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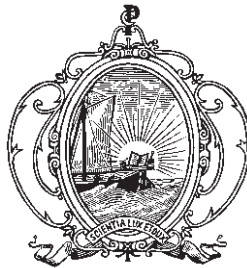
# STUDIA PATRISTICA

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Volume 22:  
The Second Half of the Fourth Century  
From the Fifth Century Onwards (Greek Writers)  
Gregory Palamas' *Epistula* III



PEETERS

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# Aptitude (Ἐπιτηδειότης) and the Foundations of Participation in the Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

That a certain principle pervades the whole of the Dionysian corpus has been commonly acknowledged by readers of the works of this intriguing author. The principle is that of participation, which frames the structure of Dionysian thinking in all its aspects, the Christological, the liturgical and ecclesiological as well as the ontological. Most scholarly studies of this Christian, nonetheless Neoplatonic, figure mostly recognize the participatory character of his thinking. In his participatory metaphysical system there is a feature that seems to be crucial. Except for some sporadic remarks – few in relation to the huge number of relevant studies – and in spite of the influence exercised on the thought of Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas, this feature has not received the attention that its centrality merits. I refer to the concept of aptitude (ἔπιτηδειότης). In the present study I explore aptitude as a critical component of the Dionysian development of participation, with a view to the Neoplatonic background of the concept, especially as established by Plotinus and Proclus. My aim is to argue for a novelty consisting in the fact that the Areopagite regards aptitude as a fundamental element that sets forth the receptive capacity of beings as the regulatory principle for participation in the life of the divinity.

## Introduction

A study of the concept of aptitude (ἔπιτηδειότης) is proposed herein as a way of going deeper into the roots of participation as Dionysius the Areopagite

<sup>1</sup> I should extend my profound gratitude to several people who contributed with their original ideas and thinking, invaluable discussions, comments and suggestions in the development of this study: Vladimir Cvetković, Panos Dimas, fr. Vasileios Gontikakis, Thomas Kjeller Johansen, George Karamanolis, fr. Andrew Louth, Dominique O'Meara, George Pavlos, István Perczel, Øyvind Rabbås, Norman Russell, Carlos Steel, Markus Vinzent, Jon Wetlesen and Christian Wildberg. In particular, I feel indebted to my supervisors at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas in the University of Oslo, Torstein Theodor Tollefsen and Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, for their intelligent guidance through the perplexities of Late Antique philosophical thought. It is only the author's inaptitude that is accountable for the imperfections throughout the present piece of research work.



conceives of them. In the texts of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*<sup>2</sup> a certain interconnection occurs between participation and aptitude, culminating in the formulation *aptitude for participation* (ἐπιτηδειότης πρὸς μέθεξιν).<sup>3</sup> These interrelated concepts are worth studying; aptitude appears as a significant component in the Dionysian instances of participation.<sup>4</sup> It is very likely that the Areopagite grants aptitude a substantial role: that of becoming the regulatory principle of participation in the divine life for all beings and without discrimination. This point touches precisely upon a particular variation of the usage of aptitude in the formulation *aptitude for deification* (ἐπιτηδειότης πρὸς θέωσιν),<sup>5</sup> the latter corresponding both to the corner-stone and to the end of his philosophy.

In the following I include some preliminary remarks on the Dionysian development of participation, in both its historical and systematic aspects.<sup>6</sup> There are certain motives prompting the disputed author of the *CD* to elaborate a concept of participation as a central pillar of his philosophy. These may be recognized through an overview of the preceding historical development of the idea and a consideration of the ways in which the concept emerges within his writings. I suggest distinguishing participation according to the Areopagite as

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, *CD*.

<sup>3</sup> *Corpus Dionysiacum I. De Divinis Nominibus*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla, PTS 33 (Berlin, 1990), 148.12-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 117.15, 118.1, 130.2, 147.15-8, 148.12-8, 166.1-4, 170.8-11, 210.3.

<sup>5</sup> *Corpus Dionysiacum II. De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, ed. Gunter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, PTS 62 (Berlin, 2012), 70.7. See, also, 83, 108.

<sup>6</sup> Considerable attention has already been paid to the topic. The following significant research pieces are indicative. In his late 60's philosophical inquiry into Dionysius' mystical thought, Spearritt offered an investigation of participation, where, among other things, he argued for the complexity of its reality and stressed the importance of regarding it in a balanced way in order to avoid both a polytheistic account and an understanding of participation within a Procline emanationist context, see Placid Spearritt, *A Philosophical Inquiry into Dionysian Mysticism* (Fribourg, 1968). A study of the Dionysian contribution to participation noting its substantial divergences from the relevant Neoplatonic developments, is offered in Eric Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in St. Maximus the Confessor* (Yale, 1991). Perl introduces Dionysius as a thinker who establishes a phase transition between the understanding of participation as share of those intermediary entities that mediate between the ontological multitude and the One, as suggested by Proclus, and the suggestions of the participated-ness of divinity as introduced by Maximus the Confessor. Moreover, a thorough insight into Dionysius' participatory thinking is to be found in a book that is crucial for Dionysian studies, Ysabel de Andia, *Henosis. L'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Areopagite* (Leiden, 1996), 77-100. In addition, several illuminating, though sporadic, remarks are offered in Torstein Theodor Tollefsen's book, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford, 2008), 68, 162-3, 220. Tollefsen's main concern is to investigate the background of what he names a Christocentric cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor. He devotes an entire chapter to arguing for a concept of participation in Maximus' thought, the foundations of which are likely to be found in the Areopagite. Tollefsen analyzes further the Dionysian influence on St. Maximus, in Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford, 2012).

either *unconditional* or *conditional*. I relate the *unconditional* aspect to what Dionysius calls *essential participation* (οὐσιώδης μέθεξις), an expression reminiscent of several formulations in Proclus' *Elements of Theology* that refer to the natural constitution of beings. Essential participation corresponds to what St. Maximus the Confessor acknowledged, in explicating Dionysius, as sharing in *being* (ὄν) and *eternal being* (ἀεὶ ὄν).<sup>7</sup> By the term *conditional*, I refer to what the Areopagite regards as radical, universal, or complete participation (ὀλική μέθεξις).<sup>8</sup> This formulation and the idea behind it is a Dionysian novelty; it does not seem to have a match in Proclus' participatory language.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In chapter 25 of the third century of *Chapters on Charity (Capita de charitate III)*, St. Maximus discusses those four divine attributes by which God sustains, guards and preserves beings, and which He communicated because of his ultimate goodness when He brought the rational and intellectual substance into being; these are a) *being*, b) *eternal being*, c) *goodness*, and d) *wisdom*. He also indicated that the first two of them were provided as substantial idioms (τέσσερα τῶν θεῶν ἰδιωμάτων, συνεκτικὰ καὶ φρουρητικὰ καὶ διασωστικὰ τῶν ὄντων, δι' ἄκραν ἀγαθότητα ἔκοινοποίησεν ὁ Θεός, παραγαγὼν εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὴν λογικὴν καὶ νοερὰν οὐσίαν· τὸ ὄν, τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν, τὴν ἀγαθότητα καὶ σοφίαν. Τούτων τὰ μὲν δύο τῆ οὐσία παρέσχε), in *Sancti Maximi Confessori. Capita de charitate III*, PG 90, 25.

<sup>8</sup> CD I. Div. Nom., 166.

<sup>9</sup> In several places Proclus uses the adjective *universal* (ὀλικός) and its comparatives, e.g. in the form ὀλικώτερα, but he never uses it as predicating participation. Yet the specific Dionysian formulation appears in the second part of chapter 4 of the *DN*. That means that, if my claim concerning Dionysius' novelty were wrong, it should have been evident from the meticulous comparison of the views of Proclus and Dionysius on Evil made by Carlos Steel, 'Proclus et Denys: De l'Existence du Mal', in Ysabel de Andia (ed.), *Denys l'Areopagite et sa posterité en Orient et en Occident* (Paris, 1997), 89-116. But Steel does not show how this formulation could have been copied from Proclus (see especially on page 110 and the Appendix, on page 105). One cannot exclude the possibility of a similar formulation in any of the lost works of Proclus. In that case, I imagine that Steel would immediately think of the transmission of Proclus' lost Greek texts to us through the mediation of Isaac Sebastokrator, and he would probably advise us to check his texts. Indeed, the editorial work of the second among the three treatises attributed to Isaak Sebastokrator, *Isaak Sebastokrator's Περὶ τῆς τῶν κακῶν ὑποστάσεως. De Malorum Subsistentia*, ed. James John Rizzo, BKP 42 (Meisenheim, 1971), offers access to it:

Dionysius' *De Divinis Nominibus*  
(DN, 166, 1-4)

Εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἀναλόγως ἐκάστῳ τὰγαθὸν  
παρῆν, ἦν ἂν τὰ θεϊότατα καὶ πρεσβύτατα  
τὴν τῶν ἐσχάτων ἔχοντα τάξιν. Πῶς δὲ καὶ  
ἦν δυνατὸν μονοειδῶς πάντα μετέχειν τοῦ  
ἀγαθοῦ μὴ πάντα ὄντα ταυτῶς εἰς τὴν  
ὀλικὴν αὐτοῦ μέθεξιν ἐπιτηδεῖα;

Isaak Sebastokrator's *Περὶ τῆς τῶν κακῶν*  
*ὑποστάσεως* (DMS, 4, 3, 28)

εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἀναλόγως ἐκάστῳ τὰγαθὸν  
παρῆν, ἦν ἂν τὰ θεϊότατα καὶ τὰ  
πρεσβύτατα τὴν τῶν ἐσχάτων ἔχοντα  
τάξιν. πῶς δὲ καὶ ἦν δυνατὸν μονοειδῶς  
πάντα μετέχειν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, μὴ πάντων  
ὄντων ταυτῶς εἰς τὴν ὀλικὴν αὐτοῦ  
μέθεξιν ἐπιτηδεῖων;

The parallel columns show not only a great similarity between the texts of the Areopagite and Sebastokrator, but also and more importantly that the latter had almost copied everything from the former. That the rest of the copied extract is not reminiscent of any Procline formulation, makes one assume that *complete participation* (ὀλική μέθεξις) is introduced for the first time by Dionysius. At least, this is a safe assumption pending the recovery of Proclus' lost works.

Given that no similar gradation of participation seems to appear in the *CD*, I think that by *complete participation* Dionysius intends to designate what in Maximus' account results in *well-being* (εὖ εἶναι) and *eternal well-being* (ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι).<sup>10</sup> This brings me to what is my principal concern here, namely the concept of aptitude and a preliminary examination of it in the Areopagite's thought.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to other terms, Dionysius is not the inventor of *epitēdeiotēs*, but rather an innovator of the concept that derives from it. Grounding this claim is effectively to speak of a novelty emerging in the way the Areopagite employs aptitude, as compared to its previous Neoplatonic usages. It is true that Dionysius invents several terminological formulations, which, although they seem at first to point to acknowledged Neoplatonic conceptual schemes, are in fact novel. Conceiving of this novelty presupposes that his constantly stated reliance upon Scripture finds receptive ears.<sup>12</sup>

## Participation

It is indisputable that participation plays an important role in Greek thought.<sup>13</sup> This is remarkable both in its pagan and Christian form. Indeed, a study of participation would be helpful in clarifying what seems to be the most acute problem in Byzantine thinking, namely, the relation of the finite to the infinite, of the one to the many.<sup>14</sup> These categories are fundamental to Greek philosophy. Within the Christian tradition the view of the world as creation out of nothing and the eschatological perspective of deification transform the problem into a question about the relation of the created cosmos to the uncreated God. Hence the foundations of cosmology develop as answers to the question of creation. It is true that in its non-Christian form the Greek philosophical tradition develops within a cosmological framework, a masterful account of which is given in Plato's *Timaeus*. But within its Christian development cosmology is related to a dimension essentially unknown previously and only intuitively outlined: the soteriological. Soteriology comes to the fore as a discourse deriving from the novel possibility of the deification (θεώσις) of the human being and the

<sup>10</sup> *De char.* 3, 24. See also T.T. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology* (2008), 173.

<sup>11</sup> The methodological considerations concerning participation apply equally to aptitude.

<sup>12</sup> From this point of view, Perl is somewhat misleading when he is claiming that Dionysius conceives of divine transcendence and its radical immanence as Plotinus and Proclus do. See Eric Perl, *Theophany. The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (New York, 2007), 112.

<sup>13</sup> T.T. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology* (2008), 192.

<sup>14</sup> Polycarp Sherwood, 'Survey of Recent Works on St. Maximus the Confessor', *Traditio* 20 (1964), 435.

redemption of the entire created cosmos.<sup>15</sup> Such a possibility is introduced and acclaimed only with the Incarnation of Logos (καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο).<sup>16</sup> Since then, Christian philosophy has put together the cosmological and soteriological dimensions. That means that the Christian philosophical mind of the Areopagite approaches the creature and conceives of it within the perspective of deification. For him creation is life within the horizon of deification. This is a fundamental condition that should be remembered in any attempt to interpret his philosophy by the aid of Neoplatonism. Equally, the affinity between cosmology and soteriology is a *conditio sine qua non* in examining aptitude with respect to participation.

Participation pervades the whole of the Dionysian corpus and frames the ground upon which its dimensionality flourishes: the Christological,<sup>17</sup> the Liturgical<sup>18</sup> and the Ecclesiological,<sup>19</sup> as well as the ontological aspects. It is conceived as a reality emerging from the beautiful and the good in such a way that there is no single being that does not have a share in them.<sup>20</sup> This ontological claim has an epistemological equivalent, which is uttered in a way that promotes the centrality of the concept of participation and underlines the interconnected fullness of Dionysian thought. Dionysius asserts that any knowledge about divinity is possible only through participation (μετοχαΐς).<sup>21</sup>

The Areopagite introduces participation as a gift of Divine Goodness to Creation.<sup>22</sup> His philosophy is essentially a hymn to Divine Goodness.<sup>23</sup> He responds to the ultimate Platonic lesson on the idea of the Good<sup>24</sup> with hymns, not because – as anyone who would acknowledge Neoplatonic influences in Dionysian mysticism would notice<sup>25</sup> – singing (ὕμνεῖν) is a genuine Neoplatonic sacred activity, which, with roots in Homeric and Orphic practice, was performed and especially promoted by Proclus, but mainly because this was his normal approach through having been initiated by the Scriptural tradition into venerating the greatness of the Divine name of Goodness.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, the scope of Proclus' hymns was the Good One and the constitutive and divinizing power and activity of the substances emanating from it, along with the reversion of

<sup>15</sup> For an interpretative insight to the tradition on creation that Dionysius inherits and bequeaths to posterity, see especially the chapters III, V and VI, on creation, redemption and its dimensions in Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption* (Massachusetts, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> *John* 1:14.

<sup>17</sup> *CD II. Ep.* 8, 173.

<sup>18</sup> *CD II. Eccl. Hier.*, 63 and 93.

<sup>19</sup> *CD II. Ep.* 8, 176-7.

<sup>20</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom. IV*, 152.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 131.

<sup>22</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 128-9, *CD II. Eccl. Hier.*, 79.

<sup>23</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 180.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 505b.

<sup>25</sup> P. Spearritt, *Philosophical Inquiry* (1968), 37.

<sup>26</sup> *CD II. Eccl. Hier.*, 94.

the human soul upon the divine world, as Van Den Berg shows in his excellent edition of *Proclus' Hymns*.<sup>27</sup> And, certainly, Dionysius is an author who deliberately and for historical reasons relates to the mainstream of philosophical production of his times, yet hides under a Neoplatonic cloak and follows up the Platonic tradition of the unknowability of the Good. However, the Dionysian Good is beyond Plato's conceptions. The divine name of Goodness (*ἀγαθωνυμία*) is identified with the Godhead (*θεαρχία*) and remains unknown by being remote – not in terms of locality but of modality – from any earthly speculation.<sup>28</sup> Yet, this suggestion of the modal remoteness of Divine Goodness as distinguishing Dionysian thinking from the Platonic tradition by no means renders divinity desperately inaccessible to the human being.<sup>29</sup> Access is granted through participation. Thus, the *Areopagitica* can also be read as a hymn to the much highlighted, thoroughly developed and extensively employed reality of participation.<sup>30</sup> This reality emerges mysteriously and is founded on a principal divergence distinguishing Christian from non-Christian Platonism. The mystery consists in the fact that participation occurs in a cosmos created out of nothing. *Creatio ex nihilo* is that central doctrinal truth and belief which, springing from the prophetic wisdom of *Genesis*, forms and pervades the thought of the Church Fathers in general, and of Dionysius the Areopagite in particular.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Rudolphus Maria Van Den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns* (Leiden, 2001), 9-12.

<sup>28</sup> *CD II. Ep.* 8, 180.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 174.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 84. This sentence should be read carefully in order not to attribute to Dionysius' thinking any notion of Neoplatonically conceived and performed theurgy. Dionysius does not adopt the idea of theurgy as it has been developed within Proclean Neoplatonism, as Sorabji remarks in Richard Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence* (London, 1990), 11-2. In other words, I do not imply that he suggests worshipping a mundane entity or activity; not at all! He distinguishes between divine and human activity: the former is to be *hymned* (*δμῆσαι*) as *theurgy* (*θεοῦ ἔργον*), whereas the latter is to be *praised* (*αἰνέσαι*) as *hierurgy* (*ἱερουργία*), a work offered by holy men. For him theurgy corresponds to transmission (*μετάδοσις*) and hierurgy to partaking (*μετάληψις*). Indeed, the last two constitute the reality of participation, both in its particular sacramental aspect, and in the wider metaphysical contours. So, what I propose above is rather to read Dionysius as venerating the superabundant love that renders the substantially unparticipated benevolently and philanthropically participable.

<sup>31</sup> One should not expect to find any explicit reference to creation in the *CD*. As Golitzin remarks, the word *creation* (*κτίσις*) and its derivatives appear in the *Corpus* only in direct quotations from Scripture: Alexander Golitzin, *Mystagogy. A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita* (Collegeville, 2013), 105-6. But he also argues that Dionysius' creaturely account ought to be read on the basis of his distinction between God's essence and powers, the act of creation being placed in the latter, *ibid.* 112. For a possibility of arguing for an Orthodox doctrine of creation in the Dionysian system and relevant reservations, see Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, 'The Doctrine of Creation in Dionysius the Areopagite', in Leena Pietila-Castren and Vesa Vahtikari (eds), *Grapta Poikila II. Saints and Heroes* (Helsinki, 2008), 75-89. One of the conditions Tollefsen points out to be crucial for affirming creation is to clarify whether a temporal beginning can be discerned in the *CD*. But it should be granted that there is no mention of 'time' when creation was not, as Golitzin comments. I would say that Tollefsen is right in finding an indication of time

In his thought, participation emerges as exclusively dependent on Divine Goodness. The Dionysian Good itself is an inaccessible mystery. Therefore, the only way to speak of that which is incomprehensible to all minds and exceeds all frames of reasonable discourse is to resort equally to cataphatic and apophatic utterances.<sup>32</sup> In the preface of St. Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogia*, the Dionysian influence is obvious as Maximus interprets the *rationale* of negation and affirmation.<sup>33</sup> Negation is introduced as the kind of utterance that is most appropriate to, and closest to him who transcends being (τὸ μὴ εἶναι μᾶλλον, διὰ τὸ ὑπερεῖναι ὡς οἰκειότερον ἐπ' αὐτοῦ λεγόμενον, προσιέμενος).<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Maximus affirms that God equals to negating being (θέσιν εἶναι τοῦ ὑπερόντος τὴν τῶν ὄντων ἀφαίρεσιν).<sup>35</sup> The Confessor stresses the significance of equality, and simultaneity, so to speak, of a cataphatic and an apophatic discourse in uttering divinity and all relations with it. He sets forth a fundamental concern about negative theology: both affirmative and negative predications of being and non-being should be treated equally with regard to God, so that none of them imposes its principal role on the other (καὶ ἄμφω περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν εὐσεβῶς θεωρεῖσθαι τὰς προσηγορίας, καὶ μηδεμίαν κυρίως δύνασθαι, τὸ εἶναι φημι καὶ μὴ εἶναι).<sup>36</sup>

In Dionysius' philosophy the mystery of Divine Goodness renders the idea of participation as a mystery, too. For how else could one think of a share of being (*ens creatum*) in non-being (*ens increatum*)?<sup>37</sup> Dionysius' philosophy has a somewhat paradoxical purpose: to exhaust the capabilities of philosophical reasoning in order to allow room for revelation.<sup>38</sup> One might exclaim: 'But this is Plato!' alluding to Diotima's speech on gradual erotic ascent, which is unpredictably interrupted by the sudden vision of the eternal being.<sup>39</sup> Following Plato's method of adopting everything good, no matter whence does it come,<sup>40</sup> Dionysius adopts the Platonic start reflected in the famous adverb ἐξαίφνης and explicates it.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, what solves the mystery is a new mystery: divinity reveals itself and it does so in a way proportional to the receptive capacity of

lacking and I would suggest that such an inadequacy may be healed with the notion of production (παραγωγή) that frequently designates God's creative activity. Moreover, time should not be conceived of outside creation; it too is created.

<sup>32</sup> For a thorough account of the presuppositions of Dionysian apophatic and cataphatic discourse, see Y. De Andia, *Henosis* (1996), 375-98.

<sup>33</sup> *Maximi Confessoris Mystagogia*, ed. Christian Boudignon, CChr.SG 69 (Turnhout, 2011), 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 110-1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 113-4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 115-7.

<sup>37</sup> T.T. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology* (2008), 190.

<sup>38</sup> *CD II. Eccl. Hier.*, 82.

<sup>39</sup> Πλάτωνος *Συμπόσιον*, ed. Ioannis Sykoutris, AAEB 1 (Athens, 1990), 179.

<sup>40</sup> Πλάτωνος *Επινομίς*, in: *Platonis Opera*, ed. James Burnet, vol. 5 (Oxford, 1907), 987de.

<sup>41</sup> *CD II. Ep.* 3, 159.

the human mind.<sup>42</sup> For Dionysius, revelation is the solid source of, and exclusive motivation for, any discourse on divinity and any sharing in it, the latter being spelled out not in terms of persuasive words deriving from human wisdom, but rather in terms of the demonstrative Spirit-moved power of those who have been granted the power of uttering a word concerning God.<sup>43</sup>

An account of participation in the Areopagite requires an awareness of the vocabulary he employs and its fine nuances.<sup>44</sup> The general tendency in English literature on Late Antique thought is to render the terms μέθεξις and μετοχή by the word *participation*. *Methexis* is a frequently used term in all discussions of participation from the time of Plato up to the Byzantine philosophy of St. John of Damascus. In Dionysius' case, the richness of the semantics of the notion is reflected in a series of derivatives employed by him in a way reminiscent of Proclus' usage.<sup>45</sup> Systematizing them may fruitfully give us an accurate outline of his account of participation.<sup>46</sup>

The syntactical structure of the vocabulary of participation in the *CD* includes four of the major parts of utterance, that is, nouns, adjectives, verbs (including infinitives) and participles. I list them in their principal form.<sup>47</sup> Terms belonging to the first class are: μετοχή, μετουσία, μέθεξις (and its deprivative ἀμεθεξία), all of them usually rendered by *participation* (with ἀμεθεξία by *imparticipability*), μετάδοσις and μετάληψις, rendered by *imparting* and *partaking of*, respectively. The second class consists of adjectives, some of which appear with their opposites, μέτοχος – ἀμέτοχος (*partaking – non-partaking*), μετοχικός (*able to participate*), μεθεκτός – ἀμέθεκτος (*participable – non-participable*), μεταδότις (*transmitter*), μεταδοτικός (*able to transmit*). The third group contains three verbs: μετέχω, μεταδίδωμι, μεταλαμβάνω, rendered respectively by *have a share in*, *give a share of* / *impart* / *communicate* and *partake of*. Finally, when it comes to participles, the use of μετέχων (*participant*, most frequently in the inclinations of the plural number) is central.

In discussing participation, a distinction between two specific parts is indispensable; without it any relevant discussion is fruitless. These are the *participated*

<sup>42</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 109.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 108.

<sup>44</sup> Such awareness is decisive in any successful reconstruction of his account. Unfortunately, the widespread use of the English term *participation* is not always helpful in depicting the distinctions occurring within several instantiations of participatory vocabulary. Thus, moving from the particular to the general on the basis of specific terminological instances might not always be fruitful. One has to proceed in a different way: first by considering the entire system of Dionysian thought, and then by drawing from it an understanding of specific terms.

<sup>45</sup> Y. De Andia, *Henosis* (1996), 98.

<sup>46</sup> It is impossible to refer in detail to each of the 273 instances of the vocabulary of participation in the *CD*. Only selective remarks can be made of what appear to me the most central cases.

<sup>47</sup> With some exceptions, wherever I think it necessary, the translations of Greek terms are those offered in the corresponding entries by Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961).

(μεθεκτόν) and the *participant* (μετέχον). As Tollefsen explicates it, the first refers to something that is portioned out to be shared by receivers, while the second designates the receiver of the portion to be shared.<sup>48</sup> As a notion of participation presupposes that which is about to be shared, it is obvious that without the participated there is no chance for any participation at all. So the relation between participated and participant is not equivalent. That means that, although an absence of the participant would render the idea of participation unimplemented, its lack is not as serious as that of the participated. For the possibility for participation still remains open, even without a participant. But an absence of the participated would result in the abolition of the idea of participation. In other words, so long as there is a participant participation is possible if a participated entity comes along. This detail is considered by Dionysius, who seems to regard the presence of the participated as unconditional.

In the opening of Chapter 4 of his treatise *On the Divine Names* (Περὶ Θεῶν Ὀνομάτων) Dionysius adopts an attribution initially proclaimed by Scripture and ascribes the divine name of Goodness to the Supremely Divine Existence (τὴν θεαρχικὴν ὑπαρξιν ἀγαθότητα λέγοντες).<sup>49</sup> The name of the Good is not merely an attribute of divinity but a substantial idiom of it (οὐσιώδες ἀγαθόν). It is tempting to think that divine Goodness and Substance are considered to be one and the same.<sup>50</sup> One should be careful not to presume that Dionysius is suggesting that our awareness of the divine goodness renders us knowers of the divine substance. Rather, the only knowledge we may obtain of divinity is conveyed through divine goodness. But this is knowledge about a notion of divine substance and not about divine substance itself.<sup>51</sup> For while divine goodness by being substantially good extends its goodness to all beings (καὶ ὅτι τῷ εἶναι τὰγαθὸν ὡς οὐσιώδες ἀγαθὸν εἰς πάντα τὰ ὄντα διατείνει τὴν ἀγαθότητα),<sup>52</sup> it remains ultimately imparticipable (ὑπέρκειται ἢ τῆς θεότητος ἀμεθεξία), since it has neither substantial contact nor any commingled communion with the beings participating in it (τῷ μῆτε ἐπαφήν αὐτῆς εἶναι μῆτε ἄλλην τινὰ πρὸς τὰ μετέχοντα συμμιγῆ κοινωνίαν).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> T.T. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology* (2008), 193.

<sup>49</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 143.

<sup>50</sup> I am not claiming that Dionysius suggests comprehensibility of the divine substance. What I think is that if one takes what St. Luke says, that *no one is Good, except for one, who is God* (οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς, ὁ Θεός, in *Luke* 18:19), and if one remembers what the Areopagite states in the beginning of paragraph 7 of chapter 4 in the *Divine Names* – that *the good is hymned by the holy theologians also as love* (τοῦτο τὰγαθὸν ὑμνεῖται πρὸς τῶν ἱερῶν θεολόγων καὶ ὡς καλὸν καὶ ὡς κάλλος καὶ ὡς «ἀγάπη», in *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 150) –, and if one recalls that *God is love* (ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, in *1John* 4:8), then, if one experiences divine goodness one should feel confident about knowing God himself.

<sup>51</sup> See n. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 143-4.

<sup>53</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 129.



Thus, the fact that divinity is introduced as substantially good entails that it never ceases to provide that which is participated. Dionysius explicates this quality of Divine Goodness by employing a favorite Platonic metaphor, originated in the *Republic* and elaborated by both Plotinus and Proclus.<sup>54</sup> He asserts divine goodness as exceeding its faint impression, the sun (ὕπερ ἡλιον ὡς ὑπερ ἄμυδρὰν εἰκόνα), the rays of which *unconditionally* illuminate the whole. Un-conditionality here entails that the sun does not calculate or expand its rays in a deliberate manner: by simply being the sun it sheds its light without any discrimination on all that can have a share of the sunlight.<sup>55</sup> This illustration can to some extent shed light upon how the Good superabundantly bestows the rays of its whole divinity on all beings, proportionally in accordance with their receptive capacity.<sup>56</sup>

I have argued above that the two components of participation, the participated and the participant, are not on equal level. My analysis has so far focused on the participated (μεθεκτόν). I still need to say something on the component of the participant (μετέχον). I suggested earlier that participation should be regarded as a mystery. It should also be regarded as a paradox. As so is Dionysius' paradoxical claim that divine Goodness, being the Source of Good, is present to all, but not all is present to it.<sup>57</sup> As suggested earlier, it is plausible according to the Areopagite to argue for a distinction between unconditional and conditional participation. This distinction emerges from a consideration of the bi-dimensionality of the concept of participation, as becomes evident from the above analysis. What does that mean?

On the one hand, participation designates that unique reality that exclusively renders human beings capable of discovering divinity and gaining an overview of divine goodness.<sup>58</sup> This reality occurs when the two compulsory components, the participated and the participant are engaged and the participant receives what is transmitted by the participated. On the other hand, participation is introduced as potency, in the sense that it is not a necessarily reciprocal reality. Non-reciprocity can be understood in terms of what was stated earlier, namely, that an abolition of participation would be due not to the absence of the participated, but to the lack or incapacity of the participant. Certainly, the participated

<sup>54</sup> For the position of the sun in the Neoplatonist thought of Plotinus and Proclus, see Radek Chlup, *Proclus. An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012), 63, 100-1, 174 and 214.

<sup>55</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 144.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 144. Dionysius' use of the metaphor of the sun should not be confused with Plotinus' depiction of the sun as a means of claiming that the ultimate metaphysical principle about the cosmos is indifferent. Dionysius' emphasis is not to stress the lack of interest, on the part of the One, for the reality that emanates from it, as Plotinus had suggested. What he wants to stress here is that divine goodness arranges the distribution of its goodness in such a natural way, that naturally, precisely like the sun, it cannot 'decide' not to shed its rays.

<sup>57</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 138.

<sup>58</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 109.

does not cease to be participable. But the transmission of the participated not to be received by the participant remains possible. Such a condition, caused by the lack of reception on behalf of the participant, underlines what I would highlight as the *conditional character* of participation. This conditionality allows the possibility that the participation remains unfulfilled; that is acknowledged by Dionysius when he confirms that the Godhead is present to all, but not all are present to it (καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ μὲν [ἡ ἀγαθαρχία] ἅπασι πάρεστι, οὐ πάντα δὲ αὐτῇ πάρεστι).<sup>59</sup> The fulfillment of partaking, the reciprocity of participation, can only be established under one condition. This condition is summed up concisely as *aptitude for participation* (ἐπιτηδειότης πρὸς μέθεξιν).

## Aptitude

My treatment of Dionysius' account of aptitude entails to include certain parameters and to respond to the following questions that shape the framework of my discussion.<sup>60</sup> What does the term *epitēdeiotēs* designate? Where is aptitude

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 138.

<sup>60</sup> In preparing the present study, I consulted several secondary works on Late Antique thought that discuss *epitēdeiotēs*. I list them chronologically below as a helpful bibliography on the topic. With regard to Dodds's comments on *epitēdeiotēs*, one should bear in mind that he was greatly influenced by Sambursky's remarks. Sambursky's contributions appear in the literature in 1962, but Dodds seems to have been already informed on the outcomes of the Oxford Conference in 1961, where Sambursky had a considerable discussion on his views with Owen. This is how he added a note on *epitēdeiotēs* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of his epochal work on Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, in 1963, the same year that the aforementioned Oxford Conference Proceedings were published. Arthur Hilary Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus. An Analytical and Historical Study* (Cambridge, 1940); René Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris, 1954); Samuel Sambursky, 'Conceptual Developments and Modes of Explanation in later Greek Scientific Thought', in Alistair Cameron Crombie (ed.), *Scientific Change. Historical Studies in the Intellectual, Social and Technical Conditions for Scientific Discovery and Technical Invention, from Antiquity to the Present* (London, 1963), 61-78; Gwilym Ellis Lane Owen, 'Commentary', in A.C. Crombie (ed.), *Scientific Change* (1963), 93-102; Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. Eric Roberston Dodds (Oxford, 1963); David Balás, *Μετοσσία Θεοῦ. Man's Participation in God's Perfection according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome, 1966); Robert Bob Todd, 'Epitēdeiotēs in Philosophical Literature. Towards an Analysis', *Acta Classica* 15 (1972), 25-35; Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden, 1978); Jonathan Scott Lee, 'The Doctrine of Reception According to the Capacity of the Recipient in Ennead VI. 4-5', *Dionysius* 3 (1979), 79-97; Dominique O'Meara, 'The Problem of Omnipresence in Plotinus Ennead VI, 4-5: A Reply', *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 61-73; George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor. Selected Writings* (New York, 1985); Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, ed. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton, 1987); Samuel Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1987); Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus on the Elements and the Celestial Bodies. Physical Thought in Late Neoplatonism* (London, 1989); A. Golitzin, *Mystagogy* (2013), initially published in 1994; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago, 1995); Y. de Andia, *Henosis* (1996); E. Perl,

to be located and what is its source? Is it a self-sufficient concept or a complementary notion within the Dionysian system? Is there any specific role for aptitude in the participatory ontology of Dionysius, in other words, how does he relate it to participation? Furthermore, does it demonstrate any virtues that could introduce it as a regulatory principle of participation? Finally, given the extant uses of the term by Proclus, in what sense may one claim a Dionysian novelty exceeding its Neoplatonic contours?

Dionysius does not provide any definition of aptitude;<sup>61</sup> as I said at the beginning, he should be regarded not as the inventor of the term but as an innovator in the use of the concept. The twenty instances of the term throughout the *CD* provide evidence of its author's awareness of the background of the concept and its history.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, one would expect a significant development to have taken place long before the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>63</sup> The term had a long life in the evolution of Late Antique thought. It would be tempting to think

*Theophany* (2007); T.T. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology* (2008); *Proclus. Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, ed. Jan Opsomer, Carlos Steel, Ancient Commentators on Aristotle (London, 2012); R. Chlup, *Proclus* (2012); Eric Perl, *Thinking Being. Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition* (Leiden, 2014); and *Plotinus. Ennead VI.4-5*, ed. Eyjólfur Kjaljar Emilsson, Steven Keith Strange (Las Vegas, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Although there are five English translations of the Dionysian writings, the options of rendering *epitēdeiotēs* they offer are four: a) *aptitude*, by John Parker, *Dionysius the Areopagite. Works* (London, 1897), and Clarence Eliot Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* (London, 1920), and b) *capacity*, by The Shrine of Wisdom, *The Divine Names by Dionysius the Areopagite* (Surrey, 1957), c) *receptivity* and d) *suitability*, by Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works* (New York, 1987). The fifth edition is John Jones, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (Milwaukee, 1980), containing only periphrastic renditions. Although a combination of all of them would be ideal for a best possible approach to the demanding Dionysian authorship, Parker and Rolt seem to have had a valuable understanding of Dionysius' language. Certainly, since Parker, the only available complete translation of the *CD* is Luibheid's. However, the literature in the previous footnote seems to present no consensus in rendering the term. It employs another four, additional ones to the above renditions. The most often employed term is *fitness*, by Sambursky, Owen, Dodds, Todd, Gersh, Siorvanes, Perl, Tollefsen and Chlup (the last also uses *capacity*). *Aptitude* is used by Roques, Berthold, Thunberg, De Andia, Opsomer and Steel, while *suitability* by O'Meara and Siorvanes (the term is used as a second option by Sambursky and Gersh, as well, whereas Sambursky also employs *appropriateness*). Moreover, Morrow and Dillon, and Golitzin employ the term *receptivity*, to which Perl consents. The classic complex rendition *receptive capacity*, is chosen by Armstrong, Balás, Lee and Emilsson, while the last suggests the term *adaptability*, as well. I should note that Todd also maintains the Greek term with Latin characters, as *epitēdeiotēs*. As is already evident, and after extensive discussions with my supervisors, Torstein Tollefsen and Eyjólfur Emilsson, I suggest agreement with those who render ἐπιτηδειότης as *aptitude*. This is a preferable rendition, as István Perczel and Christian Wildberg would admit.

<sup>62</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 117-8, 130, 138, 147-8, 166, 170, 210, 214, *CD II. Ep.* 8, 174, 180, 188, 197, *CD II. Cel. Hier.*, 10, 45, and *CD II. Eccl. Hier.*, 69-70, 83, 108.

<sup>63</sup> There is nowadays a consensus on the dating of the *Areopagitiica*. I do not mention any particular study, since the vast majority of writers on Dionysius hardly refrain from saying a word on the obscurity shrouding the identity of *CD*'s author and, consequently, the difficulty of dating his work.

that the philosophical development and the technical usages of aptitude by the Neoplatonists had been inspired by the Platonic conception of the *receptacle* (ὑποδοχή), that plays a central role in the cosmology of the *Timaeus*. After introducing the primary, immutable and invisible paradigm, which bears the qualities corresponding to the Plotinian One, and the secondary, visible and changeable model form, Plato wonders in *Timaeus* 49a what should be that third, obscure kind of form whose essential property is to be the receptacle, the matrix, for all becoming.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, in a terminological connection closer to our concern, Plato often employs the related term ἐπιτήδευμα (*pursuit*), the adjective ἐπιτήδειος (*capable, suitable*) and the verb ἐπιτηδεύω (*to pursue*), as referring to the pursuits necessary for living and well being and to the human ability for such pursuits.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Aristotle employs the term ἐπιτηδεύματα in *Politics* VII, in his inquiry into the pursuits that are the means that lead human beings to goodness.<sup>66</sup>

When it comes to commentators on Aristotle before Plotinus, one finds extant uses of the term in Alexander of Aphrodisias' works. Alexander, influenced by the Timaeian 'receptacle', develops the technical usage of the term as a means of explicating and interpreting Aristotle's insight into nature through his distinction between potency and actuality. In *De anima* he introduces an image that is firmly dependent on Plato's conception of the receptacle and helps us to understand the notion of aptitude. In distinguishing between the human intellect and its objects, the intelligible objects, he provides a detailed analysis of the functional mechanism that the human intellect follows in receiving the forms. This argument concludes that the material intellect is just a kind of aptitude for the reception of the forms (ἐπιτηδειότης τις ἄρα μόνον ἔστιν ὁ ὑλικὸς νοῦς).<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Plato. *Timaeus*, ed. Robert Gregg Bury, LCL 234 (Massachusetts, 1929), 49a, 112.

<sup>65</sup> That the *Timaeus*' uses of aptitude terms have influenced its Neoplatonic developments, may be concluded from the extensive analysis of the term ἐπιτήδευμα used by Plato in *Timaeus* 17cd in Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus: Proclus Diadochus. In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*, ed. Ernestus Diehl, Bibliotheca Teubneriana (Lipsiae, 1903), 35. The same class of names is extensively used in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Characteristic is the use of the terms in the *Apology of Socrates* (28b) in Plato's designation of the service Socrates provided to the city, which resulted in his risking his very life (Ἐἴτ' οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ, ὃ Σώκρατες, τοιοῦτον ἐπιτήδευμα ἐπιτηδεύσας ἔξ οὗ κινδυνεύεις νυνὶ ἀποθανεῖν). The likelihood that aptitude originated from the distribution of pursuits can be argued from Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides* as well. See: Procli in Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria. Procli philosophi Platonici Opera Inedita, ed. Victor Cousin (Paris, 1864), 651. The connection between ἐπιτήδευμα and ἐπιτηδειότης becomes even more comprehensible through an analogy Proclus uses in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*. As for any *pursuit* (ἐπιτήδευμα), a relevant preparation is necessary. Likewise, the ascent towards being requires a truthful and purified knowledge, which is guaranteed by the presence of aptitude (ἐπιτηδειότης), V. Cousin (1864), 927.

<sup>66</sup> Aristotle. *Politics*, ed. Henry Rackham, LCL 264 (Massachusetts, 1967), 1333a15, 604.

<sup>67</sup> *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis. Praeter Commentaria Scripta Minora. Quaestiones. De Fato. De Mixtione*, ed. Ivo Bruns, Supplementum Aristotelicum III.I *Alexandri De Anima Cum Mantissa* (Berlin, 1887), 84.

As such, it resembles a *tabula rasa*, a blank tablet. Immediately, however, he corrects his metaphor by likening aptitude to the blankness of the plate. That aptitude is not something material is confirmed by the fact that while a plate apt for receiving writing is affected by the act of writing, aptitude is not suffering anything by leading to activity, since it is not subject to anything.<sup>68</sup> Aphrodisias therefore conceives of aptitude as an intangible attribute of material beings, and distinguishable in any of them, designating an ever present, specific drive for directing a being from potency to actuality, irrespective of whether this direction will be implemented.

As such, aptitude is introduced as mediating between potency and actuality. In the first book of *De quaestionibus* he develops an argument for the claim that the will of God would not be capable of preventing the corruptibility of the cosmos if the cosmos were perishable by nature. Alexander's setting is the following. The potential for being or becoming is mainly predicated of those beings that are contingent with respect both to being and becoming. Thus potentiality applies to anything that is not deprived of the possibility of being or of becoming what it is capable of. For potentiality is not predicated of becoming by all means, but merely of not preventing something from becoming. For potentiality still applies to what has not been prevented in some specific way from becoming what it is *apt* for, even though it may not actually become so.<sup>69</sup> Another aspect of aptitude in Aphrodisias is evident within his scheme of causality. In the *Problemata* he remarks that *epitedeiotes* is that condition of passive matter that is responsible for the diversity of effects caused by the same cause.<sup>70</sup> This view is crucial for the later Procline view that aptitude is the ground for the diversified measures of being's *return*.<sup>71</sup>

Arguably, Aphrodisias' developments influenced Plotinus' thought on the matter. Porphyry confirms, in his *Vita Plotini*, that Alexander's commentaries were among the works of tradition respected by Plotinus, and read extensively by him in his school.<sup>72</sup> The term is rather rarely present in the *Enneads*; but Plotinus alludes to the concept several times and aptitude becomes a central component of his thought about participation, as it develops especially in *Enneads* VI 4-5. Plotinus' thought constitutes a transition-point on the matter. For he is the one who, thanks to his detailed insights into the problem of participation, offers a significant contribution to the historical development of aptitude, so that he

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 85.

<sup>69</sup> *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis. Praeter Commentaria Scripta Minora. Quaestiones. De Fato. De Mixtione*, ed. Ivo Bruns, Supplementum Aristotelicum II.II *Alexandri Scripta Minora Reliqua* (Berlin, 1892), 30.

<sup>70</sup> *Physici et medici Graeci minores. Alexander Aphrodisiensis. Problemata*, ed. Julius Ludwig Ideler, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1841), 30, 89.

<sup>71</sup> See E.R. Dodds, *Proclus* (1963), 39, 42.

<sup>72</sup> *Porphyry. The Life of Plotinus*, ed. Arthur Hilary Armstrong, LCL 440 (Massachusetts, 1966), 14, 40. See, also, E.K. Emilsson, *Plotinus* (2015), 235-6.

should be proclaimed as an innovator as well.<sup>73</sup> To claim a Plotinian novelty on aptitude is another way of confirming Emilsson's remark that 'Plotinus is the author of the phrase "reception according to the capacity of the recipient" and he was the first to formulate such a doctrine'.<sup>74</sup> Emilsson implies that Plotinus opens a new horizon to aptitude, going beyond its natural context. In speaking of natural context I simply refer to the usage of the term by the Commentators of Aristotle, in their attempt to designate the inherent capacity, as Dodds asserts, of nature in the process of transition from potentiality (δυνάμει) to actuality (ἐνεργεία).<sup>75</sup>

In the Plotinian mind participation is introduced as deriving from the metaphysical hierarchy. Nature is located within the third hypostasis and its gradations, namely, the cosmic Soul and the natural souls. As such, it is consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with the primary hypostasis, the One, the Good, or God. The theory of emanation, the cornerstone of Plotinian cosmology, conceives of the overflow of the divine good substance – in other words, the internal activity of the One – as the external activity of the first hypostasis. This activity causes the constitution of the other hypostases, namely, the Intellect and the Soul. Thus, what emanates from the One is nothing other than the very substance of it, the only difference being that what is emanated is inferior to the One in terms of otherness. Therefore the Intellect, being something other than the One, is automatically a hypostasis inferior to it. The Plotinian distinction between the internal and external activities of the One is assumed by Dionysius and signified by the fundamental distinction between divine substance (ἀμέθεκτον) and divine activity (μεθεκτόν). Plotinus distinguishes between two states of a hypostasis, of the One: rest (μονή) and procession (πρόοδος). Both are states of activity. A hypostasis is introduced on the basis of an activity constitutive of the same and an activity constitutive of the other. That which is constitutive of the same activity constitutes the substance of the One. Hence, for Plotinus and all his Neoplatonic legacy the substance and the activity of the One are identical. Now the fact that the hypostases secondary to the One partake of the One is because, being emanated from it, they are not self-sufficient. Their being cannot be taken for granted; it should rather be considered as dependent on their participation in the One.

<sup>73</sup> See especially, *Ennead VI.4*, 11 and 15.

<sup>74</sup> E.K. Emilsson, *Plotinus* (2015), 28. Plotinus' doctrine had been initially recognized by A.H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible* (1940), 60. Armstrong's formulations of Plotinus' doctrine were followed up 35 years later by O'Meara who addressed and brought them to the forefront of research; see D. O'Meara, *Structures hiérarchiques* (1975); J.S. Lee, *The Doctrine of Reception* (1979); and D. O'Meara, *The Problem of Omnipresence* (1980).

<sup>75</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Proclus* (1963), 344.

The above outline intends to show that, from a Christian point of view, Plotinus does not conceive of any consubstantial personal otherness.<sup>76</sup> Plotinian otherness is established in terms of hypostases demonstrating a partial otherness, or more precisely, an incomplete identity of substance. The degree of identity of substance is dependent on the grade of participation, which, in turn, is regulated by the receptive capacity, the aptitude for participation of the recipient. At the same time, and from Dionysius' point of view, Plotinus' theory of emanation obliges the consideration of the other hypostases, the Intellect and the Soul, not as consubstantial with, but as similarly-substantial (ὁμοιοούσιον or ὁμοιούσιον), or of like substance, to the One.<sup>77</sup> By employing the term *similarly-substantial*, or *of like substance*, I wish to stress the fact that the logic of the Plotinian metaphysical hierarchy is founded on two principles. The first principle is the reality of participation. The second is the fact that Plotinian hierarchy develops in terms of a gradual mitigation of the substance of the One. The ultimate consequence of this impairment is the presence of a farthest, lowest, at the same time paradoxical level in the hierarchy, that is the level of Evil. Evil is nothing other than complete privation, perfect lack of substance, namely, as the very term indicates, deficiency and absence (ἀπ-οὐσία). I believe that, although not explicitly stated, Plotinus would agree with Dionysius that evil occurs as absolute inaptitude for anything. In this respect Dionysius considers the existence of evil not as any substantial quality but as that status of ultimate inaptitude that prevents beings from participating in divine matters and results in a closed, mundane way of being.<sup>78</sup>

The Areopagite explains aptitude by elaborating two metaphors used extensively in Neoplatonic circles, the images of the *circle* and the *seal*.<sup>79</sup> He introduces the seal as a symbol of divinity, in order to remark that all beings participate in divinity entirely and as a whole, and that, in principle, there is no single being that participates only in a part of divinity. A unique seal is an archetype that delivers its impression to many items, so that the multiplicity of the seal's imprints partake of the archetypical seal. Although different, the impressions depict the whole of the archetypical figure; any one of the imprinted items bears completely the whole imprint of the one and the same seal. So no one could claim that in the one impression the archetype is not completely and totally present, or that in the impression the archetypical figure is present differently. There is no single imprint that bears just a part of the seal, because it is not

<sup>76</sup> This parameter is important, because for Dionysius aptitude for deification develops on the basis of an encounter between persons that presupposes a consideration of being as a person with freedom of will (αὐτεξούσιον).

<sup>77</sup> This term needs a separate study which cannot be undertaken here.

<sup>78</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 170.

<sup>79</sup> I refer to paragraphs 5 and 6 from chapter 2 of *DN*. The analogy of the circle is elaborated by Plotinus in explicating the relation of the intelligible and sensible to the One, and occupies the whole of chapter 5 of *Ennead VI.5*. See also E.K. Emilsson, *Plotinus* (2015), 235-8.

possible for the one and the same seal to leave different imprints in its several impressions.<sup>80</sup>

But immediately afterwards, and in contrast to what has been already discussed, he admits that the very same seal does not appear entirely identical in all its imprints. The reason for this should not be sought in the seal itself but rather in the differentiation of the items that participate dissimilarly in the wholeness and sameness of the original seal (ἀρχετυπία). What is the reason for the difference? If the wax (ἀπομόργματα) were soft (ἀπαλά) and impressionable (εὐτύπωτα) and smooth (λεία) and easily stamped (εὐχάρακτα), then it would sustain a clear (καθαρόν) and sharp (σαφή) and persistent imprint (ἐναπομένοντα τύπον). This cannot be so if the imprints are unimpressionable (ἀντίτυπα) and hard (σκληρά), fluent (εὐδιάχυτα) and unstable (ἀσύστατα).<sup>81</sup> In a manner reminiscent of Aphrodisias' description of aptitude in *De anima*, the first group of wax' characteristics recapitulates what Dionysius regards as the effects of aptitude. Any lack of these qualities would due to *inaptitude for participation*, which, in turn, would result in the negation of participation (ἀμέθεκτον).<sup>82</sup>

The next major influence on Dionysius with regard to aptitude seems to have been the thought of Proclus. His awareness of Proclus' understanding can be traced through a formulation reminiscent of the *Elements of Theology*. In proposition 39 Proclus asserts that the measures of the reversion of beings is in accordance with their procession, arguing for a hierarchically ordered *epistrophe*, seen progressively as essential, vital and cognitive (πᾶν τὸ ὄν ἢ οὐσιωδῶς ἐπιστρέφει μόνον, ἢ ζωτικῶς, ἢ καὶ γνωστικῶς).<sup>83</sup> The lowest entities maintain an appetition proper to their mere existing, which is identified as aptitude for participation in their causes (καὶ ἡ ὄρεξις οὖν τοῖς μὲν ἐστὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι μόνον, ἐπιτηδειότης οὐσα πρὸς τὴν μέθεξιν τῶν αἰτιῶν).<sup>84</sup> Although Proclus' sentence deserves a detailed treatment, I shall confine myself here to note the plurality of causes he speaks of as a crucial, as I will argue in detail.

Following his favorite strategy, Dionysius emulates Proclus with a similar utterance. He refers to the production (παραγωγή) and sustenance (ὑπόστασις) of all, by asserting that it is that to which all entities aspire: the intellectual and the rational aspire cognitively, their subordinates (ὑφειμμένα τούτων) do so through the senses, and all the rest through vital motion or essential and habitual aptitude (καὶ τὰ ἄλλα κατὰ ζωτικὴν κίνησιν ἢ οὐσιώδη καὶ ἐκτικὴν

<sup>80</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 129-30.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> A distinction should be made between ἀμέθεκτον and ἀμεθεξία, in Dionysius: the first denotes the lack of participation that is due to the inaptitude for participation of the participant, while the second refers to the fundamental unknowability, and thus eternal imparticipability, of divine substance.

<sup>83</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Proclus* (1963), 39, 40.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 39, 42.



ἐπιτηδειότητα).<sup>85</sup> My intuition is that behind the apparent similarity of the above passages, some fundamental differences lie concealed. Allowing them to emerge can be fruitful in identifying whether there is any convergence or divergence between Proclus and Dionysius on this matter.

Since beings have been created out of nothing and have been granted being as a result of their essential, unconditional participation, one would naturally think that aptitude itself is also a divine gift. Dionysius does not explicitly state this but it can be inferred from the context of a passage of the *DN* significant for the understanding of aptitude.<sup>86</sup> All beings are entirely dependent on the Good, which is introduced in terms of the Pauline prepositional formula as *source* (ἐξ οὗ), *ground* and *bond* (ἐν ᾧ) and *end* (εἰς ὃ) of all (πάντα).<sup>87</sup> Again, in a sentence reminiscent of Proclus' *ET* proposition 39, Dionysius regards aptitude as given by God in order for beings to fulfill their participation according to the grade of their being. Proclus was already conscious that aptitude is a providential divine gift, as expressed in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*. But, as it is consistent with Procline thought and in contrast to Dionysius, the gift of aptitude is not provided directly from the One but from the intermediary divine entities.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, Proclus and earlier Neoplatonists employ aptitude without any further predication. Dionysius, however, proceeds to make a distinction that was not made before. He distinguishes between *essential* and *habitual* aptitude. For he sees that since God has created all beings *ex nihilo*, they have all in consequence been granted an aptitude regulating their essential participation. Indeed, it is their participation in divine activity that constitutes them as beings and perpetually secures their status of being. Aptitude for such participation is inherent in the nature of beings, since they are not granted any possibility for choosing between being and non-being. This, perhaps, is the reason why in the Neoplatonic context aptitude appears without distinction: being is eternal and particular beings eternally emanate from it.

The second predication of Dionysian aptitude relates to *habitus* (ἕξις), and as such calls for further consideration. For it entails an aptitude that is not attached to the substance, so it is not an inherent capacity of nature. Predicating habitual aptitude makes sense in the Dionysian system, since what beings have been granted is the choice of performing those activities that are effective in leading them towards the reception of the divine attribute of goodness. Thus, although Dionysius does not provide an explanation of habitual aptitude, we are in a position to assume what its content is by positing a connection with the distinction made earlier between essential and complete participation. Thus

<sup>85</sup> *CD I. Div. Nom.*, 117-8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 148.

<sup>87</sup> *Col.* 1:16-7.

<sup>88</sup> V. Cousin, *Procli in Parmenidem* (1864), 690.

an association of habitual aptitude for complete participation with that participation which is attainable is plausible. Indeed, goodness is an idiom, which although pertaining to divine substance, as mentioned earlier, is communicated so that human beings can exercise their will in receiving it. This account clearly suggests the dynamic character of aptitude, which points precisely at deification.

Dionysius founds his concept of aptitude for deification on a crucial passage from the *Gospel of John*. *John* stresses the reciprocal character of aptitude for deification in stating that the gift of power (ἐξουσία) to become sons of God is offered to those who receive the incarnated Logos. This reception is a reforming of the human beings by mystically elevating them to the divine tribe.<sup>89</sup> In establishing further how Dionysius conceives of deification, one may distinguish between the following. First there is Plotinus' conception. By interpreting likeness to God (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ) as suggested by Plato in *Theaetetus* 176ab, as a capacity for deification of the substance, Plotinus is led to highlight the third substantial activity of the hypostases (the One excluded) that completes the cycle of the Neoplatonic metaphysical circular motion, namely the conversion (ἐπιστροφή). Secondly there is what follows as a natural consequence from the assumption of a cosmos created out of nothing, which, as I explained earlier, results in the fundamental distinction between created and uncreated. Which means that while for Plotinus beings fall hierarchically into the ontological chain that stems from the One, for Dionysius they belong to the *created* cosmos. In this perspective, substance in general is created by God and as such it has no measure of comparison to the uncreated, the latter designating divinity, namely God himself. Dionysius' assertion that substance is created and not eternally existent entails delimiting of its capacity for deification, since nothing can overcome the restrictions arising from its nature. But if this is so, then what would deification consist in? What is the Dionysian equivalent of the Plotinian *return*? If nature cannot be deified because of its radical otherness to divine nature, then what pertains to deification?

It has been said above that deification, according to the Areopagite, is attainable through participation in divinity. From the point of the participant, what facilitates partaking in divinity is the human *will* and *gnome*. As attributes of the human being, these properties are created and bear a personal character. As such, they presuppose the *acceptance* of a personal God, who proceeds freely to the creation of beings out of nothing. This perspective on deification has formed the ground for the further elaboration of the Neoplatonic concept of aptitude by the Areopagite and, later, by Maximus the Confessor. The latter comments fully on developments in the Dionysian use of aptitude and distinguishes between *substantial* and *gnomic* aptitude.<sup>90</sup> It is within this framework that deification is conceived of as potency actualized through aptitude for deification,

<sup>89</sup> CD II. *Eccl. Hier.*, 70.

<sup>90</sup> T.T. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology* (2008), 171.

the latter designating the voluntary communion and participation of beings in the life of the incarnated Logos and the Divine activity. The significance of this theme is confirmed by the fact that it has considerably influenced the medieval metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas,<sup>91</sup> who had been influenced by the works of Dionysius the Areopagite – thanks to the translations of Burgundius of Pisa and Grosseteste –, of Maximus the Confessor and of John of Damascus.

## Conclusions

The appearances of *epiteideiotes* in the *CD* makes one argue for a notion that is designating relation. Aptitude is not a self-sufficient concept; it acquires its value as correlative to other concepts. As ‘aptitude for something’, it designates a movement towards an ontological fulfillment that is granted by sharing in divinity. It is precisely its usage in the Dionysian formulation of *aptitude for participation* that suggests aptitude to be the foundation of and the regulatory principle for participation. Dionysius acknowledges two kinds of aptitude, the *essential* and the *habitual* one, both being associated with essential and complete participation. Essential participation establishes the *raison d’être* of beings, the foundations of their constitution. Essential aptitude underlines the potentiality of beings within the natural restrictions of creation. As such, essential aptitude is created as well. Habitual aptitude, however, exceeds the restrictions of natural necessity; it regulates beings’ complete participation in the life of Divinity and, thus, it crosses the boundaries of restrictions applying to creation. Such an aptitude for deification is uncreated: it is a divine gift granted to beings through the differentiated processions of God, that is, through the divine activity.

<sup>91</sup> From the above it becomes clear that John Tomarchio’s, ‘Thomistic Axiomatics in an Age of Computers’, *HPQ* 16 (1999), 249-75, 250, claim, that in spite of Aquinas’ invocation of Pseudo-Dionysius, one searches in vain in Dionysius for an explicit formulation of the doctrine of receptivity, is, at least, questionable.

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