Apophatic Strategies in *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3)

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If one does not find doing negative theology a fairly agonizing business, one is not really doing negative theology at all.[1]

Plotinus, Porphyry, *Zostrianos*, and *The Foreigner*(s)

Despite decades of research, it remains surprisingly difficult to identify the origins of the works preserved in the hoard of Coptic manuscripts discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945. Even as unearthed "Gnostic" gospels continue to make headlines, many academics repent intoning these old, fiery heretics, and some have even called for an all-out dispensation of the term "Gnosticism."[2] Yet a felicitous piece of external evidence seems to offer a more stable foundation for identifying the date and sectarian provenance of several of the most difficult works discovered at Nag Hammadi, the so-called "Platonizing" treatises of the "Sethian school" of Gnosticism.[3] Porphyry, the top pupil of the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus (third century C.E.), remarks that,

[1] Arthur H. Armstrong, "Negative Theology," *DRev* 95 (1973) 176–89, esp. 184.

[2] Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: Arguments for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) esp. 51–53, 265. Karen King (*What is Gnosticism?* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003] 168–69) offers a deconstruction of the category and its discursive baggage, without dismissing it altogether. Bentley Layton defends use of the category to designate ancients who called themselves "Gnostics" ("knowers") and the coherent body of myths associated with them. ("Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism," in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne Meeks* [ed. L. Michael White and Larry O. Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995] 334–50; for criticism, see King, *Gnosticism?*, 166–69).

[3] These were famously identified by Hans-Martin Schenke as texts dealing with a complex of ideas including (but not limited to) the following: the identification of the pneumatic seed of Seth with the savior; the divine trinity of Father, Mother, and Son; the division of the aeon of Barbelo (the Mother) into the triad of Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes; the appearance of the "Four

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> there were in his [Plotinus's] time Christians of many kinds, and especially certain heretics who based their teachings on the ancient philosophy. They were followers of Adelphius and Aculinus, who possessed a lot of writings by Alexander the Libyan, Philocomus, Demostratus and Lydus, and also brandished apocalyptic works of Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Messus and others of that kind.[4]

The Nag Hammadi codices contain treatises which bear the titles of some of these "apocalyptic works": "Zostrianos" and "Allogenes" (Greek for "foreigner," or "stranger"). The texts feature distinctively Sethian mythologoumena, such as the titles of the various entities encountered in the story.[5] They are visionary ascent narratives catalyzed by the visit of a divine intermediary to a seer, in these two cases the eponymous protagonists.[6] Their genre notwithstanding, however, these

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Luminaries"; dwelling places for Adam, Seth, and his seed; and the idea of a rite of "Five Seals." See Hans-Martin Schenke, "Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften," in *Studia Coptica* (ed. Peter Nagel; Berlin: Akademie, 1974) 165–72; idem, "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism* (ed. Bentley Layton; Suppl. Numen 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 588–616. Schenke's "Sethian" texts are: *Ap. John* (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2), *Hyp. Arch.* (NHC II,4), *Gos. Eg.* (NHC III,2; IV,2), *Apoc. Adam* (NHC V,5) *Steles Seth* (NHC VII,5), *Zost.* (NHC VIII,1), *Melch.* (NHC IX,1), *Norea* (NHC IX,2), *Marsanes* (NHC X), *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3), *Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII,1), *Cod. Bruc. Untitled*, and the individuals mentioned in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29, Epiphanius, *Pan.* (trans. Frank Williams; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1987–1994) chs. 26, 39, and 40. Scholarship on Sethianism is voluminous, but see esp. *Rediscovery* (ed. Layton; vol. 2) and the criticism of Schenke within (Frederik Wisse, "Stalking Those Elusive Sethians"); John D. Turner, "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *NovT* 22 (1980) 324–51, and other articles discussed below; for comprehensive survey of Sethianism's relationship with Platonism, see idem, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNH Études 6; Louvain: Peeters, 2001). The category is discussed (but not exactly dispatched) in Williams (*Gnosticism*, 90–93), and King (*Gnosticism?*, 154–62, who notes the coherence of the category [or the categorizing approach itself, ibid., 158]). For recent re-evaluation of the category see Tuomas Rasimus, "Paradise Reconsidered: A Study of the Ophite Myth and Ritual and their Relationship to Sethianism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki, 2006) esp. 27–39, 51–56. Here I follow Rasimus in separating the Ophite materials—i.e., texts focusing on the serpent's role in Paradise as revealer—from Sethian and Barbeloite texts. NHC XI's *Allogenes* has apparently no Ophite features (but see below, n. 86, for complications ensuing with heresiological evidence) and so would still fall under the Sethian-Barbeloite rubric, featuring the usual mythologoumena.

[4] Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, ch. 16, in *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (trans. Mark J. Edwards; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000). For precise analysis of the language of the passage see, *inter alii*, Howard M. Jackson, "The Seer Nikotheos and His Lost Apocalypse in the Light of Sethian Apocalypses from Nag Hammadi and the Apocalypse of Elchasai," *NovT* 32 (1990) 250–77, esp. 250–58; Christos Evangeliou, "Plotinus's Anti-Gnostic Polemic and Porphyry's *Against the Christians*," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (ed. Richard T. Wallis; SNAM 6; Albany: SUNY University Press, 1992) 112–16; but esp. Michel Tardieu, "Les gnostiques dans *La vie de Plotin*," in *La vie de Plotin* (ed. Luc Brisson; 2 vols.; Paris: Vrin, 1982–1992) 2:503–63; Ruth Majercik, "Porphyry and Gnosticism," *CQ* 55 (2005) 277–92, esp. 277–78.

[5] As discussed for example in Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 108–25.

[6] See John J. Collins, "Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979) 1–19, 9: "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it

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works are replete with Neoplatonic jargon. They are contemplative texts, describing the voyage of philosophers into heaven towards ultimate being and beyond.

Porphyry's evidence is necessary but not sufficient for scholars attempting to date these treatises. Analysis of the texts' contents has led Abramowski and Majercik to propose that *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* are post-Plotinian works of the second half of the third century C.E., reflecting the metaphysics of Porphyry.[7] The works known by Plotinus under the same names would not, then, be those we have discovered at Nag Hammadi. Those works were Coptic translations of Greek versions composed around the turn of the fourth century.[8] Turner and Corrigan respond that the characteristics of the Sethian treatises identified by Majercik as Porphyrian are simply Middle-Platonic.[9] Corrigan, followed by Turner, further argues that the Sethian treatises are dependent on the anonymous Turin commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, which is actually pre-Porphyrian.[10] Corrigan assumes

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envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." See also idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 1–42; for survey of scholarship on Gnostic apocalypses, see Harold W. Attridge, "Valentinian and Sethian Apocalyptic Traditions," *JECS* 8 (1999) 173–211.

[7] Probably through a lost commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles* 1:482–85. See Pierre Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (2 vols.; Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968), henceforth cited as *Anon. Comm. Parm.* (Hadot); idem, "La métaphysique de Porphyre," *Entretiens de la Fondation Hardt 12: Porphyre* (Vandœuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1966) 127–63; John M. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism," *Hermes* 92 (1964) 213–25, esp. 220; Luise Abramowski, "Marius Victorinus, Porphyrius und die römischen Gnostiker," *ZNW* 74 (1983) 108–28, esp. 124–26; Majercik, "Gnosticism," 280. Proclus's testimony, located in *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* (ed. Ernst Diehl; 3 vols.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1906) 3:64.8–65.8, is crucial, but see Mark. J. Edwards's cautionary remarks in "Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad," *JHS* 110 (1990) 14–25, esp. 15–19. Also of some importance is the anonymous commentary on the *Parmenides*, which also was a source for Victorinus and Synesius, as mentioned above. Ruth Majercik highlights the use of ὕπαρξις for the Chaldean existence-vitality-mentality triad and the shared affinity with Marius Victorinus's Porphyrian metaphysics ("The Being-Life-Mind Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *CQ* 42 (1992) 475–88, esp. 478–79, 482–87. Abramowski looks at the doctrine of the "triple-powered," and the use of paronymy (ibid., 113 esp. n. 32). In an important later article ("Gnosticism," 282–84) Majercik adds possible references to Porphyry's propaedeutic language in *Ad Marcellam* and his theory of categories; unfortunately, space does not allow full engagement with these arguments here, but the author finds them compelling new evidence in the debate.

[8] Majercik, "Triad," 486–88; idem, "Gnosticism," 278; Abramowski, "Marius Victorinus," 123–24; see also Andrew Smith, "Porphyrian Studies since 1913," *ANRW* II:36.2:717–73, esp. 763 n. 282.

[9] John D. Turner, "Typologies of the Sethian Gnostic Literature from Nag Hammadi," in *Colloque internationale sur les textes de Nag Hammadi, Université Laval, 15–22 Septembre, 1993* (Louvain: Peeters, 1994) 206; see also idem, "Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Sethian Texts from Nag Hammadi and their Relation to Later Platonic Literature," in Wallis, *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, 433–36; Kevin Corrigan, "Platonism and Gnosticism: The Anonymous *Commentary* on the *Parmenides*: Middle or Neoplatonic?" in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts* (ed. John D. Turner and Ruth Majercik; SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2001) 168–71.

[10] Corrigan, "Platonism and Gnosticism," 142–44; John D. Turner, "Setting of the Platonizing Sethian Treatises in Middle Platonism," in Turner and Majercik, *Gnosticism*, 204–5. Scholarship attempting to date the Turin commentary remains at an impasse; Majercik, Wallis, and Dillon

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Plotinus's knowledge of Nag Hammadi's *Allogenes*; Turner suggests that it is a response to Plotinus's critique of *Zostrianos*, made circa 240 C.E.[11] For both, as for Layton and Tardieu,[12] Porphyry's evidence functions as a *terminus ante quem* for the Nag Hammadi documents themselves.

Yet as Edwards has observed, "while all or most [Nag Hammadi texts] presuppose a Greek original, there is no presumption that this would be in every case an ancient one. . . . Even when the original is likely to have been of some antiquity,

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tentatively accept Hadot's evaluation of the anonymous commentary as at least Porphyrian, if not Porphyry himself, as he claims. See Majercik, "Triad," 477; idem, "Chaldean Triads in Neoplatonic Exegesis: Some Reconsiderations," in *CQ* 51 [2001] 265–96; idem, "Porphyry and Gnosticism," 278 n. 9; Richard T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995) 114–17; John M. Dillon, "Introduction," in *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's* Parmenides (trans. G. Morrow and J. M. Dillon; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) xxx; Pierre Hadot, "Fragments d'un commentaire de Porphyre sur le Parménide," *REG* 74 (1961) 410–38; Hadot, *Porphyre*; followed by Henri-Dominique Saffrey, "Connaissance et inconnaissance de Dieu. Porphyre et la Théosophie de Tübingen," in Saffrey, *Recherches sur le Néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris: Vrin, 1990) 14; for handy summaries of which see Smith, "Porphyry," 728–29, 737–41; Corrigan, "Platonism and Gnosticism," 161–65. Corrigan, Turner, and Bechtle respond that the commentary is pre-Plotinian. See Corrigan, ibid., 144–56; John D. Turner "Introduction: *Allogenes*," in *L'allogène* (ed. and trans. Wolf-Peter Funk, Paul-Hubert Poirier, Madeline Scopello, and John D. Turner; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004) 161; Gerald Bechtle, *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's "Parmenides"* (ed. and trans. Gerard Bechtle; Bern: Paul Haupt, 1999) 90–91, 221–22). For a critique of Bechtle, see now Marco Zambon, *Porphyre et le moyen-platonisme* (Paris, 2002) 40 n. 2; Edwards, "Intelligible Triad," 21–25, both of whom argue that the text is post-Iamblichean.

[11] Corrigan, "Positive and Negative Matter in Later Platonism: The Uncovering of Plotinus's Dialogue with the Gnostics," in Turner and Majercik, *Gnosticism*, 44 n. 77; Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 721; idem, "Setting," 199–201; idem, "Introduction: *Marsanès*," in *Marsanès*, (ed. and trans. Wolf-Peter Funk, Paul-Hubert Poirier and John D. Turner; Louvain: Peeters, 2000) 169–72; Turner, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," in *Zostrien* (ed. and trans. Catharine Barry, Wolf-Peter Funk, Paul-Hubert Poirier and John D. Turner; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2000) 145–49; Turner, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 3, 113–16, 161; idem, "The Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism: Interpretations of the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*," *VC* 60 (2006) 9–64, esp. 26–27, 52; idem, "Victorinus, *Parmenides* Commentaries, and the Platonizing Sethian Treatises," in *Platonisms: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern* (ed. Kevin Corrigan and John D. Turner; AMMTC: SPNPT 4; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 79–80. The argument retracts his earlier thesis that the *Steles Seth, Zostrianos,* and *Marsanes* are dependent on *Allogenes*; see Turner, "Gnosticism and Platonism," 430, 455. Karen King (*Revelation of the Unknowable God* [Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 1995] 48, 60) essentially repeats Turner's claim that *Allogenes* presumes Plotinian critique of Sethian metaphysics but elsewhere stresses that Plotinus probably knew the text. See ibid., 47–48, 50; Turner, "Introduction: *Marsanès*," 172; idem, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 3. The chronology here is unclear: The Gnostic controversy broke out shortly after Porphyry's arrival at Plotinus's seminar in 263 C.E. for which see Michel Tardieu, "Recherches sur la formation de l'*Apocalypse de Zostrien* et les sources de Marius Victorinus," *ResOr* 9 [1996] 7–114, 112), so how could *Allogenes* have been composed (240 C.E.) as a response to Plotinus twenty years prior to Plotinus's Against the *Gnostics*? The end of the *Großschrift* was composed between 263 and 269 according to Porphyry, *Vit. Plot*., ch. 6]) To support a dating of *Allogenes* to the 240s, we must assume (reasonably, but beyond Porphyry's evidence) that Plotinus was in debate with Gnostic ideas before Porphyry's arrival at the school.

[12] Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1987) 122, 142; Tardieu, "Formation" 113.

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the vagaries of redaction and translation may have produced a work of quite a different character."[13] The confluence of titles and names of the sages invoked in the books of Plotinus's opponents does not denote a coincidence of text but textual tradition. The assumption that these traditions are stable between the Greek versions known in 260s Rome and the Coptic versions in 350s Egypt needs to be validated by investigation of the texts' content. A stable textual tradition for much of *Zostrianos* has been validated in just this way, for its doctrines seem to be very similar to those Plotinus attacks in *Enn*. II.9, "Against the Gnostics."[14]

Can the same be said for *Allogenes*? The apparent absence of a direct response by a Neoplatonist forces its readers to begin with the text itself in an effort to contextualize its content in light of contemporary Platonic currents. A good start is the treatise's most distinctive feature, its negative theology, long noted by scholars as resembling later Neoplatonic ideas.[15] In *Allogenes*, the author describes the

[13] Mark J. Edwards, "The *Epistle to Rheginus*: Valentinianism in the Fourth Century," *NovT* 37 (1995) 76–91, esp. 77. Other fourth-century reminisces have been discovered in the Nag Hammadi Library: For references to the Arian Controversy and Julian the Apostate, see Raoul Mortley, "The Name of the Father is the Son," in Wallis, *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, 239–52, and Francis E. Williams, *Mental Perception, A Commentary on NHC VI, 4: The Concept of Our Great Power* (NHMS 51; Leiden: Brill, 2001) lxii, respectively. For the importance of considering potential differences between the discovered Coptic treatises and their Greek antecedents, see Stephen Emmel, "Religious Tradition, Textual Transmission, and the Nag Hammadi Codices," in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years* (ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 34–43; idem, "The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions," in *Das Thomasevangelium. **Entstehung–Rezeption–Theologie*** (ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Jens Schröter BZNW 157; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008) 33–50.

[14] Generally, see Tardieu, "Les gnostiques," 538–43; Turner, "Victorinus," 56–57 n. 2. Plotinus knew and attacked *Zostrianos* for its partition of intellect (*Enn*. II.9 [33] 1.6). Turner earlier thought ("Gnosticism and Platonism," 432) Plotinus here targeted *Allogenes*. Plotinus also attacks *Zostrianos*'s doctrine of Sophia and her relationship with the demiurge (*Enn*. II.9 [33] 2, 10; 3.8 [30] 4; 5.8 [31] 3–5; NHC VIII,1.9.16–19). Corrigan ("Platonism and Gnosticism," 44 n. 77) points out how the partition of intellect, "image of an image," and incantations all have counterparts in the *Enneads* which are possible echoes of Gnostic influence. However, cf. Majercik, "Gnosticism," as noted above.

[15] Curtis L. Hancock observes that, as in the thought of Iamblichus, *Allogenes* extends ineffability (and hence apophasis) beyond the One to the intermediary principle of the thrice-powered ("Negative Theology in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," in Wallis, *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism,* 174–76, 180). He points out that Gnostic texts use negation all over the hierarchy of the cosmos, while Plotinus limits it to the One. Wallis ("The Spiritual Importance of Not Knowing," in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* [ed. Arthur H. Armstrong; New York: Crossroad, 1986] 475–76) points out that Iamblichus and Proclus are more in line with the Gnostics than Plotinus on this point since they extend ineffability beyond the One to levels of the intelligible realm (as for example those above the "flower of intellect"). See also Michael A. Williams, "Negative Theologies and Demiurgical Myths in Late Antiquity," in Turner and Majercik, *Gnosticism*, 301.

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depths of reality,[16] but then is visited by the angel Youel,[17] who guides him further into the aeon of Barbelo. "Luminaries" intervene and tell the seer his ascent must end, but they will describe, as much as possible, what the ultimate divinity above is like.[18] What follows is some of the most startling Neoplatonic negative theology of the Nag Hammadi discoveries, yet, as King notes, "the precise logical status of negation in *Allogenes* remains undetermined."[19]

In the following I will attempt to clarify the logic, epistemology, and praxis of negation in *Allogenes*. The text's mysticism is distinct from that of Middle Platonism and Plotinus, employing jargon and techniques more reminiscent of theurgic Neoplatonists like Iamblichus and Proclus, and, at times, the *Chaldean Oracles*, the anonymous commentary on the *Parmenides*, and Porphyry.[20] This distinctively theurgic Neoplatonism invites a re-consideration of the dating of the redaction of the text preserved at Nag Hammadi. While it seems that the Coptic version of *Zostrianos* known today was similar to, if not a direct translation of, the Greek version mentioned by Porphyry (as Corrigan and Turner argue), the same cannot be said for *Allogenes*. Rather, the text bears the marks of a post-Plotinian redaction and should be dated to the turn of the fourth century.[21]

Apophatic Strategy in *Allogenes*

Let us begin with the logic of negation in *Allogenes*. After Youel initiates Allogenes's ascent into heaven, the seeker falls into a suprarational cognitive state. That is, knowledge is explicitly acquired, but only of a paradoxical sort that cannot be rationally apprehended: "I became full of revelation, through a primary revelation of unknowing (ⲁⲧⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛϥ). Because I did not apprehend it, I apprehended it

[16] NHC XI,3.45.6–57.24b. Below I have generally followed the most recent edition of the text, *L'allogène* (Funk/Scopello) noting a few discrepancies with King (*Revelation*) and Layton (text: *Coptic Gnostic Chrestomathy* [Louvain: Peeters, 2003]; translation: *Scriptures*) and occasionally modifying the translation.

[17] Maddalena Scopello, "Youel et Barbélo dans le Traité de l'Allogène," in *Colloque international sur les textes de Nag Hammadi* (ed. Bernard Barc; Louvain: Peeters, 1981) esp. 374–76. The figure seems to be derived from speculation about Metatron in intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature (ibid., 377–80).

[18] NHC XI,3.59.7b.

[19] King, *Revelation*, 19.

[20] Williams ("Negative Theologies," 290), observes that *Allogenes* uses language reminiscent of much later Western mysticism. See also Turner, "Gnosticism and Platonism," 448; Saffrey, "Connaissance et inconnaissance," 20; Wallis, "Spiritual Importance," 470. King (*Revelation*, 12, 49) considers that *Allogenes*'s approach to ritual and revelation is much more in line with theurgic Neoplatonism than Plotinus's mysticism. John Finamore gives a careful and fruitful comparison of ontology ("Iamblichus, the Sethians, and *Marsanes*," in Turner's and Majercik's *Gnosticism*, 232–38).

[21] See also Finamore, "Iamblichus, the Sethians, and *Marsanes*, 238 n. 37, on the topic of ontological generation; Puech, too, assigns Nag Hammadi's *Zostrianos* to that encountered by Plotinus, but is not sure about *Allogenes*; see Henri-Charles Puech, "Plotin et les Gnostiques," in idem, *En quête de la Gnose,* vol. 1. *La Gnose et le temps et autres essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 116.

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(ⲉⲓⲉⲛⲁⲧⲉⲓⲛⲉ . . . ⲁⲓⲉⲓ[ⲛⲉ]) and received power from it."[22] He continues as follows: "through a primary revelation of the first thing unknown to all I saw the deity elevated beyond perfection and the triple power that exists in them [all beings]. I was seeking the ineffable and unknowable God."[23]

What follows is classic negative theology. As King points out, the text (61.32b–62.24a) asks if existence can be predicated of the first principle; the answer is no, for it does not possess mind, life, or substance (ϩⲩⲡⲁⲣⲝⲓⲥ); nor can one predicate its existence with reference to its products.[24] As the "powers of the luminaries" say, "neither does it have need of mind or life or indeed anything at all, since it is superior to (ⲉϥⲥⲟⲧⲡ̄ ⲉ-) the entireties[25] by virtue of its privation[26] and its incomprehensibility; that is, its substance is not subject to becoming (ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲧⲱⲱⲡⲉ)".[27]

The next section (62.27b–63.28a) combines a series of negations (ⲟⲩⲧⲉ . . .ⲁⲛ ⲡⲉ . . . ⲟⲩⲧⲉ . . . ⲁⲛ ["it is not . . . nor . . ."] constructions) and paradoxes quite similar to a section of the *Apocryphon of John,* with whom *Allogenes* here likely shares a source:[28] "Neither is it boundless nor is it bounded by any other thing, but rather it is something which is superior. It is not corporeal; it is not incorporeal. It is not great; it is not small; it is not quantity; it is not quality."[29] The text goes on to discuss other categories of Platonic provenance, all of them inadequate: number, time, eternity, etc.[30]; extensive use of the appellation "superior to," (ⲥⲟⲧⲡ̄ ⲉ-) is

[22] NHC XI,3.60.37–61.1.

[23] NHC XI,3.61.11–14.

[24] This is an interesting departure from Plotinus, who says "we have it [i.e., the One] in such a way that we speak about it, but do not speak it. For we say what it is not, but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it" (*Enn*. V.3 [49] 14.5–8). See also for its relative utility to kataphasis and silence, VI.8 [39] 18.1–2: "And you when you seek, seek nothing outside him, but seek within all things which come after him; but leave himself alone.")

[25] With Layton, *Scriptures, pace* King, *Unknowable God*, 160: "all of them"; Turner, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 185: "the Totality"; Scopello, ibid., 225: "aux Touts."

[26] ⲧⲙ̄ⲧⲣϩⲁⲉ with King (*Unknowable God*) and Turner (*L'allogène*, 185) *pace* ⲧⲙ̄ⲧ‹ⲁⲧ›ⲣϩⲁⲉ (Layton, *Chrestomathy*, 126; idem, *Scriptures*, 146; Funk *L'allogène,* 224).

[27] NHC XI,3.62.18–24.

[28] BG 24.6–25.10; NHC II,3.17–36, 5.2–6.3; NHC IV,4.28–5.23. Antoinette Wire sees a direct literary dependence ("Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII* [ed. Charles Hedrick; Leiden: Brill, 1990] 177). Michel Tardieu thinks both refer to Plato, *Parm*. 137C–142A (*Écrits gnostiques* [Paris: Cerf, 1984] 249–51). Raoul Mortley agrees and points out further that the "neither x nor y" construction is particularly reminiscent of the sixth hypothesis ("the One is not"), *Parm*. 163B–164A (*From Word to Silence: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* [2 vols.; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1986] 2:30). See also Turner, "Introduction: *Marsanès*," 87–88; idem, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 78–79; idem, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 52–56, 117–18. I accept Tardieu's (*Écrits gnostiques*, 251) argument that ⲧⲁⲛⲓⲟ translates a corruption of ποῖον to ποιητόν.

[29] NHC XI,3.63.1–8.

[30] Ibid., 63.8–27. "The presentation of the Unknowable in 61.32–67.38 is based on a denial that any of the Platonic and Aristotelian attributes or categories given for anything which exists or is intelligible can be applied to the Unknowable" (King, *Unknowable God*, 18). By this she refers to the five attributes for existents in *Sophist* 254D–255E (being, movement, rest, identity, and diversity)

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made.[31] However, the basic pattern—the Unknowable is neither this, nor that, but is greater—is the same.[32] This pattern is clear enough to compare to contemporary Platonic currents.

The Platonists of Late Antiquity followed Aristotle in holding that negation can be conceived of in three general ways:[33] flat-out denial of an attribute (ἀπόφασις), abstraction of a particular by removal of accidental attributes (ἀνάλυσις or ἀφαίρεσις), and privation (στέρησις). Bare ἀπόφασις is a clumsy tool: The statement that "it is not a horse" is true of everything but horses.[34] Meanwhile, privation was of little service to metaphysicians outside of Aristotelian commentators.[35] Abstraction, however, dominated Middle Platonic[36] and Plotinian[37] negative

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and Aristotle's ten categories (substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, and affection). *Allogenes* thus knows Plotinus's attack (*Enn*. VI.1 [42] 2.13–16) on use of the categories to describe intelligible (King, *Unknowable God*, 18).

[31] NHC XI,3.62.33; 63.4–5, 12, 19. King translates ⲥⲟⲧⲡ ϵ- as "exquisite"; Turner, "superlative" (*Platonic Tradition*, 686; idem, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 186). See also the use of ϵⷭⲭⲟⲥϵ ϵ- (NHC XI,3.66.33–38).

[32] See also the detailed account of Turner, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 120–21.

[33] For privation vs. negation in Aristotle see *Metaphysics* 1022b 33; John Whittaker "Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology," *SO* 44 (1969) 109–25, 119) who sees στέρεσις as a subdivision of ἀπόφασις, pointing to *Meta*. 1056a 24, 1011b 19. Sometimes they mean the same thing (ibid., 120–21). For Aristotle, "Privation should be understood as the absence of a quality from a given substratum or entity, and that it be perceivable as an absence." Hence "a vegetable has no eyes" is a privation because it is an intelligible statement, unlike "a vegetable has no infinity" (unintelligible, for nothing can have infinity). See Raoul Mortley, "The Fundamentals of the Via Negativa," *AJP* 103 (1982) 429–39, 434. But cf. the account of Stephen Gersh, *Neoplatonism after Derrida: Parallelograms* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 52–54 n. 85, who adds ἑτερότης, διαφορά, and ἐναντιότης and describes similar, if more complex, models.

[34] As Mortley, "Via Negativa," 436.

[35] Such as Syrianus (Mortley, *Silence*, 85–89).

[36] Mortley, "Via Negativa," 435–38; John P. Kenney, "Ancient Apophatic Theology," in Turner's and Majercik's *Gnosticism*, 268–69. The mathematical negative theology of abstraction, meanwhile, is also in Alcinous (*Didaskalos,* X.5, 7), perhaps thinking of Aristotle, *Meta*. 1061a 28. See further Plutarch (*Quest. plat*. 1001e–1002a), Celsus (*apud* Origen, *Cels*. 7.42), and Clemens Alexandrinus (*Strom*. V.71.2); cit. Whittaker, "Negative Theology"; see also Turner, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 118–19). ἀνάλυσις and ἀφαίρεσις mean the same thing in Middle Platonic sources; see Whittaker, "Negative Theology," 113; Henny F. Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (OECS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 223.

[37] Harry H. Wolfson ("Albinus and Plotinus," *HTR* 45 [1952] 115–130, esp. 119–22) argues that Plotinus follows Alcinous (*Enn*. VI.7 [38] 36.7). For them both, the process of saying what something is not without saying what it is—ἀφαίρεσις—is tantamount to ἀπόφασις, negation, in its Aristotelian sense. Whittaker ("Negative Theology," 122–23) disagrees concerning Alcinous but does see the strategy in Plotinus (e.g., *Enn*. VI.8 [39] 21). He is followed by John Bussanich, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus* (Philos. Antiq. 49; Leiden: Brill, 1988) 114–15, who rejects Mortley's sharp distinction between abstraction and negation (ibid., 195). See Mortley, *Silence*, 2:20–24, 56–57 for the relationship of ἀφαίρεσις to contemporary mathematical currents. Deirdre Carabine thinks, contra Mortley, that ἀφαίρεσις does not predicate anything beyond νοῦς and is more of a *via remotionis* than a *via negativa*; mystical knowledge only emerges in Numenius and Plotinus (*The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*

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theology. Plotinus likes to say that "since he (the One) is none of these things, one can only say that he is beyond them ἐπέκεινα τούτων,"[38] charging his reader to abandon the necessarily dualistic operation of intellect by stripping away its thoughts, like an initiate disrobing for the mysteries.[39] In Plotinus, "the normal use of intellect involves predication, which introduces plurality since the logic of predication involves the multiple structures of the subject and the predicated quality.[40] Abstraction has an opposite logic, since it involves subtracting from the subject rather than adding to it."[41] Abstraction is productive: to use the common Middle Platonic geometric analogy, negating a line means "not-line"; abstracting from a line gives a point.

Allogenes does share with Plotinus a pattern of "neither/nor/but beyond,"[42] but it is hardly significant that a standard Platonic expression was common to these texts. Moreover, *Allogenes* delights in paradox far more than Plotinus, as, for example, at 47.19–32: "for this one is One who is situated as a cause of Being and a source and an immaterial matter and a numberless number and a formless form and a shapeless shape and a powerless one with power and a nonsubstantial substance . . . and an inactive activity, also being a provider of provisions and a divinity of divinity."[43] The relentless piling of negations, specifically of opposite qualities, is

[LTPM 19; Peeters: Louvain, 1995], 80, 83). Zlatko Pleše agrees (*Poetics of the Gnostic Universe. Narrative and Cosmology in the* Apocryphon of John [NHMS 52; Leiden: Brill, 2006] 82–91).

[38] *Enn*. V.5 [32] 6.9. "It is certainly none of the things of which it is origin; it is of such a kind, though nothing can be predicated of it, not being, not substance, not life, as to be above all of these things" (τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντα αὐτῶν). *Enn*. III.8 [30] 10.27–31; see also VI.7 [38] 32; VI.9 [9] 3.41–55; VI.9 [9] 6 passim; see also the anonymous Turin commentary—*Anon. Comm. Parm* (Hadot) XIII.23, 2:108–109, XIV.1–4, 2:108–109.

[39] *Enn*. I.6 [1] 1.7; see also his injunction, ἄφελε πάντα, at the conclusion of V.3 [49]; see also I.6 [1] 8.25–26; VI.3 [44] 19; VI.7 [38] 34–35, 38; VI.8 [39] 8.13–16, 20–22; for its relative utility to kataphasis and silence, VI.8 [39] 11.34–36; see Whittaker, "Negative Theology," 123. Plotinus's negative theology is largely epistemological. References to alienation and otherness (I.6 [1] 5, I.8 [51] 14, etc.) are not concerned with the One. Raoul Mortley, "Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus," *AJP* 96 (1975) 363–77, esp. 375; Whittaker, "Negative Theology," 123–24. However, Bussanich points out that the process is no less "existential" than negation (*Plotinus*, 195).

[40] As for example *Enn*. VI.7 [38] 41.12–17; VI.8 [39] 15; VI.9 [9] 2.36–39.

[41] Mortley, "Plotinus," 377; idem, *From Word to Silence*, 2:19, where the process is contrasted with Proclus's more apophatic approach; also ibid., 48–56. In ibid., 27, Plotinus is charged with eschewing "systematic stage-by-stage deconstruction of entities." Carlos Steel is in full agreement ("Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus's *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology," in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65. Geburtstag* [ed. Martin Pickavé; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003] 585).

[42] Turner focuses on the "but" clause always being positive: "but it is something else above, beyond, superior to the previously negated predications" ("Setting," 185). See idem, "Gnosticism and Platonism," 450–51, with reference to *Enn*. VI.9 [9] 3; see also idem, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 204; idem, *Platonic Tradition*, 668; idem, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 120–22.

[43] See also NHC XI,3.47.9–48.2, 48.8–32, 63.17–21, 65.30–33; *Anon. Comm. Parm*. (Hadot) XIV.26–34, 2:112–113; Plotinus does occasionally experiment with paradoxical language (*Enn*. V.5 [32] 7.36: ἔνδον ἄρα ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔνδον αὖ [not negative theology but a description of the "oscillation

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not characteristic of Plotinus, Porphyry, or the anonymous commentary.[44] It can be found, however, in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism.

The treatises where Iamblichus most likely discussed negative theology are lost to us,[45] but his approach is probably preserved by Proclus, who usually replicates Iamblichaean thought in matters theurgic.[46] In his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Proclus formulates a second-order apophasis, a "*negatio negationis*," or "negation of negation." Proclus wrestles with how to interpret Parmenides' lemma at the end of the discourse about the first hypothesis (*Parm.* 142A); he thinks Plato means that the paradoxical negations of the One themselves are negated.[47] This approach to *Parmenides* interpretation falls under the rubric of

between within and without" prior too union. See Bussanich, *Plotinus*, 139]; *Enn.* V.5 [32] 7.29–30). See also Finamore, "Iamblichus," 236–38; Turner, "Gnosticism and Platonism," 431–32.

[44] King (*Revelation*, 97–98) recalls Plotinus (*Enn.* V.1 [10] 7.18-27, VI.7 [38] 17—"formless form"; one should add Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* [ed. and trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell; WGW 4; Atlanta: SBL, 2003] I.7.21.15: divine nature is "formless [ἀνείδεον] so as to not be bounded by form" and Whittaker ("Transcendent Absolute," 77), notes that Plotinus's One transcends opposites (transcendence #2) without combining them (transcendence #1), since the predicates listed are not really opposites but privative qualities. However, such expressions are not terribly common in Plotinus, even when he discusses abstraction, and King elsewhere (*Revelation*, 165) recognizes *Allogenes*'s synthesis of opposites as extreme. Porphyry does discuss ἀφαίρεσις, but in contexts outside of negative theology. See, for example, *Sententiae* (ed. Erich Lamberz; Teubner: Leipzig, 1975) chs. 32, 43. As Bechtle observes, the negative theology of the anonymous commentary resembles that of the Alcinous more than Plotinus's or Proclus's (*Anonymous Commentary*, 242–47); see also the more general discussion of Saffrey, "Connaissance et inconnaissance," 8–9. Finally, *Zostrianos* also occasionally uses paradox, yet neither in a systematic fashion (NHC VIII,1. 65.21-66.7, 118.4; on 74.16–8, see below, n. 83) or even a negative theological context (21.5–7, on the omnipresence of souls).

[45] These would include his treatises *On the Gods*, *The Chaldean Theology*, and so forth. See John Dillon in Iamblichus, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis. In Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (ed. and trans. J. Dillon; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 23–25. Given Iamblichus's proclivity for discussing supra-rational faculties and techniques in ritual contexts (e.g., *de Mysteriis*.; see for example, Gregory Shaw, "After Aporia: Theurgy in Later Platonism," in Turner and Majercik, 74–82), it is difficult to imagine that he showed no interest in the negative theology of his predecessors, or that Proclus's apophatic advances beyond Plotinus are entirely unique to him. "The emphasis on not-knowing in theurgy suggests that it was integrally related to negative theology." (idem, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," *Traditio* 41 [1985] 1–28, 18)

[46] See for example Eric. R. Dodds in Proclus, *Elements of Theology* (ed. and trans. Eric R. Dodds; Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) xxii–xxiii; Wallis, *Neoplatonism,* 142, 145, 153–55. Proclus does engage—and disagree with—Iamblichus's *Parmenides* commentary at length, but on the generation of gods, not negative theology. See Carlos Steel, "Iamblichus and the Theological Interpretation of the *Parmenides*," *SyllClass* 8 (1997) 15–30; John Dillon, "Porphyry and Iamblichus in Proclus' Commentary on the *Parmenides*," in *Gonimos: Neoplatonic and Byzantine Studies presented to Leendert G. Westerink at 75* (ed. John Duffy and John Peradotto; Buffalo: Arethusa, 1988).

[47] See his notion of "hyper-negation," as mentioned at *Comm. Parm.* 1172.35. Morrow and Dillon (ibid., 523 n. 33) note that the ὑπεραπόφασις is of Stoic provenance and simply results in an affirmation (~P = P), while for Proclus it reflects the transcendence of opposites. See also Steel, "Negatio Negationis," 362–63; Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 150–51; Proclus, *Comm. Parm.* 1172.35, 1076.10–12; idem, *Théologie platonicienne* (ed. and trans. Henri-Dominique Saffrey and Leendert

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"faith," the "theurgic" virtue,[48] and so is a kind of verbal, or discursive, theurgy (for more on which see below). Our copy of his commentary, like Parmenides at the end of the first hypothesis, famously culminates in silence, the *negatio negationis*.[49] Plotinus, too, ends his discourse on the One with silence,[50] but, as noted above, he has taken a different route there.

There is no formal "negation of negation" at Nag Hammadi; but given Proclus's susual reliance on Iamblichus, something like it was probably available around the turn of the fourth century C.E., likely in the form of verbal theurgy.[51] *Allogenes* seems to employ the kind of systematic, apophatic paradox emblematic of Proclus (and his most famous reader, Pseudo-Denys), eschewing the more conventionally Middle Platonic and Plotinian ἀφαίρεσις. Moreover, Plotinus's strategy ultimately terminates in, as Rist says, waiting for "grace."[52] Proclus's strategy climaxes in an explicitly articulated supra-rational cognitive state, "faith." *Allogenes* does too, for its apophatic strategy culminates in the acquisition of knowledge—unknowable knowledge, that is.

G. Westerink; 6 vols.; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967–1997) 1:12, 57.21–24; ibid., 2:10–12, 61–73, but esp. 2:10, 63.18–64.5 [trans. mine]:

> the manner of negations (ἀποφασέων) in question is thus transcendent, primordial, having exceeded the whole universe by an unknowable and ineffable superiority of simplicity. And it is necessary, having attributed to the first God the aforementioned manner, to next sort out the negations themselves; for it could have no "name or description," says the Parmenides [142a3]. But if there is no proposition of this sort, it is clear that there is not a negation (for everything is posterior to the One, not only the objects of knowledge but knowledges and the instruments of knowledge themselves) and an impossibility appears, so to speak, at the end of the hypothesis. For if there is no single discourse on the subject of the One, the present discourse itself, which submits these theses is not germane to the One. Furthermore, it's no surprise if someone, wanting to make the ineffable known by means of a discourse, leads the discourse into an impossibility, since all knowledge which is applied to an object of knowledge with which it is not really concerned, dissolves its own force.

[48] The language of πίστις is used to describe reading the *Parmenides* in the context of union with the One at idem, *Comm. Parm.* VI.1241.42K; for the "theurgic virtue," see idem, *Plat. Theo.* 1:25. For analysis, see Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence," 224; idem, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 231–46; Dylan Burns, "Proclus and the Theurgic Liturgy of Pseudo-Dionysius," *Dionysius* 22 (2004) 111–32, 118–21.

[49] "It is with silence, then, that he [the negative theologian or theurgist] brings to completion the study of the One" (Proclus, *Comm. Parm.* VII.1242.76K).

[50] As at *Enn.* VI.8 [39] 11.1–5 and the conclusion of VI.9 [9].

[51] Iamblichus's defense of theurgy "results in a kind of positive theology, but one based on henological ineffability rather than ontological perfection" (Shaw, "Rituals of Unification," 18). For dating of Iamblichus's "Porphyrian" period to 280–305 C.E. (i.e., after *De myst.*, ca. 280) see Dillon in Iamblichus, *Iamb. Chal.*, 18–19; he dates *De myst.* later (early fourth century?) in "Iamblichus of Chalcis," *ANRW* II:36.2 (1986) 862–909, esp. 875.

[52] Rist, "Mysticism," 219; Armstrong, "Plotinus," in *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (ed. Arthur H. Armstrong; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 259–60; idem, in Plotinus, *Enn.* V p. 135 n. 1. Plotinus admits that even the greatest philosophers can only prepare themselves for the vision of the One, a preparation that culminates in passivity. See *Enn.* V.5 [32] 8.3–6; V.8. [31] 11.2; but cf. V.5 [32] 12.33–35; Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus. Or the Simplicity of Vision* (trans. Michael Chase; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998] 57; Zeke Mazur, "*Unio Magica*: Part II: Plotinus, Theurgy, and the Question of Ritual," *Dionysius* 22 (2004) 29–56, 40–42, esp. n. 43.

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Self-Reflexive "Unknowable Knowledge"

The (variously framed) paradoxical jargon of "unknowable knowledge" describes what the text's negative theology produces.[53] The "primary revelation of the Unknowable One" continues, as the luminaries describe it as epistemological faculty *and* object:

> Neither is it anything that exists such that it is possible for one to know it, but rather it is something else that is superior, something that is impossible for someone to know, a first revelation and gnosis which knows (ⲉⲓⲛⲉ) itself.[54]

> Is this unknowable knowledge not that thing in whose respect it exists? And it is joined to that unknowability which sees it. How is it unknowable? Or, is there anyone who sees it as it exists in its entirety? If one would say that it exists as a form of gnosis, that one has been impious and has been judged as having not known God.[55]

Of course this doctrine of "unknowable knowledge" is nowhere to be found in Plotinus,[56] who discusses supra-noetic contemplation of the One but assigns no such systematic, paradoxical epistemological category to it.[57] But Porphyry, the

[53] This jargon is, as far as I can tell, unsystematic; ⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲉⲓⲛⲉ: NHC XI,3.59.31–32, 61.2, 61.17-19; ⲁⲧⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛϥ̄: 59.29–32, 61.16, 63.30, 67.26; ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛⲥ̄: 64.10–11.

[54] Ibid., 63.9–16. "Invisible Spirit" seems to designate "the Unknowable" (ibid., 66.16 and 66.30–38, cited in King, *Unknowable God*, 19) in terms of its relationship to the generation of the plurality. See also Turner "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 52–56.

[55] NHC XI,3.64.10–23. Turner (*Platonic Tradition*, 688; "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 99, 187; followed by Scopello, *L'allogène*, 229) inserts "whether one sees" (a "solution problématique d'une difficulté qui persiste"—Funk [ibid., 228]) before ⲛ̄ⲁⲱ ⲛ̄ϩⲉ ⲉⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲧⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛϥ̄, concluding that "to equate him with either knowledge or non-knowledge is to miss the goal of ones' quest." King (*Revelation*, 169) and Layton (*Scriptures*, 147) translate the statement as questions: "how is it unknowable . . .?"

[56] With Corrigan, "Platonism and Gnosticism," 159, esp. n. 65.

[57] Turner (*Platonic Tradition*, 689) recalls *Enn*. III.8 [30] 11 (see also Corrigan, "Matter," 44 n. 77), VI.9 [9] 6.43–45, V.3 [49] 12–13, cited by Turner, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 208–9). All three passages refer not to a supracognitive contemplative faculty but the Good's lack of need of Intellect (or anything else), contra, probably, Origen the Platonist (for whose doctrine of an intelligible demiurge as First Principle see Proclus, *Comm*. *Tim*. 1:303.27–29; idem, *Comm*. *Parm*. I.635–638 [per Morrow and Dillon in ibid., xxvi–xxvii]; Proclus, *Plat*. *Theo*. 2:4; Saffrey and Westerink, x–xii). See also the debate between Anthony C. Lloyd ("Non-Propositional Thought—an Enigma of Greek Philosophy," *PAS* 70 [1969–1970] 261–74; idem, "Non-Propositional Thought in Plotinus," *Phronesis* 31 [1986] 258–65) and Richard Sorabji ("Myths about Non-Propositional Thought," in idem, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*. *Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983]) on the "non-propositional" thought in Plotinus's conception of νοῦς, which, according to Lloyd ("Plotinus," 264; see also idem, "Enigma," 286), implies "thought without language." Sorabji ("Non-Propositional Thought," 152–54) responds that it is not a kind of thought at all. Either way, the noetic faculty in question is not ineffable but tautological. We do find Plotinus using language not entirely alien to "learned ignorance": the One is known by "simple intuition (ἐπιβολῇ ἀθρόᾳ)," which is akin, "if not identical to, the One's self-directed activity" (*Enn*. III.8 [30] 9.21. For discussion see Rist, *Plotinus*, 47–51; Bussanich, *Plotinus*, 94–95, for Epicurean provenance, Plotinian parallels, and reception). See also προσβολή (III.8 [30] 10.33),

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anonymous commentary on the *Parmenides*, and the *Chaldean Oracles* do,[58] anticipating Iamblichus's and Proclus's plumbing of contemplation of the One through speculation on the Chaldean ἄνθος νοῦ.[59] *Allogenes*'s epistemology, then, *does* have parallels in pre-Plotinian mysticism—the *Oracles*, and (depending on how one dates it) the anonymous commentary.[60]

However, *Allogenes*'s epistemology of "unknowable knowledge" differs in several key ways. First, the Sethian text uses the vocabulary more often than do the *Oracles* and the *Parmenides* commentary, where its presence is interesting but not central. Secondly, the *Oracles* and *Parmenides* commentary do not develop it into a consistent practice, much less one couched in repetition of apophatic paradox (as described above) that leads to *Lesemysterium* (as described below). Third, *Allogenes* transforms the doctrine by assigning it self-reflexivity:[61] "for it

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ἀπομαντεύσασθαι (VI.7 [38] 29.22), and ὑπερνόησις (VI.8 [39] 16.33), a property of the One, *not* a mystic. The intellect attempting to conceive "that which is beyond" continually draws itself back into multiplicity (V.3 [49] 11.1–4), so it must "let go of learning" (VI.7 [38] 36.15–16; see also III.8 [30] 9.28–32) and is "filled with wonder" if it practices ἀφαίρεσις (III. 8 [30] 10.31). See also above, n. 39, 40. In toto, Plotinus sees contemplation of the One as taking place beyond intellect, and in this he is in agreement with *Allogenes* (and many other contemporary Platonists); he differs on terminology, both in his refusal to systematize it and to embrace paradoxical expression, and this is a significant difference.

[58] Porphyry, *Sent*. ch. 10, line 4; ch. 25, line 15 ("While a great deal can be said after the fashion of Intellect concerning that which is beyond Intellect, nonetheless it is better contemplated by means of a certain absence of Intellect than by intellection"[trans. mine]), ch. 26, line 15; Porphyry in *Theosophorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (ed. Harmut Erbse; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995) ch. 65, line 183, cited in Saffrey, "Connaissance et inconnaissance," 16; *Anon. Comm. Parm*. (Hadot) 2:27–31; 2:70; V.7–15, 2:78; VI.10–12, 2:82; IX.24–26, 2:94; *Chaldean Oracles* (ed. and trans. Ruth Majercik; SGRR 5; Leiden: Brill, 1989) fr. 1; see also Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 114–16; Turner "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 99–102, 155–60; Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 689; Turner, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 209–10; Majercik, "Gnosticism," 283–86.

[59] Iamblichus, *De myst*. II.11.96, II.11.98.6–10; idem, *Comm. Parm* (Dillon) frgs. 2A, 2B; Proclus, *Comm. Tim*. 3:296; idem, *Comm. Chald*. (in *Oracles Chaldaïques* [ed. Édouard des Places; Paris: Les belles lettres, 1971]) IV.153.20, IV.156.23, IV.157.28; Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (SPP 8; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 119–21 n. 200; idem, *Parallelograms*, 192 n. 36; Christian Guérard, "L'hyparxis de l'âme et la fleur et l'intellect dans la mystagogie de Proclus," in *Proclus, Lecteur et Interprète des Anciens* (ed. Jean Pépin and Henri-Dominique Saffrey; Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1987) 336–40, 344; Sarah Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-Discursive Thinking in the Thought of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 178–80; Anne Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy," *CQ* 32 (1982) 212–24, esp. 221; Majercik, "Reconsiderations," 284–85.

[60] For a late second-century dating of the *Oracles*, see Iamblichus in *Chald. Or*., 1–2; des Places in *Or. Chald*., 7–11. For a status quaestionis on (and rejection of) the *Oracles*' influence on Plotinus, see Ruth Majercik, "The Chaldean Oracles and the School of Plotinus," *Anc W* 29 (1998) 91–105; for a response asserting Plotinian knowledge of the oracles, see John Finamore, "Plotinus, Psellus, and the Chaldean Oracles: A Reply to Majercik," *Anc W* 29 (1998) 107–10. For the debate over dating the Turin commentary, see above, n. 10.

[61] For which see *Anon. Comm. Parm*. (Hadot) V.34, II:82. See Turner, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 155, who highlights the similarities between the doctrines of learned ignorance in these two

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is a *comprehension of itself*, since it is something unknowable of this sort, and since it is in its unknowability superior to those which are good."[62] Knowledge of the Invisible Spirit is therefore the Invisible Spirit's knowledge of itself, and the Invisible Spirit's knowledge of itself is unknowable knowledge.[63] The collapsing of epistemology, ontology, and soteriology ultimately derives from Aristotle's well-known principle of assimilation of the subject and object of thought.[64] This self-reflexivity also, however, extends to discourse. If knower and known are one and the same (like the Invisible Spirit) then so are an accurate description of Youel's revelation as recorded for Messos (the text of *Allogenes*) and the revelation itself (*Allogenes*'s subject). Or, as Gersh has put it, "both the enactment and the description are of negative theology itself."[65] It follows that the description of this disintegration is a disintegration, this time between the reader and book. Reading the revelation in *Allogenes* is itself the revelation, whose content is ontological assimilation to the Invisible Spirit.[66] This is a jump that is not made by the anonymous commentary, the *Chaldean Oracles*, or Plotinus. In the former cases, the vocabulary of "unknowable

texts and speculates that "the author of *Allogenes* had consulted the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* (or one similar to it) not only in matters of his triadic metaphysics, but also for his epistemological doctrine."

[62] NHC XI,3.63.28–31b [italics mine]. Turner (*Platonic Tradition,* 686) here recalls *Anon. Comm. Parm.* (Hadot) IX.20–26, 2:94–95, X.25–29, 2:96–97.

[63] Although the luminaries warn the seeker not to conceive of it as knowledge at all. But see also King (*Revelation*, 170), who holds that NHC XI,3.64.16–21 precludes the possibility of any knowledge about God whatsoever. Thus, the primary revelation of the unknowable can only be privative. The problem depends on whether *Allogenes*'s author considers ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ in this passage to include ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲥⲱⲟⲩⲛ̄.

[64] Self-reflexive unknowable knowledge is predicated of the Unknowable One as part of the greater negative theological "primary revelation" beginning at ibid., 60.37–61.14. For the identification of subject and object of thought, see Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.2 425b–426a26, 3.8 431b28–432a1, working from *Physics* 3.3; following the discussion of Sorabji, "Non-Propositional Thought," 144–47. Indeed, following this onto-epistemological breakdown *Allogenes* shifts back to kataphatic statements with privative value: the Invisible Spirit is "a breathless and boundless place," (NHC XI,3.66.23–25) "it receives all, tranquil, standing still" (ibid., 66.28–30). Indeed, "it is from that one who stands still forever that eternal life appeared" (ibid., 66.30b-33). See also Williams, *Immovable Race*, 86–96. The phrases about "standing still" and "the immovable race" may both refer to internal, contemplative practices stemming from the Jewish apocalyptic motif of standing still in a court before God.

[65] Gersh, *Parallelograms*, 193.

[66] Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 662, with reference to Plotinus, *Enn.* III.8 [30] 8, V.4 [7] 2.46; Porphyry, *Sent.* chs. 40, 51–56: "the contemplation of entities on ever higher ontological levels is characterized as a form of the contemplator's self-knowledge, suggesting that the consciousness of the knowing subject is actually assimilated to the ontological character of the level that one intelligizes at any given point. Having becomes inactive, still, and silent, indeed incognizant even of himself, he has taken on the character of the Unknowable One, and is one with the object of his vision." See also Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 664; idem, "Setting," 214; idem, "Gnosticism and Platonism," 448; idem, "Introduction: *Marsanès*," 147–48; idem, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 119–31; idem, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 97; with focus on the textual aspect of the assimilation, see King, *Unknowable God*, 56.

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knowledge" is not self-reflexive, as it is in *Allogenes*. In the latter, the supra-rational cognitive state is described, but not enacted.

Lesemysterium

Allogenes's negative theology ascends from apophatic negation to an outright dissolution of the boundaries between seeker, "unknowable knowledge," and First Principle—between the reader and the text. The result is an absence of discourse, a "stillness" or "calmness," as the text intones.[67] With respect to practice, *Allogenes* parts ways with Middle Platonism, *Zostrianos*, and Plotinus, who employed abstraction not to elicit mystical experience but to prepare oneself for it. The latter opined that after a mystical experience one could talk about it rationally, but it was pointless to try to describe it, much less play esoteric, discursive games in hopes of generating it.[68]

Allogenes, on the other hand, does not simply describe mystical ascent, but performs it. Once the distinction between reader and text breaks down, the text has become the reader's performative (perlocutionary) speech-act, i.e., a mode of discourse whose purpose is to accomplish a task (as, for example, the phrase "I thee wed").[69] In *Allogenes* this performance is the acquisition of self-reflexive "unknowable knowledge," assimilation to the Invisible Spirit, by describing the "primary revelation" of it. Nearly a century ago (1912), Reitzenstein coined the term "Lesemysterium" to describe the "textual initiation" of Hermetic literature.[70] The term can be aptly applied to *Allogenes*, which is a "reading-mystery" that attempts to swallow and transform the reader.[71] As is well-known, Platonizing

[67] NHC XI,3.59.37, 60.24, 66.22 passim; see also Plotinus, *Enn*. V.5 [32] 4.8–11.

[68] During union, "it is absolutely impossible, nor has it (intellect) time, to speak; but it is afterwards that it is able to reason (συλλογίζεσθαι) about it" (*Enn*. V.3 [49] 17.26–28). This of course is exactly what he does at VI.9 [9] 11; see also VI.8 [39] 19.

[69] Uttering a performative "is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it; it is to do it." (John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962] 6) See also Catherine Bell, *Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 68–70; Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (CSSCA 110; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 113–14; cf. the caution of Jonathan Z. Smith, "Great Scott! Thought and Action One More Time," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (ed. P. Mirecki and M. Meyer; RGRW 141; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 90.

[70] Specifically, *Corpus Hermeticum* XIII. See Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenischen Mysterienreligionen. Nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1956) 51–52, 64. See also Turner, who recalls Reitzenstein in the context of the diagrams of the *Book of Jeu* and *Marsanes* ("Ritual in Gnosticism," in Turner and Majercik's *Gnosticism*, 124; idem "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 74, respectively).

[71] Particularly striking, on this reading, is *Allogenes*'s appropriation of the apocalyptic cliché of book-burial. See Francis T. Fallon, "The Gnostic Apocalypses," *Semeia* 14 (1979) 123–58, 125; examples include but are not limited to *1 Enoch* 81, 93, 106, *2 Enoch* 54, *4 Ezra* 12:35-39. At the end of the text, the protagonist is told to write down the revelation (i.e., the text we have just read) and store it in a mountain: "[It] said [to] me, 'write down [whatever] I shall tell you and remind you about, for the sake of those who will, after you, be worthy.' And you shall place this book

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Sethians, inspired by the baptismal rites of their forebears (the so-called rite of the "five seals"), created Platonic manuals for eliciting visionary ascent.[72] *Allogenes* takes the Sethian internalization of ritual one step further by abandoning the baptismal context and rendering the description and reading of visionary exercise a performance itself.

Yet again, *Allogenes* is in line with later developments in Neoplatonic mysticism. As Rappe, van den Berg, and others have demonstrated, Proclus, following Iamblichus,[73] developed a kind of "verbal theurgy" whereby the initiate interacted with discourse as "internal συνθήματα."[74] As mentioned above, apophatic theology, exemplified in *Parmenides* interpretation, had a theurgic context.[75] This internal theurgy, associated with the Chaldean "flower of the whole soul," seems to have taken place at the level of the noetic monad, also known as "the One-Being,"[76] or, in Barbeloite jargon, the "triply-powered."[77] Naturally, *Allogenes*'s negative

upon a mountain, and you shall invoke the guardian of death, Phriktos ('dreadful one')" (NHC XI,3.68.16–23). See NHC II,1.31.28–34 (*Ap. John*), NHC IV,2.80 (*Gos. Eg.*), NHC V,5.85 (*Apoc. Adam*), NHC VI,6.68 (*Og. and Enn.*). How better to finish a book-mystery than describe the fate of the book being read? The motif is re-constellated to describe, perhaps, the safeguarding of our own self-reflexive text. However, any reading of this section of the document can only be provisional, given the mutilated state of the manuscript.

[72] Although baptismal language in the ascent texts is often retained, esp. in *Zostrianos*. See John D. Turner, "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986) 59; idem, "Ritual," esp. 96–97, 128–31; idem, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 71–75; idem, "Introduction: *Marsanès*," 49–54, 164–68; idem, *Platonic Tradition*, 64, 80–84, 238–47; more generally on the five seals, see Schenke, "Phenomenon," 599–607; Rasimus, "Paradise," 242–45; Alastair H.B. Logan, "The Mystery of the Five Seals: Gnostic Initiation Reconsidered," *VC* 51 (1997) 188–206. The standard work on Sethian ritual in general is Jean-Marie Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien. Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique* (BCNH Études 2; Québec, Laval University Press, 1986).

[73] Verbal theurgy for Iamblichus deals primarily with the names of the Gods as anagogically efficacious συνθήματα. (Iamblichus, *De myst*. I.12.42.5–13, VII.4.254.9–256.2; see also Shaw, *Theurgy*, 175–77, 189–215).

[74] See esp. Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 173–81; for verbal συνθήματα see Proclus, *Comm. Chald*. I.148.16–19, V.159.8–11. More generally, see Sheppard, "Theurgy," 223–24; Robert M. van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translation, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 79–81; Werner Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 327; Carine van Lieferringe, *La Théurgie. **Des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus*** (Kernos Supplément 9; Liège: Centre international d'étude de la religion grecque antique, 1999) 263–64 (emphasizing the break with Plotinus). See also Proclus, *Plat. Theo*. 4:11.19–20 on the συνθήματα νόητα through which the hypercosmic gods are known.

[75] With Gersh, *Parallelograms*, 192, n. 236: "one is tempted to speculate further on the relation between the performative and negative theology in the context of Neoplatonic theurgy."

[76] Iamblichus, *Comm. Parm*. (Dillon) frgs. 2A, 2B; Proclus, *Comm. Chald*. IV.153.20, IV.156.23, IV.157.28; Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence," 215–18, 224; Dillon in Iamblichus, *in Plat. Dia*. 389–92. For possible Plotinian antecedents, see Mazur, "*Unio Magica*: Part II," 47–51.

[77] King, *Unknowable God*, 29; "The Triply Powered One of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* corresponds almost precisely to the prefigurative existence of the (anonymous) commentary's 'Second One' in the First" (Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 725; for more see idem, "Introduction: *Marsanès*,"

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theology is described by luminaries of the aeon of Barbelo.[78] They describe what takes place at the level of the "triply-powered" in the ascent to the One, the Invisible Spirit. The text's mystical praxis employs similar performative speech-acts and deals with the same ontological depths as does Neoplatonic verbal theurgy.

Conclusion

In the above, I have tried to contextualize *Allogenes*'s negative theology in the greater history of Platonism. The text's apophatic approach to the One, its self-reflexive epistemology of the unknowable, and its performative mystical praxis is reminiscent of techniques associated with Iamblichus's famous "theurgic turn" around the turn of the fourth century C.E.[79] On several occasions Turner has loosely described the astrological theory and practices of *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) as "Sethian theurgy";[80] in the case of *Allogenes*'s, the word can be used more concretely to describe the text's negative theology and *Lesemysterium*.

The question is then whether *Allogenes*'s redactor developed these practices independently of and prior to "mainstream" Platonists (dating the text as pre-Plotinian) or picked up on the nascent theurgic movement emerging around Iamblichus (dating the text as post-Plotinian). Hitherto, *Allogenes*'s fate has been tied to that of its sister Sethian textual tradition known in Plotinus's school, *Zostrianos*. Abramowski and Majercik notwithstanding, a stable textual tradition between Plotinus's school and Nag Hammadi has been defended for the latter treatise, on the grounds of great similarity to the doctrines attacked by Plotinus himself in *Ennead* II.9 and its shared theological source with Marius Victorinus.[81]

90–102; idem, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 81–94). The term seems to have been of Gnostic coinage, used in Platonic circles only rarely and late (Majercik, "Triad," 480–81).

[78] NHC XI,3.59.4–9.

[79] See the oft-quoted remark of Damascius, *Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo II* (ed. Leendert G. West-erink; Amsterdam, 1977) 105.

[80] See Turner, "Introduction: *Marsanès*," 231–34; idem, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 72–75; idem, *Platonic Tradition*, 614–33.

[81] For the shared source (a *Parmenides* commentary) of *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1.13–66.11; 66.14–68.13; 75.12–21) and Marius Victorinus *Adversus Arium* (*Marius Victorinus: Traités théologiques sur la Trinité* [ed. Paul Henry; trans. Pierre Hadot; Sources Chrétiennes 68–69; Paris, 1960] 1:49.9–40; 50.10–6, 50.7–10, 50.5–8; I:50.18–21, respectively), see Tardieu, "Formation"; Pierre Hadot, "Porphyre et Victorinus: Questions et hypothèses," *ResOr* 9 (1996) 117–25; Turner, "Introduction: *Zostrianos*," 76–77; "Commentary: *Zostrianos*," in *Zostrien*, 579–608 (ed. Barry et al.); idem, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 141–54; idem, "Gnostic Sethians," 42–51; idem, "Victorinus," 72–79. Tardieu ("Formation," 100–1) and Saffrey ("Connaissance et inconnaissance," 4–5) point out that the Turin commentary has a line (IX.1–4, 2:90–93) which draws from *Chald. Or.* fr. 3 and the source (*Adv. Ar.* 1:50.10; NHC VIII,1.66.14–20) common to Marius Victorinus and *Zostrianos* (for which see Tardieu, "Formation."). Perhaps it was written by Numenius, as argued by Tardieu (ibid., 112) and Luc Brisson, "The Platonic Background of the Apocalypse of Zostrianos," in *Traditions of Platonism* (ed. John J. Cleary; Aldershot: Ashgate, 1990) 179–82; Corrigan ("Platonism and Gnosticism," 156) suggests Cronius. See also Bechtle, *Anonymous Commentary*, 237–42.

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On the other hand, *Allogenes*'s paradoxical apophasis does not appear in Plotinus, but the later Neoplatonists. Its *Lesemysterium* operates on the same metaphysical levels and textual interface as later Neoplatonic theurgy. Like *Zostrianos*, it may share a Platonic theological source with Marius Victorinus's *Adversus Arium*,[82] but unlike *Zostrianos*, its source is systematically mixed in with un-Middle Platonic apophatic paradox.[83] Finally, *Allogenes* is already known to have a complex textual tradition, for Epiphanius mentions "books of Allogenes" in the plural in the hands of both Sethians and Archontics.[84] In fact, we possess another one of these books in *Codex Tchacos*, whose version of *Allogenes* is an apocalyptic discourse apparently bereft of Platonic influence.[85] It is possible, then, that there were at least three "books of Allogenes" in Late Antiquity: first, the *Allogenes* of *Codex Tchacos* (un-Platonic); second, that known in Plotinus's seminar ([Middle] Platonic enough to merit his ire); third, the *Allogenes* of NHC XI (theurgic Neoplatonism; possibly a revision of Plotinus's).[86]

[82] Turner ("Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism," 48) points out that *Adversus Arium* and *Allogenes* both hold that the One is "without existence, life, or intellect" (1:49.17–18; NHC XI,3.61.36–37), and that the One's power of existence contains the "powers of life and blessedness" (1:50.12–15; NHC XI,3.49.26–37). Thus "a similar—if not identical—source may have been available also the author of *Allogenes*" ("Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism," 48–49; see also idem, "Introduction: *Allogenes*," 149–54; idem, "Victorinus," 76–79).

[83] *Adversus Arium*, 1:50.16–17 ("non-existent existence"), an interesting example because it crops up among the epithets for the transcendent drawn from the shared source with *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1.75.13–25; as Turner, "Gnostic Sethians," 45, and Brisson, "Apocalypse of Zostrianos," 176, observe, the text is distinctively Middle Platonic). Whether the paradoxical epithet belongs to Victorinus himself or the source he shares with *Allogenes* cannot be determined, since lines following the source in the latter (NHC XI,3.50.1–5) are badly mutilated; however the narrative turn in the text (49.38–39) seems to depart from a context where such an epithet would be appropriate. Regardless, it clearly does not come from the source shared with *Zostrianos*.

[84] Epiphanius, *Panarion* ch. 39.5.1, assigned to Sethians; ibid., ch. 40.2.2, assigned to Archontics; see also the Archontic books named for the "foreigners," the sons of Seth. (ibid., ch. 40.7.4–5)

[85] For commentary and translation see Turner, "Allogenes the Stranger"; for text see *The Gospel of Judas: Critical Edition* (ed. and trans. R. Kasser et al.; Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2007).

[86] Which of these—if any—are those known to Epiphanius and, perhaps, Theodore bar Konai (who knows a "Book of the Foreigners" [*Ktāvā d'nukroye*] and an "Apocalypse of the Foreigners" [*Gelyoneh d'nukroye*] Text: *Librum Scholiorum* [ed. Addai Scher; Louvain: Impr. orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1954] ch. LXIII, 319.29-320.26; trans.: *Livre des scolies [recension de Se´ert]* [trans. Robert Hespel and René Draguet; CSCO 431–32; Louvain: Peeters, 1981–1982] LXIII, 238–39; cit. Henri-Charles Puech, "Fragments retrouvés de *l'Apocalypse d'Allogène*," in idem, *La Gnose*]) is hard to say. Puech (ibid., 284, 294) suggests that Plotinus, Epiphanius, and bar Konai were all dealing with the same body of texts, originating among the Sethians and Archontics and ending up in the hands of the Audiani (for whom see idem, "Audianer," in *RAC* 1 [1950] cols. 910–15). After the Nag Hammadi discovery, Puech indicated ("Plotin," 92) a shared text between one of Theodore's fragments and NHC II,3.89.3–4, *Reality of the Rulers* (in *Nag Hammadi codex* II, 2–7 : together with XIII, 2*, *Brit. Lib. Or.*4926(1), and *P.OXY.* 1, 654, 655 [ed. Bentley Layton: Leiden: BNNS 20; Brill, 1989]), namely, the archon's suggestion to rape Eve: "come, let us sow our seed in her." As Rasimus ("Paradise," 116 n. 57) notes, bar Konai (II.79) mentions snake-worshippers (i.e., Ophites) who deal with typically Ophite theriomorphic archons. The complex of Sethian (bar

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By assigning *Allogenes*'s negative theology to a post-Plotinian provenance I do not seek to minimize Gnosticism's impact on the Platonic tradition.[87] In fact, recent research has emphasized Sethian influence on Plotinus, especially in his early years.[88] It does not seem, however, that this influence is evident in the negative theology of NHC XI,3. Rather, it appears that at least one Sethian contemplative chose to stay abreast of developments in Neoplatonic mysticism. *Allogenes* is a witness to Sethianism's persistent involvement in and contribution to Neoplatonism through the turn of the fourth century. Nor is NHC XI,3 merely an adoption of theurgic ideas. It is a refinement; the sophistication of its systematic, ritualized negative theology is unparalleled in extant sources until Proclus in the mid-fifth century. Second, its subtle *Lesemysterium* anticipates the shape of internalized, text-based apophatic praxis that, via the dissemination of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, would dominate the mystical tradition of medieval Christendom[89] and is currently experiencing a revival through Deconstruction's encounter with negative theology.[90] Third, ideologically speaking, little could be farther from the Hellenic παιδεία prized by the theurgists than *Allogenes*'s apocalyptic visionary narrative. *Allogenes* engages Neoplatonism on the *common ground* of metaphysics and mysticism. Apparently, for the author of *Allogenes*, the genre, idiom, and colour of Barbeloite Sethianism were too precious to concede.[91*]

Konai's *Apocalypse of the Foreigners*, and, more widely, the tradition of writing books ascribed to Allogenes), Archontic (Epiphanius's testimony that Seth and his sons are called "foreigners" with eponymously titled books), Ophite (bar Konai's snake-worshippers), and, in Rasimus's nomenclature, Barbeloite-Ophite (*Reality of the Rulers*) "mythologoumena,"of interest, awaits further study.

[87] As do Edwards, "Intelligible Triad," 25; Majercik, "Triad," 488.

[88] See for example Corrigan, "Matter," 44 n. 77; Mazur, "*Unio Magica*: Part II"; Theo G. Sinnige, "Gnostic influence in the Early Works of Plotinus and in Augustine," in *Plotinus amid Gnostics and Christians: Papers presented at the Plotinus Symposium Held at the Free University, Amsterdam on 25 January 1984* (ed. David Runia; Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1984).

[89] With Williams, "Negative Theologies," 290. For surveys see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); Carabine, *Unknown God*.

[90] Important texts include Jacques Derrida, *On The Name* (ed. Thomas Dutoit; trans. David Wood, John P. Leavy, Jr., and Ian McLeod; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); idem, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Derrida and Negative Theology* (ed. H. Coward and T. Foshay; Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (ISPR; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (ed. John Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon; ISPR; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric, and Truth* (ed. Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999). For analysis from the Neoplatonic angle, see Gersh, *Parallelograms*.

[91] See Alan B. Scott, "Churches or Books?: Sethian Social Organization," *JECS* 3 (1995) 109–22. The importance of genre for determining the social character of Sethianism in its Neoplatonic context remains to be determined.

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