipsa unitas.*

49 Nicholas of Methone, *Anaptyxis*, 4.19–5.15.

50 The identity of the first principle’s internal and external acts is indicated by two arguments to be considered below: 1. The first principle’s production without any act of a mediative nature; and 2. The multiplication of the first principle’s act by the variety of its imitability. On these points, see below.

51 Ficino notes here that Plotinus’ argument “does not apply” (*nihil pertinere*) to the divine Thomas [Aquinas] when distinguishing the Trinity according to relations, but that its applicability to the corresponding Scotist teaching is doubtful. See the note below regarding the commentary on *Ennead* v. 6. 3.

that is mediative" ("nullo actu ... medio") but "with the stability itself of his most absolute simplicity" ("ipsomet simplicitatis absolutissimae statu")<sup>52</sup>—this statement indicates the identification of the internal or external acts or at the very least their emanative continuity with one another. The Florentine does not expand on the significance of this conception which was clearly intended by Plotinus to indicate that the first principle's unitary act—despite the determinate individual actualizations of subsequent terms—does not itself involve any inclination or decline. Rather, the commentator simply uses the obvious rejection of any attribution of number or composition to the first principle implied in Plotinus' account of the latter's unitary act to introduce a comparison with the words: "But the number of the relations discovered by Christian authors does not at all do this" ("relationum vero numerus apud Christianos inventus id minime facit"). In other words, the relational number attributed to the Trinity by Christian thinkers is not to be understood as the compounding mathematical number rightly denied by Plotinus with respect to his first principle. The remainder of this chapter then summarizes the doctrine of Trinitarian number: first, negatively by arguing that this number is not found in any beings, categories, or transcendentals, cannot be imagined, and does not occur in essences, forms, or qualities. It is rather necessary to turn to "divine authority" (*divina auctoritas*) for some illumination: that is, by arguing affirmatively that the number is of persons or of properties,<sup>53</sup> or that we are dealing with distinction according to relation or an absolute distinction.

In this chapter of the commentary on *Ennead* v. 3, Ficino has basically contrasted an interpretation of Plotinus' doctrine of the unitary act of the first principle with an account of the Christian teaching about the relational number of the triune God. His approach is to suggest that the two approaches are merely different from or even complementary to one another. However, in the chapter of the commentary on *Ennead* v. 6, Ficino uses Plotinus' discussion as the basis for a more constructive development which brings the pagan and Christian positions into greater alignment. Here, we discover that the notion of the first principle's unitary act can be linked with the trinitarian number through the notion of infinite power.

Examination of the relationship between the divine act and the divine number from this slightly different angle begins in the first section of the commentary on *Ennead* v. 6, c. 3.<sup>54</sup> The exegetical starting-point is now Plotinus' view

52 See note 51 above.

53 Ficino means: father, son, spirit (= persons) and fatherhood, sonship, spiration (= properties).

54 Ficino, *In Enneadem*, v. 6. 3.

that distinction among forms within intellect's understanding of itself, "even if no relation has there been added to them" ("etiam si nulla illic relatio<sup>55</sup> illis accesserit"), is incompatible with the first principle's simplicity. The combination of the notions of absence of multiplicity and absence of relation leads Ficino to explain the doctrine somewhat redolent of Thomism whereby the first principle does not itself possess a plurality of forms by somehow understanding that plurality. Rather, "it sees all things by looking into itself through its one form and in a single act: that is, considering its most simple form as something imitated by different things in various ways" ("per unam sui formam actu unico se inspiciens omnia conspicit, videlicet simplicissimam formam suam considerans aliter ab aliis atque aliter imitandam")<sup>56</sup>—another statement clearly indicating the identification of the internal or external acts or at the very least their emanative continuity with one another. Before proceeding further, Ficino is careful to note that the Platonic teaching that formed the starting-point of his excursion into Christian theology, if not identical with the latter, is at least not opposed to it.

In the next stage of his discussion, the commentator first appeals in a general way to the authority of Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory Nazianzen regarding the identity of unity and trinity in the godhead. He explains that although opposites—for instance, slowness and rapidity of motion—are distinct in the lower world, because the divine nature through its "infinite power" (*virtus infinita*) can unite all things to one another and to itself, these opposites can be brought into union in the divine sphere—that is, as rest. Ficino now brings the continuity between the internal and the external divine act assumed by Plotinus—which now emerges as a reduction of *external* opposites to *internal* unity—into conjunction with both the divine act and the divine number stated by these Christian authorities. He argues that according to the principle of infinite power as uniting opposites, Dionysius and Gregory can be seen as agreeing with the Plotinian teaching regarding the continuity between the internal and external divine act when they speak of the unitary godhead as producing an offspring that is "innermost and equal as far as triunity" ("intima aequalisque usque in Trinitatem").<sup>57</sup> In the same context, Ficino stresses that

55 Reading *relatio* following the 1559 edition (not *relati* according to the 1576 edition).

56 See note 51 above.

57 The argument at this point is elliptical and therefore hard to follow. It unfolds on the basis of a complex set of assumptions—emerging not so much in this text as in his commentary on Plotinus' *Ennead* 11. 4: "On Matter" and his commentary on Plato's *Philebus*—that [1] there is a continuum of infinity equivalent to the duality of higher and lower matter(s); [2] this continuum derives from the divine infinity itself; [3] the divine infinity relates to

the Trinity is not a multitude participating in or referred back to a higher unity but has a distinction that is arranged through “a certain relation” (*relatio quaedam*) since the latter “introduces only a very minimal difference without compounding” (“differentiam quam minimam afferre nihilque componere”).<sup>58</sup>

The relationship between the divine act and the divine number is examined in the final section of the commentary on *Ennead* v. 6, c. 3 from yet another angle. Here, the exegetical starting-point in Plotinus’ view that distinction among forms within intellect’s understanding of itself is incompatible with the first principle’s simplicity leads not so much to a *quasi*-Thomistic treatment of the issue as in the first section of this chapter but explicitly to an encounter with another branch of Scholasticism. Without necessarily committing himself to this viewpoint, the commentator explains how the followers of Scotus maintain that a multitude which is not the cause of some compounding through potency and act might be worthy of God, then going on to explain that the multitude of persons envisaged in the present context by Dionysius and Gregory is indeed that of a certain act or acts that “do no compounding and do not arise from a potency” (“componentes nihil neque ex potentia exeuntes”).<sup>59</sup> Ficino concludes by noting that the activity of this multitude of persons—just like the multitude of Ideas mentioned in Plotinus’ text—is best understood as certain rays of light that are intimate to the light and into which the latter propagates itself.

### 3.3 Comparison between the “Trinities” of Christianity and Post-Plotinian Platonism

The third of our selected topics<sup>60</sup> involves the comparison of the divine Trinity of Christianity with the “false” trinity of post-Plotinian Platonism. The importance of this topic for Ficino is underlined by its being referenced in the last two of his Latin glosses on the *Anaptyxis*<sup>61</sup> and also developed in the arguments of chapters 56–58 of his commentary on the *Parmenides*. Its starting-point is Nicholas’ citation of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, prop. 6: “Every multitude is composed either of unified things or of henads” (πάντων πλῆθος ἢ ἐξ ἡνωμένων ἐστὶν ἢ ἐξ ἐνάδων).<sup>62</sup> According to the bishop of Methone, the ancient Platonist is

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the continuum of infinity as *esse* (“act of being”) to *essentia* (“essence”). Ficino’s doctrine here is a subtle blend of authentically Plotinian and Thomistic principles.

58 Ficino, *In Enneadem*, v. 6. 3.

59 See R. Cross, “Duns Scotus on Divine Substance and the Trinity”, in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11(2003), pp. 181–201.

60 For the three topics see p. 425.

61 Ficino, *Annotationes* #14–15.

62 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 6, 6. 22–30.

shown by this proposition to be worshipping a multitude of gods despite having shown that the One-in-Itself is established before all things. Proclus had thus failed to grasp that God could be threefold without thereby becoming a multitude. He continued to believe in a multitude of gods distinguished by many differences from one another in the Greek manner, whereas between the divine hypostases of Christianity there is not difference but unity of substance, power, and activity.<sup>63</sup>

In the relevant chapters of his *Parmenides* commentary, Ficino argues decisively against the doctrine—explicitly attributed to Syrianus and Proclus—that there is a multitude of henads or gods before being. He begins his argument by noting the Greek writers' view that "the essential points stated in all the conclusions are the existence of certain separate gods" ("omnium conclusionum capita deos quosdam seorsum existentes esse"), and that terms like "multitude", "part", "whole", "straight and spherical shape", "similarity", "dissimilarity", and so forth correspond to "certain divinities" (*numina quaedam*). In fact, it is through the negative conclusions of the first hypothesis that these gods are shown to be inferior to the first principle, and through the corresponding affirmative conclusions that each god is shown to be in its own order. Ficino concludes by observing that as an interpretation of Plato's text "this seems to be a poetical rather than a philosophical construct" ("inventum hoc poeticum potius quam philosophicum esse videtur") and that one should in preference understand the various terms as denoting "certain properties of universal being" ("propria quaedam entis universi").<sup>64</sup>

Ficino also makes a detailed comparison of his own interpretation of the *Parmenides* at this point with the exegesis of the dialogue by Syrianus and Proclus, doing this by distinguishing *two* stages within the dynamic evolution of the first term derived from and subsequent to the One itself.<sup>65</sup> First, he summarizes the view of these Platonists that there are no "oppositional differences among Genera and Ideas" ("oppositioales generum idearumque differentiae") within the primal being.<sup>66</sup> According to them, this is because <1> this being is closest to the One and <2> it has the most unity with the One. Moreover, these Platonists hold that there is no "non-being" (*non ens*) in the primal being whereby the "same" is not the "other", "rest" is not "motion", and

63 Nicholas of Methone, 10. 1–20.

64 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 3, ed. Vanhaelen, 11, pp. 40–42.

65 As we have seen earlier, this will be for Ficino the angel(s) as "one-many".

66 This will correspond to the *being* of being (first triad within being) together with its henad according to the system of Syrianus and Proclus as reported in the latter's *Platonic Theology*.

so forth. According to them, this is because <1> none of the aforementioned opposites can be predicated of everything, whereas <2> being *simpliciter* is predicated universally. The view of Syrianus and Proclus is that these oppositional differences are rather to be placed within the “intellectual essence” (*intellectualis essentia*) which follows the primal being.<sup>67</sup> In contrast with all this, Ficino declares his preference for the opinion of the “more ancient ones” (*antiquiores*), the implied reference here being to Plotinus.<sup>68</sup> These earlier thinkers [A] placed such differences within the “first being” (*ens primum*) but not at the latter’s “first stage” (*primus gradus*)<sup>69</sup> and also [B] made them “unfold” (*explicari*) at a certain subsequent stage where there is a “procession” (*progredi*) through life and intelligence. Ficino’s view is that this teaching of the more ancient authorities resolves the problematic issues mentioned above in connection with the range of predications. Thus, <A> the five Genera unfold more broadly in “an essence that is now living” (*in essentia iam vivente*) and the Ideas rather in “a living essence that is now intellectual” (*in vivo iam intellectuali*), whereas <B> these Genera and Ideas are scarcely distinguished in the essence itself despite the presence there of the necessary properties of all things.<sup>70</sup>

These final remarks indicate a transition to the next phase of Ficino’s reply to the post-Plotinian thinkers in which he distinguishes *three* stages within the dynamic evolution of the first term derived from and subsequent to the One itself. In the next chapter of his commentary on the *Parmenides*, Ficino begins by explaining how Syrianus and Proclus established “a certain trinity of three substances outside the first principle” (“trinitas quaedam substantiarum trium extra primum”) consisting of the “first being” (*prima essentia*)—the causal principle of being—, the “first life” (*prima vita*)—the causal principle of living—, and the “first intellect” (*intellectus primus*)—the causal principle of understanding. The Florentine soundly rejects the reasoning on which these thinkers based their doctrine or at least seemed to have done so.<sup>71</sup> First, they placed the causal principle of being before that of life apparently on the grounds that the gift of being is extended more widely to subsequent things

67 This will correspond to the *intellect* of being (third triad within being) together with its henad according to the system of Syrianus and Proclus as reported in the latter’s *Platonic Theology*.

68 Also, probably to Dionysius the Areopagite, whom the Florentine holds to be Plotinus’ predecessor.

69 Or “first level”—that Latin substantive *gradus* has equally temporal and spatial connotations which Ficino is prepared to exploit.

70 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 56. 2, ed. Vanhaelen, II, pp. 38–40.

71 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, 57. 8, ed. Vanhaelen, II, pp. 56–58.

than is the gift of life and the gift of intellect. However, since there is on the level of effects a contradiction between the order of precedence with respect to extension of the gifts<sup>72</sup> and the order of precedence according to value of those gifts,<sup>73</sup> the argument of Syrianus and Proclus transferring the former order to the level of causes with the exclusion of the latter seems to be logically incoherent.<sup>74</sup> Second, it was a mistake on the later Platonists' part to postulate a multitude of causal principles in order to generate the required effects when one would have been sufficient. Rather, we should accept Plotinus' view that the order of precedence according to the extension of the gifts on the level of effects is consistent with a kind of "order of generation" (*generationis ordo*) on the level of causes where the essence of the first being "is somehow first, but soon *lives*, and then soon *understands*" ("prius quodammodo sit [...] mox vero vivat, mox intelligat"). Ficino's final point—that if the first being were perfect in its first stage, it would have no appetite towards the Good itself—seems to be the really decisive one, for the dynamic evolution of the first term derived from and subsequent to the One must be fundamentally revertive in nature.<sup>75</sup>

We have seen that Ficino argues decisively against the view—explicitly attributed to Syrianus and Proclus—that there is a multitude of henads or gods before being. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that there are no traces or even analogues of such a theory in his Christian version of Platonism. In fact, the *Parmenides* commentary argues without demur that, when we look for the primal cause of multitude, we find that this is identical with the origin of union, provided that we understand "the primal cause of multitude" in the correct manner. It is perhaps obvious that things are one because of their dependence on that which can also be called "unity itself" (*unitas ipsa*), but it is also true albeit less obviously so that things are many because of that same dependence on the primal unity. Indeed, the many things exist through "multitude itself" (*ipsa multitudo*), although this multitude is not a particular multitude but absolute multitude which is equivalent to certain unities propagated

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72 I.e. being above life above intelligence.

73 I.e. intelligence above life above being.

74 I have here paraphrased what I take to be Ficino's argument which is obscure because of its lack of detail. The Florentine simply refers to the teachings of Plotinus and Dionysius the Areopagite at this point and notes that he has discussed the issue further in his commentaries on those texts. Fortunately, there is a discussion at Ficino, *In Dionysii De divinis nominibus* (206, II, pp. 130–134) which states the issue somewhat more carefully and in agreement with my paraphrase.

75 This is because there is no procession or inclination in the causality of the Plotinian One. See the detailed discussion in section 3.2 above.

and distributed by the absolute unity.<sup>76</sup> As we have seen in our earlier discussion of this passage, the multitude of emanative unities constituting the second principle which is distributed by the absolute One corresponds to a multitude of the intellectual unities through which the blessed angels are joined to God.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4 Conclusions

We began by noting how in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Ficino concludes a passage discussing the contrast between the two principles named the "one-many" (*unum multa*) and the "absolute one" (*simpliciter unum*) by remarking that the Platonic arguments removing a multitude from the first principle do not count against the Christian Trinity, and that the writings of Nicholas the Greek theologian and bishop of Methone had been particularly successful in pointing this out. We continued by suggesting that this same passage of the *Parmenides* commentary was important first, because it provided evidence of Ficino's reading of an important Byzantine theologian—indeed, providing a cross-reference to an extant set of his own glosses on the bishop of Methone's work—; and second, because it linked the said Byzantine writer especially with the Florentine commentator's own reflections on some of the deepest questions of Platonic metaphysics.

There is perhaps one further reason why this particular textual confrontation is important at least for students of Ficino. That is because it provides supporting evidence of the Florentine's preference for the "Egyptian" school of Platonism typified by the writings of Plotinus over the "Lycian" school represented by the teachings of Syrianus and Proclus. Statements of this preference form a continuous theme throughout Ficino's career.<sup>78</sup> It perhaps first emerges clearly in the philosophical-historical discussions of the final books of his *Platonic Theology*<sup>79</sup> and comes to fruition in his commentaries on Plotinus and Dionysius the Areopagite. We now discover that the author of the *Anaptyxis* has appeared as a most opportune ally in steering the direction of Ficino's interpretative approach. Given his unparalleled expertise in the history of the Platonic tradition, Ficino was probably aware that Nicholas of Methone—

76 Ficino, *In Parmenidem*, c. 57. 5, ed. Vanhaelen, II, pp. 52–54.

77 See above in section 3.1, § c.

78 For a discussion of Ficino's "historical" classification of the Platonic philosophical schools of late antiquity see M.J.B. Allen, *Synoptic Art. Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Florence: Olschki, 1998), pp. 51–92.

79 See Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, XVII, 4, VI, pp. 44–62.

sometimes accidentally and perhaps often willfully—misunderstood that Greek whom he ironically styled a “wise man”. Nevertheless, the bishop’s role as an authoritative Christian witness to what was good and not so good about Platonism in the eyes of Ficino should not be underestimated.

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