

THE CONCEPT OF *PARHYPOSTASIS* ÎN PROCLUS’  
*DE MALORUM SUBSISTENTIA*.  
A MEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract.** This study aims at interpreting the concept of *παρυπόστασις*, as it is presented in Proclus’s work *De malorum subsistentia* from a meontological point of view. Although this concept – central to the understanding of the various conceptions about the existence of evil from Late Antiquity and Middle Ages – has been for some time the source of various interpretations in the modern exegetic literature, its meaning is still disputed and its translations into modern languages show that there is not yet a common base of understanding it. I will argue that, as far as the process of *παρυπόστασις* is concerned, it is more than just the “mode of existence” of evil. It rather is a necessary process through which our existential context is constituted and, although is neutral in itself, it creates the conditions for the existence of evil. Interpreted in this way, *παρυπόστασις* creates the context in which evil can occur in mortal souls because of their temporal nature and limited powers of cognition, making thus evil a metaphysical, epistemological and psychological phenomenon, not just an ethical phenomenon in the modern sense of the term.

**Keywords:** meontology, evil, Proclus, neoplatonism, parhypostasis, nothingness, Christianity, Late Antiquity

The discussion about the existence of evils in the Hellenistic period could be referred to as the second „battle of Giants” in ancient philosophy, after the notorious *γίγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας*<sup>1</sup> that took place in the presocratic period of Greek philosophy and has been somehow settled by Plato’s and Aristotle’s systematic efforts to level away the contradictions between previous philosophical theories. A similar endeavour can be seen in Proclus’ works, where one can notice the constant effort to surpass the problems raised by the multitude of philosophical theories developed in the Hellenistic world and to render, on the basis of the

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Sophista*, 246a.

original premises of classical platonic thinking, a well-balanced and non-contradictory account of reality as a hierarchical continuum of beings possessing different degrees of existence. This is the reason why Proclus' philosophical thinking cannot be viewed only in terms of a "scholarly effort" to gather all the existent theories into one coherent system. Just like Plato before him, his synthesis is original and, although he views himself only as an interpreter of Plato's works – as did, in fact, all the neoplatonic philosophers to some extent–, some of the solutions he proposes are authentic and without precedent in the Ancient Greek culture.

One of these solutions concerns a very disputed problem in late Antiquity, namely the problem of the *existence of evil*, which was addressed at that time by both pagan philosophers – in stoicism, epicureanism, peripateticism or neoplatonism –, and by early Christian thinkers. This problem, although formulated in a variety of ways by Proclus himself, can be put forward in a simple manner using his words from *De decem dubitationibus* in the following way: "How does evil even take place in the realm of (individual) beings, given that there is Providence?"<sup>2</sup>. On the one hand, we could accept the evident existence of evil, but then we end up admitting that the divinity itself – namely the One or Good<sup>3</sup> and the principles that come "before νοῦς", πρόνοια<sup>4</sup> – is directly or indirectly the cause of evil, not only of goodness. On the other hand, one could accept that the divinity orders everything in the world, but then must end up admitting that evil doesn't really exist, but it is just something good from the perspective of Providence. In the first case, there is no real divinity; in the second case, there is no real evil. There could be a third option for this problem, namely that there are two "first principles", one producing goodness and the other producing evil, just like in Gnosticism, but this solution would be a contradiction in terms, because for

<sup>2</sup> Proclus, *De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that both Forms of One and Good, being "above intellect and essence", sustain no real distinction between them, only a "relative" one, namely relative to the standpoint one takes when thinking of these entities. If one thinks teleologically, the highest Form which orders all the actions and events in the world is the Form of Good. If one thinks formally, the highest Form which gives unity to every mundane entity and to the world itself is the Form of One. This is why, Proclus himself, says that "goodness is unity, unity is goodness, the (Form) of Good is the same with the Form of One, and the One is the primary Good" (Proclus, *Institutio Theologica*, 13). This is also the reason why some modern exegetes refer to this principle of all things as "the One-Good" (Cf. Dionysis Skliris, *The Theory of Evil in Proclus. Proclus' Theodicy as a Completion of Plotinus' Monism* in "Philotheos", nr. 8 (2008), p. 140; 142).

<sup>4</sup> One of the axioms of Proclus's theology is that providence (πρόνοια) is an attribute of divinity in general. "All divinity acquired, in his own substance, the providence of the whole cosmos, and the primary providence is found in divinity" (Proclus, *Institutio Theologica*, 120). This is why, the highest form of providence, the highest existence that is beyond the realm of intellect is the form of One-Good. "All divinity is a good-doing henad or a unifying goodness that has this substance inasmuch as it is divine. But the primary divinity is the pure Good and pure One" ( Πᾶς μὲν θεὸς ἑνὰς ἐστὶν ἀγαθοῦργός ἢ ἀγαθότης ἐνοποιός, καὶ ταύτην ἔχει τὴν ὑπαρξιν καθόσον ἕκαστος θεός· ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν πρῶτιστος ἀπλῶς τὰγαθὸν καὶ ἀπλῶς ἓν – Proclus, *Institutio Theologica*, 133).

Platonists the mere notion of “two first principles” was absurd and impossible to defend. It was written down in the definition of the ἀρχή that there must be one unique principle of all things to which all the “secondary principles” or “causes” could be reduced. „If there must exist a cause of beings, a distinction between cause and caused and no *reduction ad infinitum*, then there is a primary cause of beings from which every entity proceeds just like from a root – some being closer, others being more distant.”<sup>5</sup> But, if there would be an “origin” or “leading cause” of evil, then “the Good would not be the cause of all beings, neither their principle”<sup>6</sup> and the κόσμος would be torn apart by the two conflicting forces.

The concept of *παρυπόστασις*, used by Proclus to explain “the character and mode in which the evil subsists” (ὁ τρόπος καὶ πῶς ὑπέστη τὸ κακὸν)<sup>7</sup>, is a surprisingly original solution that solves the problem just expressed. On the one hand, it evades all the problems posited by the other philosophical accounts on evil from that period. On the other hand, it draws attention on the idea of *negative causation*<sup>8</sup>, a phenomenon largely ignored by ancient philosophy. If this is correct, the analysis of the meaning of *παρυπόστασις* could give us new means of interpreting the phenomenon of evil from a meontological point of view, a standpoint that, as we will argue, fits better Proclus' intentions and philosophical system. The aim of this study is to foreshadow the meaning of *παρυπόστασις* as the primary character of evil and to shed light on its epistemological and metaphysical origin in the concept of non-being/nothingness.

## 1. CURRENT INTERPRETATIONS OF *παρυπόστασις*

The word we intend to study is a technical word, not to be found among the words of the basic vocabulary of Greek Antiquity. Most likely it is an invention of the neoplatonic school, probably of Porphyrios, the editor and publisher of Plotin's *Enneads*. In his works, the term is mentioned for the first time in a philosophical context<sup>9</sup> as far as we know from the written texts that have been preserved through ages. Although a considerable number of studies have been written on this subject, there is no unique interpretation of the meaning of *παρυπόστασις*, neither in ancient Greek language in general, neither in Proclus' works. Even the scholars themselves

<sup>5</sup> εἰ οὖν καὶ αἰτίαν εἶναι δεῖ τῶν ὄντων, καὶ διώρισται τὰ αἴτια τῶν αἰτιατῶν, καὶ οὐκ εἰς ἄπειρον ἢ ἀνοδος, ἔστιν αἰτία πρώτη τῶν ὄντων ἀφ' ἧς οἷον ἐκ ρίζης πρόεισιν ἕκαστα, τὰ μὲν ἐγγυὲς ὄντα ἐκεῖνης, τὰ δὲ πορρώτερον. (Proclus, *Institutio Theologica*, 11)

<sup>6</sup> Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> As far as my knowledge goes, the only modern scholar mentioning the process of negative causation is Jean-Paul Schneider, but he never takes time to thoroughly analyze it (Cf. Jean-Pierre Schneider, *Nature et contre-nature dans la philosophie de Proclus* in “Actes du 25e Congrès de l'Association des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française (ASPLF)”, 1994, p. 441.

<sup>9</sup> Porphyrios, *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, 44.

admit that “the term has often been discussed in the secondary literature, but its philosophical context has not yet been understood properly”<sup>10</sup>.

This fact is evident in two main contexts: in the modern translations of this word and in modern scholarly studies. Both of these show that we are yet far from reaching an agreement concerning the „true meaning” of this concept. As I will try to argue, one of the the main reasons for this situation is that we failed to throughoutly interpret another concept deeply connected to *παρυστάσις*, namely the concept of *ὑπόστασις*, from an meontological point of view.

As far as the translations are concerned, one might easily notice that the Greek word is translated in various ways, many of them expressing different and somewhat contrary meanings. Taking a quick look at its translations into the main modern languages, we see that *παρυστάσις* has been read as „adventitious existence” (fr. *existence adventice*) by I. Hadot<sup>11</sup>, as „quasi-existence” (it. *quasi-esistenza*) by Montoneri<sup>12</sup> and Paparella<sup>13</sup>, as „parasitic existence” by Lloyd<sup>14</sup>, as „pseudo-existence” by Saffrey and Westerlink<sup>15</sup>, as „counter-existence” (fr. *contre-existence*) by Isaac<sup>16</sup>, as „by-product” (fr. *sous-produit*) or as „parallel existence” (fr. *existence parallèle*) by Festugière<sup>17</sup> and, finally, as „parasitic existence” by Steel and Opsomer<sup>18</sup>. This shows us that the interpretation of the term is not yet settled, as it happens to be in the case of other philosophical terms. Although none of these translations is entirely wrong and there can be found arguments in support of each of them, they show us that we lack the linguistic instruments and concepts to translate the multiplicity of connotations of the Greek word into modern languages. At the same time, beyond these translations lays the fact that the full meaning of the word still evades our understanding.

On the other hand, we might expect that the multitude of academic studies<sup>19</sup> on the subject can shed some light on the meaning of *παρυστάσις* for Proclus’

<sup>10</sup> Jan Opsomer & Carlos Steel, *Evil without a cause: Proclus’ Doctrine On The Origin Of Evil, And Its Antecedents in Hellenistic Philosophy* in Therese Fuhrer & Michael Erler (coord.), *Zur Rezeption der hellenistischen Philosophie in der Spätantike. Akten der 1. Tagung der Karl-und-Getrud-Abel-Stiftung vom 22. – 25. September 197 in Trier*, Stuttgart, Farnz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p. 249.

<sup>11</sup> Simplicius, *Commentaire sur le Manuel d’Epictète* (transl. by Hadot, I.), 2001, Paris.

<sup>12</sup> Proclo, *La provvidenza e la libertà dell’uomo* (transl. by I. Montoneri), 1986, Roma–Bari.

<sup>13</sup> Proclo, *Tria opuscula. Provvidenza, Libertà, Male* (transl. by Francesco D. Paparella), Milano, Bompiani Il Pansero Occidentale, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Lloyd, A. C., *Parhypostasis in Proclus*, in: G. Boss, G. Seel (eds.), *Proclus et son influence. Actes du Colloque de Neuchâtel*, juin 1985, Zürich, pp. 145–157.

<sup>15</sup> Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne* (Transl. by Saffrey, H. D., Westerink, L. G.), vol. 1–6, 1968-1997, Paris.

<sup>16</sup> Proclus, *Trois études sur la providence. De l’existence du mal* (transl. by Isaac D.), Paris, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Proclus, *Commentaire sur la République*, vol. 1–3 (transl. by Festugière, A. J.), 1970, Paris.

<sup>18</sup> Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils* (transl. by Opsomer, J., Steel, C.), 2003, London.

<sup>19</sup> The best semantic analysis of *παρυστάσις* has been given by A.C. Lloyd (*Parhypostasis in Proclus*, in G.

Boss/G. Seel [eds.], « Proclus et son influence. Actes du Colloque de Neuchâtel », juin 1985 [Zürich 1987] 145-157). The majority of other studies published later on seem to start from the information contained in this study, as does this one. On the other hand, as I will argue in the following pages, the .

thought, but here are some major preconceptions that baffle our understanding of the concept, many of which are based on the fact that Proclus' thinking is included into a tradition of interpretation that doesn't pay attention to meontological character of his philosophical system. Although there are some studies that explore the connection between nothingness/non-being and the concept of *παρυπόστασις*, they remain in an ontological thinking framework that obstructs the access to the phenomenon of nothingness.

From a meontological point of view, neoplatonic thinking in general and Proclus' thinking in special is structured by the idea that every being or existence is a hypostatization of the supreme idea of One-Good, a hypostatization that has different degrees of perfection and that is – on the lower levels of the cosmos – subjected to numerous degrees of imperfection. This is why, every existence (*υπόστασις*) can be viewed, in the first place, as a “partial and imperfect rendering” of the supreme idea of One-Good.

On the other hand, if this supreme idea is beyond every form of understanding<sup>20</sup>, from the point of view of the human soul, it can be viewed as sheer nothingness. The supreme Good, as that which is beyond being, is, in some sense, nothing<sup>21</sup>. This is why, every entity, as far as it has existence, it participates to the idea of Good and, from a neoplatonic point of view, has its origin and beginning in nothingness. In some strange way, the supreme idea of One-Good doesn't “represent” any substantial being, be it sensible or intellectual. From this point of view, the idea of Good, by opposition to other ideas, is not hypostatized into any definite substance – like the idea of a chair, for example, which is hypostatized in every existent chair. Strictly speaking, it is not *something definite*, although is present in everything in a concealed manner. In aristotelic terms, it is pure power, pure virtuality that actualizes itself on different ontological levels in various types of existences, but doesn't, strictly speaking, belong to any ontological regions. It is neither an intellectual being, belonging to the *κόσμος νοητός*, neither a sensible being, belonging to the *κόσμος αἰσθητός*.

The two main world-orders of platonism are deeply related to some faculty of hypostatization of the supreme Goodness – namely *νοῦς* and *αἴσθησις* –, this being the reason why every substance is, in fact, a hypostasis of this supreme One-Good, filtered through our knowledge faculties. It is, literally speaking, a (partial) understanding of the idea of Good. The soul, as a whole, can be thus understood as a collection of hypostatization functions, each and every one faculty of the soul being a function that hypostatizes the primordial ineffability and incognoscibility of the One-Good. Every form of existence is a sedimentation<sup>22</sup> of nothingness

<sup>20</sup> Πᾶν τὸ θεῖον αὐτὸ μὲν διὰ τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἔνωσιν ἄρρητόν ἐστι καὶ ἄγνωστον πᾶσι τοῖς δευτέροις, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν μετεχόντων ληπτὸν ἐστι καὶ γνωστόν· διὸ μόνον τὸ πρῶτον παντελῶς ἄγνωστον, ἅτε ἀμέθεκτον ὄν. (Proclus, *Institutio Theologiae*, 123).

<sup>21</sup> Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> The term *υπόστασις*, which is the main neoplatonic term for expressing the idea of “existence”, also has the meaning of “sediment” or “sedimentation”.

resulted from the activity of the intellect or the soul, sedimentation that is governed by the possibility of error on the lower levels of the world, where the noetic and sensible entities intermingle.

Although this connection between substance and understanding might seem strange to us, for ancient Greek philosophers it seemed natural. Greek philosophy is a peculiar kind of thinking that links the different modes of existence or the different kinds of substances to the powers through which the human soul can get to know them. This is why for the ancient philosophers it was natural to equate substance with understanding, as far as a main axiom of philosophy has been that τὸ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι<sup>23</sup> since Parmenides. It is nonetheless interesting that even the etymology of the English words preserves an intimate connection between “sub-stance” and “under-standing” which enables us re-establish the link between thinking and existence.

One of the main problems that spring from ignoring the meontological character of Proclus’ thought is that interpreters tend to overlook the fact that *παρυπόστασις* is not an existence independent from the soul, but a process of the soul and especially of the mortal soul. It is true that the *result* of *παρυπόστασις* is something we might call “evil”, but *παρυπόστασις* is not the *essence* of evil, because evil, not participating in Good, does not, strictly speaking, have an essence. Evil is ἀνούσιον<sup>24</sup>, it has no propriety of its own – it is just a peculiar, somewhat uncaused, undetermined and unforeseeable phenomenon. From this point of view, evil itself is some kind of nothingness, but a peculiar kind of nothingness, different from the ineffability of the Good and from the ineffability of pure matter.

In fact, here lies the main argument that Proclus raises against Plotinus, which identified evil with unformed matter and with nothingness<sup>25</sup>. Proclus shows that, although “non-being and destruction occur on the account of the nature of evil”<sup>26</sup>, evil is not itself non-being: neither in the sense of that which transcends being, because the nothingness that transcends being is the Good itself<sup>27</sup>, nor in the sense of pure unformed matter<sup>28</sup>, which is completely passive and cannot give birth to anything. So, evil has a meontological character, but not a simple one – it is not pure nothingness, although it is not yet something substantial. It springs from the deficiencies of the human soul<sup>29</sup>, so it has a mode of existence, but it doesn’t have a definite cause to which we can point to. So, we could say that its mode of existence evades the aristotelic ontology of the four causes, as Proclus himself argued<sup>30</sup>. Evil is not substantial, although it is not completely unsubstantial either. Its substance is

<sup>23</sup> Parmenides, DK B, 3

<sup>24</sup> Proclus, *De Malorum Subsistentia*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Plotinus, *Enneades*, 2.4; 1.8.

<sup>26</sup> Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 5

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 29-34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 47-49.

not “of its own”, but it “lends” substance from something which is intended to be good. In a strange way, evil is a parasite of goodness that, in the end, doesn’t mix with goodness *de facto*, it has no real (determinable) cause, but occurs out of the lack of power of our souls to constantly aim the Good.

Bringing up the problem of causality, we finally reach a third group of preconceptions that link Proclus’ meaning of *παρυπόστασις* with the aristotelic concept of *accidental causation*<sup>31</sup>. Unfortunately, this interpretation contradicts Proclus’ way of thinking in general, because he explicitly states that “it is completely impossible for something to be generated without a cause”<sup>32</sup>. Although some of the scholars have noticed this incongruency<sup>33</sup>, they say it is just a risk the philosopher takes in order to “eliminate all reductions of evil to the first divine cause”<sup>34</sup>. Our argument is that the modern exegesis mostly failed to notice that Proclus doesn’t refer to Aristotle’s *accidental causation*, but to a meontological type of causation, namely *negative causation*, where the “cause” of an event is the lack of some quality rather than a substantial thing. Evil is somehow caused by something, but not in a substantial manner, by an entity placed on a certain ontological realm. It is rather caused by the powerlessness of the human soul and its deficient knowledge of the noetic forms.

To properly understand this phenomenon of negative causation as the cause of *παρυπόστασις*, we must first understand the mechanism by which this process takes place in the realm of the human soul and why it is not possible to have a *παρυπόστασις* on the upper levels of the ontological hierarchy.

## 2. THE TEMPORALITY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE AND *παρυπόστασις*

In Proclus’ philosophy, the concept of *παρυπόστασις* is strictly linked to the existence of evil, but the concept is never explained and analysed as such. From the way in which the Greek philosopher speaks about this para-hypostatization it seems like it was a known concept in the neoplatonic school of thinking. This is why, in order to better understand it, we need to take a look at the context in which this word firstly occurs and to draw some conclusions about its possible meaning, in Porphyry’s *Sentences*<sup>35</sup>. There, the concept of *παρυπόστασις* and the

<sup>31</sup> Jan Opsomer & Carlos Steel, *op. cit.*; Dionysis Skliris, *The Theory of Evil in Proclus Proclus’ Theodicy as a Completion of Plotinus’ Monism* in “PHILOTHEOS. International Journal for Philosophy and Theology”, nr. 8 (2008), pp. 137-159; Radek Chlup, *Proclus’ Theory of Evil: An Ethical Perspective* in “The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition”, 3 (2009), pp. 26-57; Jan Opsomer, *Proclus vs Plotinus on Matter (De mal. subs. 30-7)* in “Phronesis”, XLVI/2, Brill, Leiden, 2001, pp. 154-188;

<sup>32</sup> *Omni enim impossibile sine causa generationem habere* (Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 50).

<sup>33</sup> Jan Opsomer & Carlos Steel, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256.

<sup>35</sup> Porphyry, *Sentences ad intelligibilia ducentes*, 44.

corresponding verb, παραυφίστημι, are linked to temporality of the soul and to the dependence between time and eternity.

The argument goes like this. The sensible and the intellectual are two different types of beings<sup>36</sup>, that distinguish themselves by the faculty of knowledge they are perceived through, namely νοῦς and αἴσθησις. The intellect dwells in an “atemporal moment”, from where he thinks all the things together at once, now and forever, because eternity – αἰών understood as ἄχρονος νῦν – is characterized by the suspension of what we call “past” and “future”<sup>37</sup>. For the intellect, there are no dimensions of time, just the constant dwelling in a present in which all that was, is and will be coexist as one. Moreover, the intellect contains in itself all the forms/ideas as his own intellections, so he is, at the same time and as a whole, “the object of thinking” and “the thinking object”<sup>38</sup>. For this kind of intellect, there is no time, but only αἰών – a period of existence that can have no end, because it has no beginning, and is characterized only by pure actuality. This αἰών is somehow co-dependent (παρυπέστη) on the activity of the intellect which is “thinking in unity and according to unity” (καθ' ἓν ἐν ἐνὶ νόησις). So, eternity is a state of mind, not a „real” thing. It is not something substantial, but rather an attribute of the intellect’s activity and of its holistic intuition of the entire world of noetic objects called ideas or forms. The intellect, as a consequence of its activity, creates eternity as a παρυπόστασις. This means that eternity is some kind of a side-effect of the “thinking in unity and according to unity” which creates a suspension of the temporal dimensions. For this kind of intellect there is no plurality, just unity, there is no distinction between “subject” and “object”, just a direct intuition, unmediated by λόγος, of the whole.

But this peculiar kind of dwelling in eternity is not accessible to souls in general and to mortal souls in particular, because these have somehow fallen from eternity into time. This happens because the soul has a different type activity than the intellect, which Porphyry calls μεταβατικῶς καὶ ἐν κινήσει νοοῦντι – discursive and kinetic thinking. This type of activity creates an expansion of the intellect’s unity which has, as a side-effect, the dilatation of eternity into the three-dimensional χρόνος we all are used to. This is why, in a certain sense, the multitude of ideas are nothing but παρυποστάσεις of the original Unity in which the intellect dwells, caused by the activity of the soul. They are mere partial glimpses of the noetic realm, which seem different from one another, because the soul being the principle of motion of the bodies, is always in motion and cannot directly intuit forms, but unfolds them discursively (μεταβατικῶς). This is the reason why time is some kind of side-effect of ψυχῆ’s activity, just like eternity is a side-effect of intellect’s activity.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> εἰ οὖν ἐπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ νῦν, ἀνήρηται δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ παρεληλυθὸς καὶ τὸ μέλλον, ἐν ἀδιαστάτῳ τῷ νῦν ἀχρόνῳ παραστήματι, ὥστε τὸ ὁμοῦ κατὰ τε τὸ πλῆθος κατὰ τε τὸ χρονικὸν διάστημα ἐπ' αὐτοῦ (*Ibidem*)

<sup>38</sup> ὁ αὐτὸς ἄρα νοῦν καὶ νοοῦμενον ὅλον ὅλω (*Ibidem*)

This means that the process of para-hypostatization is not evil *per se*, although evil occurs as *παρυπόστασις*. It is the mere activity of the soul or intellect that can cause some unintended phenomena to appear along with the intended ones. In this process, the *παρυπόστασις*, the unintended consequence, integrates itself into the world along with the other phenomena explicitly intended by the soul or, in a more contemporary expression, with the *intentional acts of consciousness* performed. In this way, the *παρυπόστασις* could be metaphorically described as “the wolf in sheep’s clothes”. Time presents itself as *ἄπειρον*, as an infinite sequence of moments that resembles eternity, and this way deceivingly conceals (*διαψεύδεται*) the real meaning of eternity. Time, as a *παρυπόστασις* of the human soul creates a false idol, a “statue” of eternity, to which the soul directs its instinct for survival. “This is the reason why”, says Prophyry, “some people consider that time can be contemplated in stillness as well as in motion and that eternity, as we have just said, is the infinite time, because they reciprocally project on the other their own impressions. That which is always in motion pictures (*ἀπεικονίζοντος*) eternity starting from stability in virtue of the identity with its own eternal movement and that which stands still in identical activity pictures eternity starting from its activity by attaching time to its own abiding”<sup>39</sup>. These “hidden phenomena” that occur through *παρυπόστασις* and give meaning to things stand *beside* (*παρά*) the phenomena intended by the soul’s activity and create a deceiving representation that can falsify reality. Simply said, they can create “distortions of truth” in correlation with the situation one finds himself in. This is why, the *παρυπόστασις* often goes *against* (*παρά*) the natural order of things, disturbing somehow the perception of this order.

On the other hand, we cannot escape this phenomenon of para-hypostatization because it forms what we can call the “existential context” in which we live. The unintended consequences of our actions, those things that have their origin in our activity but we never take time to notice and analyse, are guarded by a milieu of assumptions and preconceptions that we take for granted and that somehow determine our view of the world and of things that take place in it. The process of para-hypostatization forms the “dark side” of the world, the side that never crosses our minds and that doesn’t usually reach the level of our consciousness. That’s also the reason why this un-reflected part of our world might, from time to time, lead us astray from the truth and intended good. As we can see, even the intellect is subject to some kind of para-hypostatization, although he is not subjected to evil because, at the same time, he has knowledge of all the *παρυποστάσεις* of his activity directly and unmediated. So, the process of para-hypostatization is not “evil in itself”, but just a natural process of the mind/soul that forms the existential context in which we live or dwell and that occurs along with the intentional acts of consciousness that constitute the various forms of existence or hypostases (*ὑποστάσεις*).

<sup>39</sup> διὸ καὶ ἐν στάσει τὸν χρόνον τινὲς οὐχ ἤττον ἢ ἐν κινήσει θεωρεῖσθαι ὑπελάμβανον καὶ τὸν αἰῶνα, ὡς ἔφαμεν, τὸν ἄπειρον χρόνον, ἑκατέρου τὰ πάθη τὰ ἑαυτοῦ τῷ ἑτέρῳ προστιθέντος, τοῦ μὲν κινουμένου αἰεὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐστῶτος κατὰ ταυτότητα τῷ αἰεὶ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ τὸν αἰῶνα ἀπεικονίζοντος, καὶ τοῦ ἐστῶτος ἐν ταυτότητι ἐνεργείας τὸν χρόνον τῇ ἑαυτοῦ μονῇ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνεργείας προσάπτοντος. (*Ibidem*).

But, if this is the case, where does evil come across? How come *παρυπόστασις* became the *τρόπος* of evil and its mode of existence? If the ideas themselves – which cannot be evil – are *παρυποστάσεις* of the supreme Unity, then under which conditions does the para-hypostatic phenomena become evil? To answer these questions, we must analyse the notion of *a-causality* or *negative causality* that occurs in the discussion of the *τρόπος* of evil in Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*.

Although there seems to be a giant leap between Porphyry and Proclus, we can easily see that their conceptions of *παρυπόστασις* are not at all unrelated. Even if Porphyry doesn't necessarily link *παρυπόστασις* to the fundamental character of evil things, his use of the word and the problems raised in the fragment just analysed enable us to make a connection between the two thinkers and to better understand the subtleties of Proclus' thought. The process of *παρυπόστασις* in Porphyry is contextual as is the phenomenon of evil in Proclus. In addition, the *παρυπόστασις* is viewed as an attribute of the soul's temporal existence and of the indetermination of the existential context in both thinkers. Moreover, one can interpret that, in Proclus, even for the upper ranks of beings that live in the realm of intellect, the process of para-hypostatization occurs, but does not give birth to evil, because these upper beings are thinking in Unity and get to know evil and restrain themselves from *doing* it. "It seems that not only the barbarians (i. e. Christians, *n.n.*), but also the best of Greeks acknowledges the gods' knowledge of all things"<sup>40</sup> and because evil is never "pure evil", but a deceiving mixture of goodness and evil, of truth and falseness – as is, for Porphyry, the para-hypostatization of indefinite time as eternity – then "the gods know and produce evil *qua* good"<sup>41</sup>. This means that, although their existence and activity create the context in which evil can occur, this context obtained through para-hypostatization is not, in itself, something bad, but is also a source of goodness<sup>42</sup>. Just like forms that inform matter, the context of existence created by the higher beings for humans is not *per se* evil, but can generate evil because our lack of power and knowledge. The "cause" of evil is not "something" but rather the lack of "something" from our souls.

### 3. NEGATIVE CAUSALITY AS A-CAUSALITY AND THE GENESIS OF EVIL

In order to understand the idea of negative causality of a-causality, we must firstly understand that the phenomena which are uncaused (*ἀναίτιόν*) do not necessarily appear out of thin air, but can also be phenomena without a definite cause. This is the case of Proclus' theory of evil, where this phenomenon is said to be uncaused because it's causality escapes Aristotle's theory of the four causes. It

<sup>40</sup> Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 42.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

is relevant to keep in mind that, for Aristotle, a cause must be either *determinate and determinative* (*causa formalis*), *have an aim* (*causa finalis*), *imply conscious intention* (*causa efficiens*) or *imply potentiality* (*causa materialis*). In the case of the occurrence of evil, none of these apply because evil is “without end, unintended (...) and indefinite”<sup>43</sup> and, above all, it occurs *quam debilitate et per impotentem*. Just like matter isn't able to “receive” the entire perfection of the form, the human soul is not able to notice its entire context of existence, ignoring the side-effects of his actions and, thus, proliferating evil.

At a closer look at the text, Proclus himself tends to be sceptical that this means that evil is purely uncaused (*ἀναίτιόν*), because would lead him into inextricable difficulties. Rather, he uses a more prudent expression – evil is *ἀναίτιόν πως*, it is “somehow uncaused”. This led many of the modern scholars to link the existence of evil with the causation *per accidens* (*κατὰ συμβεβηκός*) in Aristotle<sup>44</sup>, not noticing that Proclus' argument has other stakes than the one Aristotle made.

On the one hand, in Aristotle's argument the causation *per accidens* is brought about to show that there cannot be a *science of the contextual*. If one digs a grave and finds a treasure – to pick up one of the famous examples of causation *per accidens* – we cannot determine the “leading causes” of this event and we cannot have *knowledge* of it. This event is somehow “uncaused”, as long as digging graves is not universally linked to finding treasures. This is also the reason why this type of causation evades our understanding and cannot be a proper subject for philosophy as science of the first principles or causes.

On the other hand, Proclus' account on evil aims at solving the dilemma exposed at the beginning of this study. He doesn't want to develop a “science of evil”, but to show that evil has no generating principle and, at the same time, it isn't produced by de procession of the Good either. This is the reason why, although Proclus describes the type of causality that gives birth to evil in similar terms as Aristotle, he doesn't say we cannot determine the cause of the occurrence of evil at all. It is true that “we must rank evils, failures and shortcomings of all kind among the *accidental beings*”<sup>45</sup>, but this does not mean we are unable to spot another type of cause for the occurrence of evil, different from the four Aristotelian causes, that could serve as an explanation: that cause is a “negative one” in the sense that evil takes place because of the soul's weakness and its impotence to steadily contemplate the eternal forms of things<sup>46</sup>.

More simply stated, the “cause” of evil, as Porphyry would express it, is the inability of the soul to think *καθ' ἑν ἐν ἐνὶ*, to have a unitary and holistic thought that directly grasps the context that is constituted by the *παρυποστάσεις* of his own

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, 50.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, E 2-3; Δ 30; K 8; *Physics* B, 4-6.

<sup>45</sup> Opsomer/Steel, *op. cit.*, 250.

<sup>46</sup> “Relinquitur ergo quod debilitatis solum: nam anime oculi perseverare ad verum ipsum et earn que ibi claritatem aspicientes impotentes sunt” (Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 46).

activity. Being discursive and in motion, the soul expands the ἄχροτος νῦν of the intellect into a tree-dimensional time that makes it impossible to foresee the consequences of one's actions and to be aware of all the contextual factors involved in an action. As a consequence, the ultimate cause of evil would be the fall of the soul from eternity into time, the descent from the κόσμος νοητός into the realm where the sensible becomes intertwined with the intelligible and loses its unity through the multiplication of entities that fall under one single form or idea.

This shows that the existence of Evil *has* a cause. Not an ontological one, but rather a meontological one. Evil's origin is not something definite, but rather the lack of determination – *i.e.* the lack of power and unity. In some sense, the evil is caused by *nothingness* (τὸ μὴ ὄν), as it is presented in Plato's *Sophist*, namely as a contextual propriety of thinking in general. The fall from eternity introduces nothingness and multiplicity in the activity of the soul, thus making room for evil, error and mistake. Starting from this negative causality, we can understand the conception of evil as double ignorance proposed by Proclus in his *Commentary on the Alcibiades I*<sup>47</sup>. In this commentary, Proclus states that evil often arises because we wrongly attribute divine attributes to worldly things, not knowing the “context of understanding” that generates these attributes. For example, we want to be autarchic, just like the gods, but view autarchy as the multitude of material possessions. We want to be powerful just like the gods, but view power only as an attribute of social condition. We want to be respected just like the gods, but view respect as public fame. As in Plato, evil is a form of ἄνοια<sup>48</sup>, a form of madness that conceals the real nature of things and creates a “false reality” in which we emerge. Evil is an para-hypostatization erroneously made from ignorance and “asthenia of the soul”.

#### 4. Παρυπόστασις, ὑπόστασις AND MEONTOLOGICAL THINKING

Meontology, as “thinking about nothingness” is deeply linked to the idea of hypostatization, because we cannot talk about nothingness without hypostatizing it, without turning it into something. Everything we say about nothingness turns it into the opposite, into a “notion” that has a meaning and forms an essence. Simply said, speaking about nothingness turns it into something. But nothingness is the perpetual non-essential that finds its place in the heart of every entity, be it noetic or sensible. That's the reason why we cannot get to know nothingness in itself, but we can form some vague sense of it through the mediation of its hypostases. Ineffability, non-discursivity, atemporality, in-cognoscibility, non-being, all of

<sup>47</sup> Danielle A. Lyne, *Involuntary Evil and the Socratic Problem of Double Ignorance in Proclus* in “The International Journal of The Platonic Tradition”, 9 (2015), 27-53.

<sup>48</sup> λέγεται ψυχὴ ἢ μὲν νοῦν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀρετὴν καὶ εἶναι ἀγαθὴν, ἢ δὲ ἄνοιαν τε καὶ μοχθηρίαν καὶ εἶναι κακὴν (Phaidon, 93b).

these are just hypostases of nothingness or ways in which we try to discursively think that which cannot be thought.

Each of these hypostases of nothingness form in different contexts of thinking and from a different principle. For example, non-being is nothingness thought in the context of ontology starting from the principle of substantiality (*ὑποκείμενον*) or presence (*οὐσία*), just like ineffability is nothingness thought in the context of discursivity, from the principle of expressivity. We will call the context of hypostatization, the (*meontological*) *genealogy* of a notion and the principle of hypostatization, its (*meontological*) *archeology*. These two structures are, as we have shown elsewhere<sup>49</sup>, sufficient to explain and understand the formation of meontological entities such as those above-mentioned.

Proclus' thinking is a form of meontology because every existence in the hierarchy of the cosmos is a hypostasis of the form of One-Good, hypostatized in different contexts and by different *functions of hypostatization* or, as the history of philosophy calls them, borrowing a medieval and modern terminology, *faculties of the soul*. But, as we've noticed, the hypostatization of the Good gives birth to a set of *παρπυστάσεις* that "go along" with the existence explicitly hypostatized and that can (but doesn't need to) falsify our understanding of things and of the situation we're placed into. In exchange, these "side effects" of hypostatization can cause errors because of the soul's incapacity to grasp all the unintended phenomena that go along with its activity or because it takes the *παρπυστάσεις* as actual *ὑποστάσεις*. In other words, his inability to be aware of his entire existential situation and of the real consequences of his actions gives birth to evil.

This interpretation brings forth the fact that the phenomenon of evil – interpreted from a meontological point of view – is, on the one hand, a metaphysical phenomenon and, on the other, an epistemological and "psychological" one. It is metaphysical because its conditions of occurrence are, as far as Proclus is concerned, metaphysical, namely the process of hypostatization of the incognoscible form of One-Good into different ontological contexts and by various powers of knowledge. At the same time, evil is an epistemological and psychological phenomenon because it concerns the condition of the soul fallen from eternity into temporality and its inability to achieve complete and adequate knowledge due to the expansion of the "atemporal moment" into a three-dimensional time. The limitations of our human condition, the constitution of our soul and the incapacity to fully disclose the circumstances of our existential situation are the main (meontological) factors that make almost impossible to uproot from the world, as long as the soul is not in unity with itself and dwells in the realm of noetic entities and eternal forms. Bearing in mind the meontological interpretation of the concept of *παρπυστάσεις* foreshadowed there and fact that the para-hypostatization is not

<sup>49</sup> Cornel-Florin Moraru, *Lumea și nimicul. Coordonatele unei gândiri meontologice / The world and the nothingness. The coordinates of a meontological way of thinking*, București, Editura Universității din București, 2017.

necessarily linked to evil could shed a new light on Proclus's work, on neoplatonism in general and on the reasons why this conception of evil entered Christianity through the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, influencing the entire thematization of the problem of evil in the Middle Ages – both in Rome and in Byzantium.

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