

On the Circle-Radii-Center Analogy to Divine Causality in Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius, and Its Legacy

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Introduction

I wish to thank Prof. Fuhrer and Dr. Cordes for their generosity in having me present tonight, particularly on a topic that is neither (at least solely) philology-based, nor primarily in Latin. The topic of my talk is based on a part of my PhD project, on the causality of the first principle in the late Neoplatonists Proclus and Damascius (5th–6th cent. A.D.), and the focus of my talk tonight will be on passages that—in spite in the title—have more to do with mathematical concepts than metaphysical principles. In particular I wish to trace the development of certain Neoplatonists' discussion of a mathematical concept—i.e. the circle and its radii and center—as they use it to illustrate divine causality.

But before I begin, it may help to ask why anyone would be interested in the mathematical analogy, or metaphor,¹ that the Neoplatonists employ, or the causal framework that the metaphor is supposed to illustrate. If we start with ordinary cases, let's say I try to heat a kettle to put on boiling water. What would the cause be for the heating of water? The fire in the stove. So then one might say specifically the 'heat' in the fire causes the 'heat' in the water—that is, heat causes heat. In one sense, then, the cause must either pre-contain, or simply *be*, that which it brings about—fire must have the quality 'heat' to produce the same thing in its effect. On the other hand, in cases like a hammer that smashes glass, the hammer as the cause of the glass shattering doesn't itself shatter—so the 'quality' of shattering, as it were, that the hammer imposes does not exist in it. So then there is a sense in which the cause does not share the same property as the effect it produces.

These are of course different examples for two different aspects of causality, but one could generalize from these two to say that causes in certain ways need to be like the effect they bring about, but in other ways they must be different from the effect. If we consider cases like the soul or God, then the issue much more pronounced: with soul, for instance, it causes life in the body by having in itself, by its own essence, the character of 'life'; on the other hand, and in fact because of this last fact (particularly for Platonists), the soul must be immaterial in relation to the body, or of a different kind than the body it animates. A more tricky case may be God's causality, where he must possess the properties or perfections that make up creation; on the other hand, as such a cause, like the soul in relation to body, God must be simple and therefore lack the kind of plurality that characteristically belongs to created beings. Balancing these two aspects in the latter case is an especially difficult, perennial issue philosophically and theologically speaking, and it's an issue someone may wonder how to resolve: specifically, in what

¹Throughout the paper I will primarily refer to the circle figure as a 'metaphor', when discussing the content of the circle's radii and center in themselves. When relating the geometrical figures to metaphysical principles, I will use 'analogy', indicating that there is an analogical relation in terms of the causal relation for the metaphysical principles and the geometrical figures.

exact way are causes, like God, or generically the first principle, the cause of ‘all things’? Does the simplicity of the first principle anticipate its effects, or not? Or is there a way to say it anticipates its effects analogously?

These particular questions take up the Neoplatonists’ philosophical focus in Late Antiquity, and in their attempt to articulate a solution on the first principle’s causality, they employ the geometrical metaphor of the circle, radii, and center to help answer the problem. In particular, they draw on the analogy of a circle’s generation from a given center-point and the radii drawn from the center, determining the breadth of the circle, as well as the equal length of the circular line from the center. The imagery is supposed to show how plurality emerges from a single unity, which is the point—the simplest geometrical object—and the circle as the first, simplest plane figure to emerge from it. This concords with the Neoplatonists’ general metaphysical picture of reality, where they generally hold to three principles behind the material cosmos: *Soul*, which organizes matter and bodies; *Intellect*, the source of the paradigms against which the world and cosmos are molded by Soul; and *the One*, the cause of unity in Intellect and all things, and thereby the first cause of plurality. By comparison to later Latin and Byzantine Christian views of divine causality—with only one principle, God, as responsible for creation—the Neoplatonists hold to a hierarchy of principles that explain the gradual, continuous generation of all things from a single source. The circle metaphor then illustrates the top part of this hierarchy with the One’s generation of Intellect, using the center and the circular line respectively to illustrate the latter two. What is commonly to be explained in both cases is simply how plurality can be generated from unity—and that is where the mathematical example can be used, and in turn can be analyzed in its own right.

So in what follows, I will discuss passages on the metaphor in three Neoplatonists: Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius. What we see in each figure’s description of the metaphor is a shift that parallels their different positions on the One’s causality. Whereas Plotinus has a simple view of the One directly producing plurality, Proclus and Damascius follow a general position for late Neoplatonists—starting with Iamblichus in the 4th cent. A.D. to the end with Simplicius in the 6th cent.—which hold that the One produces Intellect through an intermediary cause, so the One produces *indirectly*. As I will show, one sees this framework drawn out in the language they use to describe the circle’s relation to the center.

I will first begin with background by reviewing the definitions of the circle and the center from Euclid, and then briefly outline the early use of the circle metaphor in Alexander of Aphrodisias and its application in Plotinus. This will give us the conceptual background to consider the specific passages in Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius with the One. I will then conclude by briefly noting the legacy of the metaphor in a few specific Latin and Byzantine figures—Augustine, and especially Eriugena and Ps.-Dionysius.

Background: Euclid, Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Plotinus

In looking at the circle and its radii and center, one may first wonder why the Neoplatonists find these elements fitting for their causes—and more basically, how is the circle defined and understood? For this we may review Definitions 15 and 16 (and implicitly 1–3) from Euclid’s *Elements*, which appear to be commonly taken from the Neoplatonists—and explicitly so for Proclus with his commentary on Euclid. We may briefly go over the two: [T1]

Definition 15: A circle (*kuklos*) is a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal to each other.²

²Κύκλος ἐστὶ σχῆμα ἐπίπεδον ὑπὸ μιᾶς γραμμῆς περιεχόμενον [ἢ καλεῖται περιφέρεια], πρὸς ἣν ἀφ’ ἐνὸς σημείου τῶν ἐντὸς τοῦ σχήματος κειμένων πᾶσαι αἱ προσπίπτουσαι εὐθεῖαι [πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κύκλου περιφέρειαν] ἴσαι ἀλλήλαις εἰσὶν.

Definition 16: And the point is called the center (*kentron*) of the circle.³

We should notice first here that Euclid defines the circular line somewhat negatively: that is, he does not define it *directly*, but indirectly, on the basis of the lines, or *radii*, that stretch from the ‘point’ to the circle’s encompassing line. The only point in the figure where one can have equal lines drawn in any direction would then be the ‘center’—so Definition 16 depends on the conclusion of Definition 15 about the specific ‘point’ from which the lines are drawn. For now we should also notice that Definition 15 does not make a claim about the end-points of the radii, or what their nature is, in the circle, or particularly in relation to the center.

From here we may step forward to Alexander of Aphrodisias, where we see an instance of the circle’s center and radii being used to illustrate a causal principle. In his *Quaestio* 3.9, Alexander attempts to expand on Aristotle’s claim, from *De Anima* III.2, that there is a faculty in the soul by which we can perceive all the senses simultaneously.⁴ In the *De Anima* passage [T2] [for reasons of time I will only reference the passage], Aristotle attempts to illustrate his claim by using the notion of a point which can be considered at once ‘one’—by itself partless, as in Euclid’s Definition 1—and, in his words, ‘two’. Aristotle’s language is somewhat sparse, but he seems to have in mind a point that one can place in the middle of a line, so thus the idea of the point as ‘one’ and ‘two’ comes into play: the point is ‘one’ in itself, but ‘two’ as potentially dividing that one line into two, separate lines. One can refer here to Euclid’s Definition 3, with the ends (*perata*) of lines being points, so then the point which indicates a break between two lines could then be potentially ‘two’, as separate end-points for the two lines. By using this imagery, Aristotle seems to say that one can imagine a faculty which is, in itself, ‘one’, but can then receive input from different sense faculties (like taste, touch, etc.)—so potentially divisible into each corresponding faculty. In that respect it can be simultaneously ‘one’ and ‘many’ together.

Turning to Alexander’s commentary on this part of *DA* III.2, Alexander (probably correctly!) notes that Aristotle’s language is too ‘obscure’, and proposes another geometrical example with the circle’s radii and center to better illustrate the issue: [quoting from line 6 in [T3]]

For the straight (lines) drawn from the circumference of a circle to the centre all have the centre of the circle as their terminus, a single point; and this point, being one, is also in a way many, when it is taken as the terminus of each of the lines drawn from it. For if sensation is something like this, [then] in so far as it is one and indivisible, what judges will be one, though it simultaneously judges what is at the termini of the lines since all the termini are together and are a single thing; but in so far as it is taken as the terminus of this [line], and then this, and it is taken as many times as [there are] straight [lines], [in this respect] it is many. And in this respect, again, in so far as there are many termini and [they belong] to different lines, the things that are judged will be many and separated and different; and in a way what judges will be separated in the way in which the centre was in a way many, and each of these [things that judge] judges the affection on its own particular line. But in so far as what is [formed] from them all is one and undifferentiated and in every way the same, what judges will itself be one thing and will judge [the different aspects] simultaneously. And what has been said to resolve the difficulties that have been raised is like this.⁵ (*Quaestio* 3.9, 96,15–28; trans. R.W. Sharples)

³Κέντρον δὲ τοῦ κύκλου τὸ σημεῖον καλεῖται.

⁴*Quaestio* 3.9, 94,10–12 (Bruns): ‘Explanation of a passage from the third [book] *On the Soul*, through which Aristotle shows that there is something with which we sense everything simultaneously’ (trans. R.W. Sharples). (Λέξεως ἐξηγήσις ἐκ τοῦ τρίτου Περὶ ψυχῆς, δι’ ἧς δείκνυσιν Ἀριστοτέλης, ὅτι ἔστιν τι ὃ ἅμα πάντων αἰσθανόμεθα.)

⁵αἱ γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν τῆς περιφέρειας τοῦ κύκλου ἐπὶ τὸ κέντρον ἀγόμεναι εὐθεῖαι πέρας ἔχουσι πᾶσαι τὸ κέντρον τοῦ κύκλου, ἐν σημείον, ὃ σημεῖον ἐν ὃν καὶ πολλὰ πῶς ἔστιν, ὅταν ὡς ἐκάστης τῶν γραμμῶν ἐπ’ αὐτὸ ἀχθῶσιν πέρας λαμβάνηται. εἰ γὰρ τοιοῦτό τι ἡ αἴσθησις εἴη, καθὼς μὲν ἐν τι καὶ ἀδιαίρετόν ἐστιν, ἐν ἔσται τὸ κρίνον (ἀλλὰ καὶ ἅμα κρίνει τὰ ἐν τοῖς πέρασι τῶν γραμμῶν τῷ πάντα τὰ πέρατα ἅμα εἶναι καὶ ἐν τι), καθόσον δὲ ὡς τῆσδε καὶ τῆσδε πέρας λαμβάνεται καὶ τοσαῦτα λαμβάνεται, ὅσαι καὶ εὐθεῖαι, πολλά. καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο πάλιν καθόσον μὲν οὖν πολλὰ τὰ πέρατα καὶ διαφεροσῶν γραμμῶν, πολλὰ ἔσται τὰ κρίνόμενα καὶ κεχωρισμένα καὶ διαφέροντα καὶ τρόπον τινὰ † οὕτω κεχωρισμένον, καθόσον τὸ κέντρον πολλὰ πῶς ἦν, ὃν ἕκαστον κριτικὸν ἐν τοῦ ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ γραμμῇ πάθους ὄντος, καθόσον δὲ ἐν τὸ ἐκ πάντων ἔστιν ἀδιάφορον καὶ πάντῃ τὸ αὐτό, αὐτὸ ἐν τε ἔσται τὸ κρίνον καὶ ἅμα κρίνον. καὶ τὸ μὲν εἰς λύσιν εἰρημένον τῶν ἡπορημένων τοιούτων.

Alexander here applies Aristotle's reasoning about the point as potentially divisible to Euclid's Definition 15 with the circle: while not explicitly mentioned in Euclid, the center-point can be considered potentially 'many' insofar as the lines which end on the center also have the center as their respective end-point. In other words, the radii which fall on the center of the circle actually have their own end-points (*perata*), each of which is *unique* and different from the circle's center-point: so for instance, if one draws a radius from the circumference's edge to the center-point, one can indicate that line's end-point on the center *distinctly* from the center-point in relation to the whole circle. Thus Alexander's statement that, if one just looks at one radius, the center becomes an end-point or limit (*peras*) relative to that one line. Any predicate or 'judgment' that applies to the center will then apply simultaneously to the other, separate radii, since each of their respective end-points happen to coincide in the center-point, while the center point remains actually 'one' in itself.

If we turn to Plotinus, we find that he employs both the same metaphor and argument with the separate senses in *Ennead* IV.7.6:⁶ [T4]

Or how could one say that these sense-perceptions are different, if they did not all come together to one and the same [recipient]? This then must be like a center, and the sense-perceptions from every quarter, lines coming together from the circumference of the circle, must reach it, and that which apprehends them must be of this kind, really one.⁷ (10–15; trans. Armstrong)

In this context Plotinus appears to be arguing that the soul itself, and not just a faculty of the soul, must be 'one' in relation to the separate sense faculties or sense perceptions.⁸ However the essential structure of the argument is the same: Plotinus argues that there must be a common faculty which is 'one', in itself, but able to make a judgment about, and receive input from, multiple, separate senses.⁹ This becomes one reason for him to assert the soul's immateriality in relation to the separate, physical senses—which Alexander also argues for the common sense faculty later in the *Quaestio*.¹⁰

Thus, we can see that one clear line of transmission for the circle metaphor comes out of Alexander, in his particular analogy to the common sense faculty that Aristotle argues, and we can also see Plotinus applies the same argument for the soul in relation to the senses. We now have the main background to consider Plotinus' own application of the metaphor to divine causality.

Plotinus: The One as the Center

In the context of *Ennead* VI.8.18, where see the circle metaphor fully explicated for divine causality, Plotinus attempts to give a positive definition to the first principle of all things, namely the One, where in normal, literal speech one is not permitted to speak the One, or to refer to it in any positive sense. From *Enn.* VI.8.13 onward, Plotinus attempts to use positive language,

⁶Cf. fn. 284 (p. 135–6) in Sharples ed., 'Alexander of Aphrodisias: Quaestiones 2.16–3.15' (Duckworth, 1994). Credit for the Alexander reference goes to Michael Atkinson's commentary on Plotinus' *Ennead* V.1 (Oxford: 1983), 236–7.

⁷Ἡ πῶς ἂν εἴποι, ὅτι ἕτερα ταῦτα, μὴ εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ ὁμοῦ τῶν αἰσθημάτων ἐλθόντων; Δεῖ τοίνυν τοῦτο ὥσπερ κέντρον εἶναι, γραμμὰς δὲ συμβαλλούσας ἐκ περιφερείας κύκλου τὰς πανταχόθεν αἰσθήσεις πρὸς τοῦτο περαίνειν, καὶ τοιοῦτον τὸ ἀντιλαμβανόμενον εἶναι, ἐν ὄντως.

⁸Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.7.6, 1–5: 'But it is clear from the following arguments that if soul is a body, neither perception nor thinking nor knowing nor virtue nor anything of value will exist. If anything is going to perceive anything, it must itself be one, and perceive every object by one and the same means....' (trans. Armstrong). ('Ὅτι δὲ, εἰ σῶμα εἴη ἡ ψυχὴ, οὔτε τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι οὔτε τὸ νοεῖν οὔτε τὸ ἐπίστασθαι οὔτε ἀρετὴ οὔτε τι τῶν καλῶν ἔσται, ἐκ τῶνδε δῆλον. Εἴ τι μέλλει αἰσθάνεσθαι τινος, ἐν αὐτῷ δεῖ εἶναι καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ παντὸς ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι [...].')

⁹As I will briefly mention in the conclusion, Augustine also uses this same argument, and the circle metaphor, in *De Quantitate Animae* 18–19, 22.

¹⁰Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaestio* 3.9, 97.36–98.10, esp. 98.2–6: 'But, while the affections come about in the sense-organ, the judgement of the things that come to be in this [takes place] in the capacity; for it is not possible for this too to admit the affections which are corporeal, since it is incorporeal. So the capacity of the entire [sense-organ] is not at all prevented from simultaneously judging the things that come about in different parts of the sense-organ' (trans. R.W. Sharples). (ἐπεὶ δ' ἐν μὲν τῷ αἰσθητηρίῳ τὰ πάθη γίνεται, ἡ δὲ τῶν ἐν τούτῳ γινομένων κρίσις ἐν τῇ δυνάμει (οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε εἶτι τοῦτο τὰ πάθη δέχεσθαι τὰ σωματικὰ ὃν ἀσώματον), οὐδὲν κεκώλυται τὰ ἐν τῷ αἰσθητηρίῳ γινόμενα κατ' ἄλλο καὶ κατ' ἄλλο μέρος ἅμα κρίνειν ἢ δυνάμεις ἢ παντὸς αὐτοῦ.)

in spite of the limitations, to describe the One for the sake of ‘persuasion’ (*peithos*), in order to see the One as the source of self-determination and freedom.¹¹ This gives a particular justification for Plotinus’ use of the circle metaphor, as we see in ch. 18:

And when seeking, do not seek outside him (*autou*)¹² [the One], but seek inside all things which are after him. For he is himself that which is outside, the encompassment and measure of all things (*tôn pantôn*)—or that which is inside in depth, but what is outside him, as it were both touching (*ephaptomenon*) and hanging off of (*exêrtêmenon*) him by a circle, is [the] All (*pan*) which is rational account (*logos*) and intellect (*nous*). But rather it would be Intellect according to which it touches and hangs off of him, inasmuch as it has its being Intellect from him. Just as the circle, then, which touches the center with a circle, would be agreed to have its power from the center, and to have the center’s form (*kentroeidês*) as it were, by which the radii (*grammai*),¹³ coming together in the circle towards the center as one, make their limiting-point (*to peras*) to be such at the center, like that towards which they are brought and from which they, as it were, grow out, since the center is greater than what is according to these radii and their limiting points, the points belonging to the radii themselves¹⁴—and on the one hand, the limiting points are like [the center], on the other a dim [image] and trace of that which is capable (*dunatai*), having the power [for] these [limiting-points] and the radii, they everywhere have that [center]. And what the center is like is revealed through the radii, as it were unfolded without having been unfolded (*exelichthen ouk exelêlîgmenon*)—in such way is it necessary to take both Intellect and Being (*ton noun kai to on*), coming to be out of it and as it were poured forth (*ekchuthen*), unfolded, and hanging upon its intellectual nature, to bear witness to (*marturein*) Intellect in the One, as it were, which¹⁵ is not Intellect: for it is ‘One’ (*hen*). (1–22)¹⁶ (trans. mine)

So here we see the geometrical metaphor applied to the One after Plotinus gives two ways that one may seek the One: either (1) as ‘outside’ all things—so in a sense, in an ‘apophatic’ way (as the ‘encompassment’, ‘limit’, and so on)—or (2) ‘inside’ all things that come after the One. For option (2), Plotinus has in mind the particular way ‘all things’ depend on the One, particularly how unity in each item within the group, ‘all things’, brings us back to the One. In clarifying that dependency, Plotinus deploys the radii-center example to illustrate what this means. Here we should notice the verbs that Plotinus uses: the circle ‘touches’ (*ephaptoito*) the center; Intellect ‘hangs off of’, or ‘depends on’ (*exêrtêtai*), the One, as by analogy the circle [and radii] on the center; the lines ‘grow out’ (*exephusan*) from the center, as well as get ‘brought back’ (*ênechthêsan*) to the center. The center is then the ‘power’ behind the lines growing out, such that it has the ‘center’s form’ (*kentroeidês*)—though it is important to see here that Plotinus qualifies this term with the phrase, ‘as it were’ (*hoion*),¹⁷ as we will eventually see why.

The major theme that one should see here is that Plotinus emphasizes the circle as a kind of projection of the center, from the language we see, and that the radii are the means by which the circle is projected out. Here we can recognize Plotinus’ adaptation of Alexander’s argument, which we saw implicitly from the *Enn.* IV.7.6 passage [T4], spelled out here, with the radii

¹¹See *Enn.* VI.8.13, 1–15: ‘But if one must bring in these names of what we are looking for, let it be said again that it was not correct to use them, because one must not make it two even for the sake of forming an idea of it; but now we must depart a little from correct thinking in our discourse for the sake of persuasion’ (trans. Armstrong); and further, 47–50: ‘But one must go along with the words, if one in speaking of that Good uses of necessity to indicate it expressions which we do not strictly speaking allow to be used; but one should understand “as if” (*hoion*) with each of them’ (trans. Armstrong).

¹²Plotinus appears to use the masculine *autos* in reference to the One in line 2 (‘For *he* [himself] is that which is outside’... — τὸ γὰρ ἔξω αὐτός ἐστι...), so thus my translation of ‘he’ as pronoun for the One.

¹³Here for context with the circle, I translate *grammê/grammai*, normally ‘line’, as *radius/radii*.

¹⁴The unspoken premise here appears to be the principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. So by analogy, the center is ‘greater’ by priority to the sum/multitude of limiting-points from the radii that each separately coincide with the center.

¹⁵The ‘which’ here actually refers to *Intellect* in the One, not *the One* itself—the relative clause’s gender (masculine, for *nous*) must refer to this. This subtle but significant shift implies transitivity: One ‘pre-contains’ Intellect, but Intellect ‘in’ the One’s mode of being is simply the One.

¹⁶Καὶ σὺ ζητῶν μηδὲν ἔξω ζητεῖ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ’ εἰσω πάντα τὰ μετ’ αὐτόν· αὐτὸν δὲ ἔα. Τὸ γὰρ ἔξω αὐτός ἐστι, περίληψις πάντων καὶ μέτρον. Ἡ εἰσω ἐν βάθει, τὸ δ’ ἔξω αὐτοῦ, οἷον κύκλῳ ἐφαπτόμενον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξηρηγμένον πᾶν ὁ λόγος καὶ νοῦς· μᾶλλον δ’ ἂν εἴη νοῦς, καθὼς ἐφάπτεται καὶ ἡ ἐξηρηγται[1] αὐτοῦ [καὶ ἡ ἐξηρηγται], [2] ἅτε παρ’ ἐκείνου ἔχων τὸ νοῦς εἶναι. Ὡσπερ ἂν οὖν κύκλος, ἐφάπτοιτο κέντρου κύκλῳ, ὁμολογοῖτο ἂν τὴν δύναμιν παρὰ τοῦ κέντρου ἔχειν καὶ οἷον κεντροειδῆς, ἡ γραμμαὶ ἐν κύκλῳ πρὸς κέντρον ἐν συνιούσαι τὸ πέρας αὐτῶν τὸ πρὸς τὸ κέντρον ποιοῦσι τοιοῦτον εἶναι οἷον τὸ πρὸς ὃ ἡνέχθησαν καὶ ἀφ’ οὗ οἷον ἐξέφυσαν, μείζονος ὄντος ἢ κατὰ ταύτας τὰς γραμμάς καὶ τὰ πέρατα αὐτῶν τὰ αὐτῶν σημεῖα τῶν γραμμῶν—καὶ ἐστὶ μὲν οἷον ἐκεῖνο, ἀμυδρὰ δὲ καὶ ἴχνη ἐκείνου τοῦ ὃ δύναται αὐτὰ καὶ τὰς γραμμάς δυνάμενον, αἱ πανταχοῦ ἔχουσιν αὐτό· καὶ ἐμφαίνεται διὰ τῶν γραμμῶν, οἷον ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνο, οἷον ἐξεληχθὲν οὐκ ἐξεληλιγμένον—οὕτω τοι καὶ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὸν ὄν χρῆ λαμβάνειν, γενόμενον ἐξ ἐκείνου καὶ οἷον ἐκχυθὲν καὶ ἐξεληχθὲν καὶ ἐξηρηγμένον ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ νοεράς φύσεως, μαρτυρεῖν τὸν οἷον ἐν ἐνὶ νοῦν οὐ νοῦν ὄντα· ἐν γὰρ.

[1] Coniectimus: ἐφάπτεται *Enn.* I follow Schwyzer’s/Armstrong’s replacement here.

[2] Following Schwyzer’s/Armstrong’s deletion.

¹⁷See previous footnote referencing *Enn.* VI.8.13, 47–50.

having their respective end-points (*perata*) coinciding with the circle's center. As with Alexander, and again the IV.7.6 passage, Plotinus puts emphasis on the circle's center having priority over the sum of the different radii end-points that coincide in the center. This would be analogous to the general mathematical principle that the whole is greater than its parts,¹⁸ applied here to the center-point in relation to the collective end-points of the radii. Plotinus elaborates this principle in *Ennead* V.1, using the imagery of bringing the lines to the center-point: [[T5] in 'Background Texts' on the *handout*]

Since [the One] is not divided, but remains, and since he does not remain in place, he is seen in many things according to each of those things able to receive him as another [self]¹⁹ (*hoion allon*), just as the center is by itself, while each of the [things] in the circle has a point in [the center], and the lines/radii bring their proper [end-]point to this [the center].²⁰ (*Enn.* V.1.11, 8–13; trans. mine)

This passage then provides context when Plotinus talks about the different end-points each being a 'faint image' (*amudra*) or 'trace' (*ichnê*) of the center, insofar as the end-points themselves are differentiated effects of the center. Since the end-points coincide with the center, each *would* then be the center, albeit in relation to one specific line; another to another, and so on. We have already seen this in Alexander, as well as Plotinus' adaptation of Alexander in *Enn.* IV.7.6 [T4], and thus here we can see how Plotinus adapts it to the case of the One. If we look back at our first passage from *Enn.* VI.8.18 [T7], the argument for the simultaneous unity and plurality of the center-point is reflected when Plotinus says that the center is revealed (*emphainetai*) through the radii, although its being is still unique in relation to the radii. We can also see this with the circle having the 'center's form' (*kentroeidês*), alongside the use of verbs describing inherent relation, like the circle 'touching' the center, the radii 'revealing' the center, and so on. In one sense Plotinus comes close to making an identity claim between the circle and the center, although we should note Plotinus' qualification with the phrase, 'as it were' (*hoion*), which signals a distinction: insofar as the circle is contextualized by the multiple radii, it lacks the unity that is characteristic of the center-point. As we see at the end of the passage, Plotinus makes the same conclusion for Intellect and the One: as implicitly possessing the same property, but different by each entity's mode of existence, namely plurality for Intellect and unity for the One.

Proclus: The One 'Hidden' Behind the Center

Proclus, as we are about to see, has a rather different approach to the One, and his geometrical metaphor differs accordingly. While the basic structure is the same, Proclus' choice of language, as well as the change in description, marks a break from Plotinus' position on the One. This is seen in Proclus' commentary on Definitions 15–16 in Euclid's *Elements* [T1], on the circle and the circle's center being a point, after he finishes his exposition on the mathematic figures and turns to consider the figures in relation to their paradigms, with the One and plurality, or Intellect:

But up there they are all in unity: if you take what corresponds to the center, you will find everything in it; if you take the procession coming out of the center, you will find that this also contains everything; and likewise if you take the reversion. When you have seen that they are all of them in each other, and have discounted the imperfection implicit in their extendedness, and have banished from thought the spatial position around which they are distributed, you will discover the truly real circle itself—the circle which goes forth in itself, defines itself, and acts in relation to itself; which is both one and many; which remains, goes forth, and reverts [toward itself];

¹⁸E.g. Euclid, *Elements*, Common Notion 5.

¹⁹Armstrong suggests this addition, to reference a possible parallel in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.4, 1166a31–2, with the case of the friend mentioned as being 'another self' (ἔστι γὰρ ὁ φίλος ἄλλος αὐτός).

²⁰οὐ μεριστοῦ ἐκείνου ὄντος, ἀλλὰ μένοντος ἐκείνου, καὶ οὐκ ἐν τόπῳ μένοντος—ἐν πολλοῖς αὖ θεωρεῖσθαι καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν δυναμένων δέχεσθαι οἷον ἄλλον αὐτόν, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ κέντρον ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐστίν, ἔχει δὲ καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν ἐν τῷ κύκλῳ σημείον ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ αἱ γραμμαὶ τὸ ἴδιον προσφέρουσι πρὸς τοῦτο.

which has its most indivisible and unitary part firmly fixed, but is moving away from it in every direction by virtue of the straight line and the Unlimited that it contains in itself, and yet from itself wraps [itself] back into unity, urged by its own similarity and self-identity towards the partless [center] of its own nature and the One that has been hidden there. And once it has embraced [this center], it becomes homogeneous with it and with its own plurality as it revolves about it. For that which reverts imitates what has remained fixed; and the circumference is like a separated center converging upon it, striving to be the center and become one with it and to bring the reversion back to the point from which the procession began.²¹ (154,2–24; trans. Morrow, modified)

One distinct feature here, only hinted in the Plotinus passage, is that Proclus employs verbs of motion to describe the distinct stages of the circle's generation from the point: one begins with the point *remaining* (*menein, menonta*) in the center, the lines then stretch out and proceed (*proienai, proionta*) from the center, and then the circular line, or circumference, is formed by the 'reversion' (*epistrephein, epistrephonta*) of those lines. 'Remaining' and 'procession' might make sense, but how would 'reversion' describe the circular line? If one connects the stage of 'remaining' with unity—in other words, the center—and the stage of 'procession' or going forth with plurality—in other words, the multiple radii—then one may connect this with Proclus' statement that the circular line combines unity and plurality: that is, the circular line is relative to a specific point and always defined by it, so in that sense a 'unity', while its distance from the center is defined by the length of the radii, and in that sense a 'plurality'. So Proclus has in mind that 'reversion' implies both stages of unity and plurality, or remaining and procession, with the figure.

Substantially this is reconcilable with the passage from Plotinus' *Enn.* VI.8.18: although Plotinus does not talk about the circular line as a 'reversion', he implies that the circular line is consequent on the multiple radii which project forth from the center. Further Proclus' emphasis that one finds 'all things' (*panta*) in the center, as well as in the radii and circular line, follows what we saw in Plotinus: that the radii and circular line are a kind of projection and manifestation of the center, while the center's mode of existence—just as the One in relation to Intellect—is distinct.

Given the similarities, a number of differences from Plotinus stand out: for instance, Proclus talks about the circular line forming its own 'separated center', or being analogous to one, in approximation to the center it began from. This may not be significantly different in language, however if we compare with Plotinus' circle being *kentroeidês*, of the center's form, this implies a stronger link in identity, or sameness, between the circle (or circular line) and the center. In Proclus, the circle is not formally of its center, but instead it 'duplicates' its center, as it were, in revolving back around it. The emphasis here appears to be on 'separateness'—as we see in Proclus describing the circle as a quasi-'separated center'—in a way we don't find in Plotinus: in Proclus, the circle has its own, autonomous kind of being compared to the radii and the center, whereas for Plotinus the radii, and thereby circle, are 'manifestations' of the center. We might characterize Plotinus' view as a 'weak' kind of distinction between the center and the circle/radii, and Proclus' as a 'strong' distinction—while acknowledging for both figures that the center 'contains' its radii and circle.

The difference is made apparent when Proclus brings the analogy back to the principles. At first, earlier in the *Commentary*, Proclus makes implicitly links the point to the One [*in [T6] in the Background Texts*], connecting the different geometrical elements to different principles. However in the case of the circle's generation in our current passage, Proclus does not link the center to the One, but instead claims that the One is 'hidden' behind the center. A few lines after our previous passage,

²¹ἔκεῖ δὲ ἐν ἐνὶ πάντα, καὶ τὸ (?) οἷον κέντρον λάβης, ἐν τούτῳ πάντα εὐρήσεις, καὶ τὴν διισταμένην ἀπὸ τούτου πρόδοον, καὶ ταύτην ἔχουσαν τὰ πάντα, καὶ τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν, ὡσαύτως. πάντ' οὖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἰδὼν καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς διαστάσεως ἐλάττωσιν ἀφελὼν καὶ τὴν θέσιν ταύτην, περὶ ἣν ὁ μερισμός, ἀφανίσας εὐρήσεις τὸν ὄντως ὄντα κύκλον αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῷ προϊόντα καὶ ὀρίζοντα αὐτὸν καὶ ἐνεργοῦντα πρὸς αὐτόν, ἔν τε ὄντα καὶ πολλά, μένοντα καὶ προϊόντα καὶ ἐπιστρέφοντα, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀμερέστατον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐνικώτατον ἰδρύοντα σταθερῶς, πάντῃ δὲ ἀπὸ τούτου κινούμενον κατὰ τὸ εὐθὺ καὶ τὴν ἀπειρίαν τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ, συνελισσόμενον δὲ εἰς τὸ ἐν ἀφ' αὐτοῦ καὶ διὰ τῆς ὁμοιότητος καὶ ταυτότητος ἀνεγειρόμενον εἰς τὸ ἀμερές τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως καὶ τὸ κεκρυμμένον ἐν αὐτῷ τοῦ ἐνός, ὃ δὴ καὶ ἐγκολπισάμενος καὶ περιθῶν ὁμοιοῦται πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ τῷ αὐτοῦ πλήθει. καὶ γὰρ τὸ ἐπιστρέφον μιμεῖται τὸ μείναν, καὶ τὸ περιφερὲς οἷον κέντρον ἐστὶ διαστάν καὶ συνεύει πρὸς αὐτὸ κεντρωθῆναι σπεύδον καὶ ἐν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο γενέσθαι, καὶ ἀφ' οὗ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔσχεν ἡ πρόδος, εἰς τοῦτο περατώσας τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν.

Proclus specifies the principles' relation to the geometrical elements:

If we must identify the first cause by which the circular figure is brought to light and perfected, I would say it is the very highest order of the intelligibles. For the center resembles the cause of the Limit,²² while the lines from it, being indefinite in number and length, represents unlimitedness [i.e. the Unlimited], so far as in them lies; and the line which bounds their indefinite extendedness and gathers it back to the center is like the hidden cosmic order they constitute [...] For since [the circle] moves in an intelligent way about the intelligible and has that as the center of its motion, it is properly said to act cyclically.²³ (155,9–18; 21–23; trans. Morrow, modified)

Proclus' reference to the 'Limit' (*peras*) and 'Unlimited' (*apeiron*, *apeiria*) ultimately comes from Plato's *Philebus*, where Plato refers to the two terms as the basic elements that compose all things in the cosmos²⁴. In explicating this, Plato makes a four-fold distinction of 'kinds' in causality: the Limit, Unlimited, the Mixture (containing the latter two as elements), and the Cause of the mixture. In the context of the dialogue, Plato uses the framework to explain the composition of the good life as a 'mixture' of the two elements, namely reason (standing in the place of the 'Limit') and pleasure (standing in the place of the 'Unlimited'). Proclus adapts the two principles from the *Philebus* to account for the generation of intelligible being from unity and plurality, and ultimately for Intellect from the One. We can see this when Proclus straightforwardly calls the center the 'highest order of the intelligibles', about which, it is implied, Intellect revolves and contemplates the intelligible. We don't see Plotinus call the center the 'intelligible' in the same way, but his reference to the One as being, as it were, 'Intellect' in the form of unity implies that he might partially agree.

Ultimately at issue here is how the center is related to the circle, and in turn the principle which directly generates Intellect. We might phrase the question this way: is the center's unity unaffected by the plurality of radii which go forth from it, or is it affected? Plotinus would affirm the former, while Proclus would affirm the latter. Proclus emphasizes that 'all things' are found in the circle's center, just as in the production of the radii and the circumference, but for Proclus this would endanger the One's unity. In Proclus' presentation, the Limit is also 'one', but it is relative to what it produces; if the One is not supposed to be affected by plurality, then to place it in the analogous position of the center, as Plotinus does, would be an issue for Proclus. So this would be the implicit reasoning for why Proclus tries to emphasize the One as an *indirect* cause of plurality—and therefore why the One is 'behind' the center, but not identified with the center. As Proclus' language shows with the circle metaphor, the emphasis on distinct, separate stages in the circle's generation, and the separate imitation of the center by the circumference—rather than being directly related to the center, as in Plotinus' *kentroeidēs*—reflects Proclus' move to delegate causality from the One to intermediate principles, like the Limit and Unlimited, and similarly for the circle's generation from the center.

Damascius: The One 'Hidden' by, but Analogous to, the Center

Turning finally to Damascius, intriguingly one finds that he combines features of both Plotinus and Proclus with his geometrical analogy: Damascius affirms a distinction between the One and the circle's center (following Proclus), but he also affirms an *analogous* identity between the One and the circle's center (thus following Plotinus). First for background, we should note

²²I take the genitive here, implied by Morrow's translation, as indicating 'the role of' or 'the nature of' the object indicated—so that is, the cause is *of the nature of* the Limit. This would be instead of reading as a straightforward possessive genitive, e.g. the cause 'of', which is *prior to*, the Limit (e.g. the One). Philosophically Proclus can't mean this latter sense, especially since he stated earlier that the One is 'hidden' behind the center, just as it is causally 'behind' the Limit. Therefore I take this line in the former sense.

²³Εἰ δὲ δεῖ καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν εἰπεῖν τὴν πρώτην, καθ' ἣν ἀνεφάνη τὸ κυκλικὸν σχῆμα καὶ ἐτελειώθη, τὴν ἀκροτάτην ἂν εἴποιμι τάξιν τῶν νοητῶν. τὸ μὲν γὰρ κέντρον τῇ τοῦ πέρατος αἰτίᾳ προσέοικεν, αἱ δὲ ἀπὸ τούτου γραμμαὶ καὶ τῷ πλήθει ἀπειροὶ καὶ τῷ μεγέθει, ὅσον ἐφ' ἑαυταῖς, τὴν ἀπειρίαν ἀποτυπώνται, ἡ δὲ περατοῦσα τὴν τούτων ἀόριστον ἔκτασιν γραμμὴ καὶ πάλιν εἰς τὸ κέντρον συνάγουσα αὐτὴν τῷ ἐκ τούτων ὑποστάντι κρυφίῳ διακόσμῳ [ὡμοίωται?], [...] ἀτρυτῶς ἐφορεῖτο περὶ γὰρ τὸ νοητὸν κινούμενον νοητῶς καὶ οἷον κέντρον ἐκεῖνο τῆς ἑαυτοῦ φορᾶς ἔχον εἰκότως λέγεται κυκλικῶς ἐνεργεῖν.

²⁴Plato, *Philebus* 16c–d, 23c–d.

that Proclus explicitly denies that the One is ‘all things’ (*ta panta*) in a few places, particularly in his *Parmenides Commentary*, when he is implicitly responding to Plotinus (via Porphyry) with the claim that the One contains the ‘paradigms of paradigms’ (*paradeigma paradeigmatôn*).²⁵ In this case, Damascius is implicitly responding to Proclus here—on the one hand, affirming that the One cannot anticipate the ‘paradigms’ that are in Intellect, but on the other hand arguing that the One still *is* causally all things by analogy. Once again, as with the others, Damascius’ version of the circle’s radii and center brings this out:

We respond that it is right to proclaim [the One] as all things. For the Unified is an aggregate (*sunairema*) of each plurality; <if the Unified then> is an undifferentiated ‘all’ (*pan*), just like plurality which has been differentiated, the One is everywhere that before the Unified; as many things as the One is, so much is the Unified. For the One is as many things since it proceeds towards such things; the One does not go down towards a ‘one’, but towards the Unified, and the Unified does not go down toward a ‘unified’, but toward the distinguished ‘all’ (*pan diakekri-menon*), such this way that we also clearly conceive ‘all things’ (*ta panta*). But just as in the center the circle has been packed together (*suneptuktai*), and all [radii] from the center, such even is the entire plurality of differentiation (*diakriseôs*) in the unified; and the same analogy holds for both the center itself in the One and the things that have been compressed (*supeptugmena*) in the center, and similarly all things are simplified. And in this way we say that all things are one (*hen*), and that the One is all things, and yet more, that it is all things according to unity (*kata to hen*). And all things are not entirely ‘one’, but that One is entirely ‘all things’.²⁶ (*De Principiis* I, 93,21–94,12; trans. mine)

First if we consider Damascius’ language here, we can see a partial return to Plotinus’ language with a dynamic relation and a kind of direct relation between the circle and the center: Damascius says that the center results from the circle being ‘packed’ or ‘compressed together’ (*suneptuktai*), while analogously it is an ‘aggregate’ (*sunairema*) of the things from it (insofar as the center stands in for the ‘Unified’, in the passage). Damascius’ language mirrors Plotinus’, where the radii are ‘brought together’ (*ênechthêsan*) to the center, and inversely ‘unfolded’ (*exelichthen*), and the circle has the ‘center’s form’ (*kentroeidês*). While Damascius does not use this exact wording, Damascius’ expression that the center is simply the circle ‘compressed’ implies a similar position to Plotinus.

We also see Proclus’ description in the background, where the One is implicitly ‘behind’ or ‘before’ the center. But unlike Proclus, Damascius emphasizes that the same relationship between the circle and the center must also apply to the center and the One: just as the circle is ‘packed’ together in the center, the center is analogously ‘packed’ into the One. Damascius’ reasoning for the latter appears to be that, if one follows Proclus’ framework, and thereby if the One is placed behind the center, that still indicates a causal relation. Thus, if the center produces the circle by ‘unraveling’ it, to use Plotinus’ language, by analogy so should the One ‘unravel’ the center. In this respect, Damascius employs a principle of transitivity: if A produces B, and B produces C, A implicitly pre-contains C. Likewise, if the One produces the Unified, and the Unified ‘all things’, then the One pre-contains ‘all things’, and therefore there is causal synonymy between the One and ‘all things’.

We can also see for Damascius that, whereas Proclus describes the circle being its own, separated kind of ‘center’ alongside its originating center, Damascius dispenses with this language—the circle is simply the unrolling of the center. This would also go along with the lack of language describing distinct stages between the center ‘remaining’, the lines ‘proceeding’ from the center, and the circular line as ‘reverting’ toward the originating center. One can see this when Damascius calls the principle linked to the center the ‘Unified’, and not the ‘Limit’: where Proclus identifies the Limit and Unlimited as separate stages,

²⁵Proclus, *In Parm.* 1107,8–22, ff. (Steel).

²⁶[93,21] ὁρθῶς ἔχει καὶ ἐκεῖνο πάντα ἀνυμνεῖν· ἐκάστου γὰρ πλήθους τὸ ἡνωμένον συναίρεμα. *** πᾶν ἐστὶν ἀδιάκριτον, οἷον τὸ πλῆθος διακεκριμένον, [25] πρὸ δὲ τοῦ ἡνωμένου ἐκασταχοῦ τὸ ἐν ἑκάστον, [94,1] τοσαῦτα τὸ ἐν, ὅσα τὸ ἡνωμένον. ἔστι γὰρ τοσαῦτα, ὅτι προήλθεν εἰς τοσαῦτα· οὐ γὰρ εἰς ἐν ὑπέβη τὸ ἐν, ἀλλ’ εἰς ἡνωμένον, οὐδὲ τὸ ἡνωμένον εἰς ἡνωμένον, ἀλλ’ εἰς πᾶν διακεκριμένον, ὅπου καὶ σαφῶς τὰ πάντα νοοῦμεν. ἀλλ’ [5] ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ κέντρῳ συνέπτυκται ὁ κύκλος καὶ πάσαι αἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ κέντρου, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ ἡνωμένῳ τὸ πᾶν τῆς διακρίσεως πλῆθος· ἀνὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ἐν τῷ ἐνὶ τῷ τε κέντρῳ αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ κέντρῳ συνεπτυγμένα καὶ πάντα ὁμοίως ἀπλοῖζεται. καὶ οὕτως ἐν τὰ πάντα λέγομεν, [10] καὶ τὸ ἐν πάντα καὶ ἔτι πλέον, ὅτι κατὰ τὸ ἐν τὰ πάντα· καὶ τὰ μὲν πάντα οὐ πάντως ἐν, τὸ δὲ ἐν ἐκεῖνο πάντως τὰ πάντα.

or principles, respectively indicating unity and plurality, Damascius ties these two together in the Unified (as the word, *hênômenon*, might imply, with an implicitly plural entity undergoing unity). Therefore both unity and plurality emerge together by analogy in the center. For this, Damascius might once again be thinking of Plotinus conceiving of the circle's center implying both the unity of its own point, and simultaneously the plurality of the radii end-points that fall on it. Since they coincide, one can describe the circle's center as both one and many together.

In terms of principles, Damascius seems to be thinking the same way: the first cause which generates Intellect cannot just be 'unity', as Proclus' Limit, but must already anticipate the distinct character of plurality in itself—so it must be 'one' and 'many' together. Given this, Damascius does not entirely go back to Plotinus: to affirm the priority of unity, Damascius follows Proclus and places the One before the Unified, as with the center. But we can here again see references back to Plotinus when Damascius says that the One is 'all things' *kata to hen*, according to unity. In this respect, Damascius moves away from Proclus by drawing a causal relation between the One and the circle's center, whereas Proclus would deny that the One is causally related to the center. Damascius' language would then go back to the concluding lines of our passage from *Ennead* VI.8.18, where Plotinus identifies Intellect within the One, but then clarifies that 'Intellect' here is then simply 'One' (*gar hen*).

Conclusion: Legacy in Latin and Byzantine Christian Figures

Let me conclude the talk now and briefly summarize the three positions that I have surveyed in Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius, and then say a word about the legacy of the metaphor from the Neoplatonists in Augustine, Eriugena, and Ps.-Dionysius.

- In Plotinus, the circle is described as having the 'form of the center' (*kentroeidês*), and being fully in contact with the center as a projection of the center. Plotinus emphasizes the unity of the circular line and radii with the center, which mirrors his position on Intellect's relation to the One as being a projection and a pluralized version of what is 'in' the One.
- Proclus sharply moves away from this picture by de-emphasizing the direct relation between the circumference and the circle's center, where instead the circumference imitates the center by becoming its own, 'separated' center as an approximation. The emphasis on separation mirrors Proclus' view of the One's causality, by making the One separate from the direct production of Intellect's plurality, as with the circle where it produces the circle by means of the point, while being ontologically separate from the point.
- Damascius follows Proclus' basic structure, with the One 'behind' the circle's center, but he returns to Plotinus' dynamic picture of the circle as an 'unfolding' of the center. Damascius uses the dynamic relation between the circle's circumference and the center to show that an analogous relation exists between the circle's center and the One prior to the center. In this way the One is still directly related to Intellect's plurality, though by analogy. In this sense Damascius represents a 'halfway point' between Plotinus and Proclus.

Thus, just as each Neoplatonist discussed here varies with their own view about the One's causality, we can see this reflected in the language and description they use for the circle's relation and generation from the center and radii. Although one could initially argue that the circle example used by each figure is essentially the same, we have at least seen that the language and description of the example fits the analogical connection each figure draws with his position on the One's causality—thus the *explanans* is proportional in each case to the *explanandum*.

The legacy of the circle metaphor in relation to divine causality is fairly common in later Byzantine Christian language, as well as later Latin Christians from Eriugena onward. While in earlier Latin figures like Augustine, especially, I haven't found a specific reference to divine causality with the circle metaphor. However Augustine does use the metaphor in *De Quantitate Animae* to defend the soul's unity and immateriality in relation to the separate parts of the body,²⁷ parallel to Plotinus' and Alexander's arguments with the soul (or soul-faculty) and its relation to the senses. Here Augustine most likely takes this reference from the *Ennead* IV.7.6 context, and not from the other cases on divine causality. [However I'm open to other suggestions or references here, if there are any.]

In the Byzantine world, Ps.-Dionysius adapts the metaphor in *De Divinis Nominibus*, describing God implicitly as the point which contains the converging lines within the circle's center, analogous to the monad that contains and implies the numbers it produces.²⁸ In this context Ps.-Dionysius appears to follow closer to Plotinus' description of the circle, and perhaps Damascius' as well. Switching back to the Latin context, Eriugena in the 9th cent. A.D. (likely 860's) translates Ps.-Dionysius' passage²⁹ and, in paraphrasing his own version of the metaphor, essentially follows the same formulation from Ps.-Dionysius and thereby Plotinus, making an inherent relation of the circumference and radii to the center.³⁰ The later Byzantine and Latin figures' notion of the metaphor would ultimately make sense in light of their position on God's causality, within a monotheistic perspective: instead of following Proclus, who divides the different stages of generation from one principle, between different gods and intellects, they simplify the picture and make God the cause of both unity and the plurality of the different aspects of creation. In this respect Plotinus' framework (and perhaps Damascius' too), even with the geometrical metaphor, offered the later Christians an amenable platform for their metaphysics.

²⁷Augustine, *De Quant. Animae* §11, p. 18, esp.: '[Evodius] I think that is indivisible which we were placing as a centre in the figure, from which lines are drawn to the borders. For if it is divisible, it cannot be without length, or even without width. [...] [Augustine] This, then, which I see you do understand, is the most excellent of all the things described so far, and that because it admits of no division' (trans. J.M. Colleran) ([Evo.] ego illud puto non posse diuidi, quod medium in figura ponebamus, unde in extrema lineae ducuntur. nam si diuiditur, longitudine aut etiam latitudine carere non potest. [...] [Aug.] hoc ergo quod iam te intelligere uideo, potentissimum omnium, quae demonstrata sunt. siquidem hoc est, quod nullam diuisionem patitur); §14, p. 23, esp.: '[Augustine] And if of all plane figures, that is the most perfect which is drawn in a circle, and reason has shown that in it there is nothing more perfect and more important than the point, which no one doubts to be without parts [cf. Euclid, *Elements* I, Def. 1; [T1]]: why should it be surprising if the soul is not corporeal, nor extended in length, nor spread out in breadth, nor made solid by depth, and yet is present so effectively in the body as to control all the members of the body and serves as a pivot of action, so to speak for all the motions of the body?' (et si figurarum omnium planarum illa optima est quae circulo effingitur, in qua ratio docuit nihil esse melius puncto atque potentius, quod nullo dubitante partibus caret; quid mirum si anima neque corporea sit, neque ulla aut longitudine porrecta, aut latitudine diffusa, aut altitudine solidata; et tamen tantum ualeat in corpore, ut penes eam sit regimen omnium membrorum, et quasi cardo quidam in agendo, cunctarum corporalium motionum?).

²⁸Ps.-Dionysius, *De Divin. Nom.* 184,21–185,11 (Suchla 1990)=820D–821A (Migne, *PG* 3): 'Every number preexists uniquely in the monad and the monad holds every number in itself singularly. Every number is united in the monad; it is differentiated and pluralized only insofar as it goes forth from this one. All the radii of a circle are brought together in the unity of the center which contains all the straight lines brought together within itself. These are linked one to another because of this single point of origin and they are completely unified at this center. As they move a little away from it they are differentiated a little, and as they fall farther they are farther differentiated. That is, the closer they are to the center point, the more they are at one with it and at one with each other, and the more they travel away from it the more they are separated from each other' (trans. Luibheid, from the Migne ed. (*PG* 3)). (Καὶ γὰρ ἐν μονάδι πᾶς ἀριθμὸς ἐνοειδῶς προϋφέστηκε, καὶ ἔχει πάντα ἀριθμὸν ἢ μονάδα ἐν ἑαυτῇ μοναχῶς, καὶ πᾶς ἀριθμὸς ἦνται μὲν ἐν τῇ μονάδι, καθ' ὅσον δὲ τῆς μονάδος πρόεισι, κατὰ τοσοῦτον διακρίνεται καὶ πληθύνεται. Καὶ ἐν κέντρῳ πᾶσαι αἱ τοῦ κύκλου γραμμαὶ κατὰ μίαν ἑνωσιν συνυφεστήκασι, καὶ πάσας ἔχει τὸ σημεῖον ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὰς εὐθείας ἐνοειδῶς ἠνωμένας πρὸς τε ἀλλήλας καὶ πρὸς τὴν μίαν ἀρχήν, ἀφ' ἧς προήλθον, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ μὲν τῷ κέντρῳ παντελῶς ἦνται. Βραχὺ δὲ αὐτοῦ διαστάσαι, βραχὺ καὶ διακρίνονται, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀποστᾶσαι, μᾶλλον. Καὶ ἀπλῶς, καθ' ὅσον τῷ κέντρῳ πλησιαίτερά ἐίσι, κατὰ τοσοῦτον καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἀλλήλαις ἦνται, καὶ, καθ' ὅσον αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τοσοῦτον καὶ ἀλλήλων διεστήκασιν.)

²⁹Eriugena, *Periphyseon* II, 618a33–b1 (Sheldon-Williams ed.).

³⁰*Ibid.*, 639d: 'This conclusion I cannot contradict since without any uncertainty I see that all numbers eternally and uniformly subsist in the monad and all radii in their centre, and although in the actual process of counting the numbers and drawing the radii they take the forms of different kinds of numbers and figures, yet they still abide as one form in their principles, I mean in the monad and in the centre, and it is understood that neither were the principles ever without them nor was there a beginning to their being made in the principles, and while they flow forth from them as many, yet they do not cease to be in them under the form of one because of their eternity and immutability' (trans. Sheldon-Williams).