How Damascius Correlates First Principles in Orphic Theology to His Neoplatonic First Principles: Damascius, *On First Principles* Chapter 123

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ABSTRACT. This paper offers a detailed analysis of Damascius' discourse on Orphic theology in Chapter 123 of On First Principles, focusing on how Damascius correlates the first principles of Rhapsodic and Hieronyman theogonies to his own Neoplatonic first principles. Through detailed textual analysis, it presents a schematic alignment of Damascian principles with Orphic theology.

KEYWORDS: Damascius, Orphism, First Principles, the Ineffable, the One.

In chapter 123 (C-W III.159.6-III.162.18[1]) of *On First Principles*, Damascius discusses the Orphic Theology of Rhapsodies and that of Hieronymus and Hellanicus.[2] In what follows, I will focus on how Damascius correlates the items in Orphic theogonies he reports to his own Neoplatonic first principles[3].

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[1] All quotations of *On First Principles* in this paper are from L. Westerink, and J. Combès (1986–1991). And all translations are mine. E. Afonasin (2024) recently translated the fragments of Hieronyman theogony into Russian and provided commentary on it.

[2] Damascius, so far as we know, was only one among those who referenced the Orphic theogony attributed to Hieronymus or Hellanicus. There have been some attempts to identify one or both two individuals, as Damascius himself alludes to the possibility that they may, in fact, be the same person. West suggested an Egyptian Hieronymus mentioned by Flavius Josephus (L. West 1983, 176-177), while White (2004) tentatively identified this eponym with Hieronymus of Rhodes, the third century Peripatetic from the school founded by Eudemus. Damascius also reports a theogony from Eudemus, but it starts from the lower principle thus it is not the subject of this paper.

[3] For a general introduction to Damascius' metaphysics, see G. Van Riel (2011) 667-696, especially pages 675-684 which delve into Damascius' first principles.

At *On First Principles* III.160.16-161.13, Damascius discusses the highest principles in Orphic theology:

On First Principles III.160.16-161.13

Ἡ δὲ κατὰ τον Ἱερώνυμον φερομένη καὶ Ἑλλάνικον, εἴπερ μὴ καὶ ὁ αὐτός ἐστιν, οὕτως ἔχει. Ὕδωρ ἦν, φησίν ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ ὕλη ἐξ ἧς ἐπάγη ἡ γῆ, δυό ταύτας ἀρχὰς ὑποτιθέμενος πρώτας, ὕδωρ καὶ γῆν, ταύτην μὲν ὡς φύσει σκεδαστήν, ἐκεῖνο δὲ ὡς ταύτης κολλητικόν τε καὶ **συνεκτικόν**. Τὴν δὲ μίαν πρὸ τῶν δυεῖν ἄρρητον ἀφίησιν· αὐτὸ γὰρ τὸ μηδὲ φάναι περὶ αὐτῆς ἐνδείκνυται αὐτῆς τὴν ἀπόρρητον φύσιν. Τὴν δὲ τρίτην ἀρχὴν μετὰ τὰς δύο γεννηθῆναι ἐκ τούτων, ὕδατός φημι καὶ γῆς, δράκοντα δὲ εἶναι καὶ κεφαλὰς ἔχοντα προσπεφυκυίας ταύρου καὶ λέοντος, ἐν μέσῳ δὲ θεοῦ πρόσοπων, ἔχειν δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων πτερά, ὠνομάσθαι δὲ Χρόνον ἀγήραον καὶ Ἡρακλῆα τὸν αὐτόν· συνεῖναι δὲ αὐτῷ τὴν Ἀνάγκην, φύσιν οὖσαν τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ Ἀδράστειαν, δισώματον διωργυιωμένην ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ, τῶν περάτων αὐτοῦ ἐφαπτομένην. Ταύτην οἶμαι λέγεσθαι τὴν τρίτην ἀρχὴν κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ἑστῶσαν, πλὴν ὅτι ἀρσενόθηλυν αὐτὴν ὑπεστήσατο πρὸς ἔνδειξιν τῆς πάντων γεννητικῆς αἰτίας.[4]

I. Water and Earth

In this paragraph, Damascius firstly considers a primal pair consisting of "water" (ὕδωρ) and "earth" (γῆν).[5] The earth has nature of dispersing (σκεδαστήν), and water provides coherence (κολλητικόν) and **connection (συνεκτικόν)** for earth. The dual structure is similar to the Neoplatonic Dyad of Limit and the Unlimited (or called One-All and All-One, the One and the Multiplicity, see *On First Principles* II.28.1-6),[6] and there is additional evidence for this correspondence:

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[4] The [Orphic theogony] Hieronymus and Hellanicus report, if the latter is not the same person, is as follows. He said, in the beginning there was water, and there was earth coagulated from matter, these are the primal dyad he establishes, water and earth, The latter has nature of dispersing, and the former glues and connects earth. Before the dyad is the single ineffable principle he left, he did not mention it, this fact shows its ineffable nature. But as for the third principle after the dyad which is generated from these, I mean from water and earth, it is a dragon with lion heads and bull heads grown upon it, and in the middle there is a face of god, and it has wings on its shoulders, this god is called Ageless Time and is also known as Heracles. Necessity which is also Nature and Adrasteia, is united with it, and arms of this bimorph body stretch through the whole world, untill the very boundaries of it. This description means the third principle functions as substance, except that Hieronymus represent it as male-female in order to show that it is the generating cause of all things.

[5] For a mythlogical investigation of the dyads of water and earth, see D. Meinster (2018) 126-133 and 137-144. See also E. Afonasin (2024) note 9, note 11 and note 13.

[6] In *On First Principles*, though Damascius is more likely to use the term "dyad" (δυάς) to refer to the One-All (the Unlimited), he does not refuse to use the expression of "the dyad of Limit and the Unlimited" e.g. *On First Principles* II.25.3 and II.28.1

The words Damascius uses to describe the two items fit the Limit and the Un-limited. Just as the Limit is the principle that connects all things, water provides connection. Proclus also said, "Limit is the divine cause of remaining, uniform, and **connection.**" (τὸ μὲν πέρας τῆς... ἑνοειδοῦς καὶ **συνεκτικῆς** θεότητος αἴτιον ὑπάρχον). "The latter (i.e. earth) has nature of dispersing" fits the Unlimited, Damscius' cause of multiplicity well, since dispersion makes something no longer one or solitary, instead conferring a state of multiplicity. "Water provides coherence and connec-tion for earth" is also an expression reminds us of what Proclus said, in *Platonic theology* III.10, "Limit limits the unlimited" (περατοῦν τὸ ἄπειρον)[7].

II. The single principle that is ineffable

Damascius then mentions the single ineffable principle (τὴν μίαν ἄρρητον) be-fore water and earth. Brisson claims that this single ineffable principle here repre-sents the Damascian supreme Ineffable:

> Avant l'Eau primordiale, Damascius pose un principe suprême, que n'auraient pas mentionné Hiéronymos et Hellanikos, parce qu'il s'agit de l'«Ineffable». Cette astuce, qui permet à Damascius de retrouver à bon compte son premier principe dans cette théogonie orphique et donc de corroborer sa position dans le cadre du courant Néo-platonicien[8]

This is not quite so, because Damascius, as is clear from his own writings, asserts that "the Ineffable"[9] cannot be presented in any system. For instance, in *On First Principles* Chapter 22, Damascius stresses that "the Ineffable" is absent in the Pla-tonic metaphysical system and Plato never mentioned it, since it cannot be the

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[7] See Proclus, *Platonic Theology* III.40.23-25. The edition referenced is M. Abbate (2019).

[8] Brisson (1995) 198.

[9] Damascius sometimes also call the One as (the) Ineffable (ἀπόρρητον/ἄρρητον, see e.g. *On First Principles* I 10.22-11.16; I 56; II 22.11 ff) or the ineffable principle (ἡ ἀρρήτου ἀρχή, see e.g. *On First Principles* II.11.24) M. Vlad (2019) 186 also speaks about that. For the purpose of present essay, I will use "the Ineffable" with quotation marks to refer specifically to the Damascian supreme Ineffable which cannot be presented in terms of any system.

object of hypothesis like the One in *Parmenides*[10]. "The Ineffable" is "**not in any system**, non-relative and inconceivable in *every way*"[11] (ἄθετον, ἀσύντακτον καὶ ἀνεπινόητον κατὰ πάντα τρόπον):

> *On First Principles* I.55.9-56.16
> Πλάτων…οὐδὲν ἐνεδείξατο περὶ ἐκείνης, ἀλλὰ τὰς ἀποφάσεις ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνός…Καὶ πρὸ τοῦ ἑνός ἄρα τὸ ἁπλῶς καὶ πάντῃ ἄρρητον, ἄθετον, ἀσύντακτον καὶ ἀνεπινόητον κατὰ πάντα τρόπον[12]

Therefore, this single ineffable principle as a highest principle within a system (Orphic system) cannot be "the Ineffable". If a supreme origin remains within a system, it can only be the One.[13]

The term of πάντα τρόπον is reminiscent of what Proclus says in *Platonic Theology* which is that there are many *ways* (τρόποι) to discuss theology, such as Pythagorean way, Orphic way and Platonic way:

> *Platonic Theology* I.19.23-20.8

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[10] Thus, C-W (1986) I: lvii-lviii and A. Mihai (2014) which attribute "the Ineffable" to the topic of first Parmenidean hypothesis for Damascius, must be problematic. Mihai also mistakenly references L. Brisson (1991) and S. Rappe (2010) to support this conclusion. In fact, Brisson (1991) 163-164 argues Damascius never interpreted first hypothesis as he has discussed questions like first hypothesis in his *On First Principles*. Rappe also acknowledges that Damascius' interpretation of first hypothesis is absent for his works. Recently, Vlad discussed that "the Ineffable" cannot be the topic of first Parmenidean hypothesis detailly, see M. Vlad (2019) 194-197 and M. Vlad (2023). Linguiti discussed this very ineffability cannot be the object of any hypothesis of the Damascian ineffable in the terms of history of philosophy. See A. Linguiti (2012) 209-212.

[11] In comparison, the One can be conceived in a Platonic way, namely through all the negations in the first Parmenides hypothesis, for the discussion of this comparison see M. Vlad (2023).

[12] Plato never mentioned this ("the Ineffable"), but instead started from the One…Thus that before the One is the absolutely and completely ineffable, which cannot be the object of hypothesis, and is not in any system, non-relative and inconceivable in every way.

[13] In comparison with this "Ineffable" which is not a principle that can be presented in terms of any metaphysical scheme, the One is also sometimes called as (the) Ineffable (ἀπόρρητον/ἄρρητον, see e.g. On First Principles I 10.22-11.16; I 56; II 22.11 ff) or the ineffable principle (ἡ ἀρρήτου ἀρχή, see e.g. On First Principles II.11.24) by Damascius. Recently, Meisner also tried identifying the single ineffable principle with the One rather than "the Ineffable", however Meisner does not offer a demonstration of this. See D. Meisner (2018) 126 and 128.

Οἱ μὲν οὖν *τρόποι* τῆς παρὰ τῷ Πλάτωνι θεολογικῆς διδασκαλίας τοιοίδε τινές εἰσι...Ἔστι δὲ ὁ μὲν διὰ τῶν συμβόλων τὰ θεῖα μηνύειν ἐφιέμενος Ὀρφικὸς καὶ ὅλως τοῖς τὰς θεομυθίας γράφουσιν οἰκεῖος. Ὁ δὲ διὰ τῶν εἰκόνων Πυθαγόρειος.[14]

Obviously, the Orphic way should be included in πάντα τρόπον. This corroborates "the Ineffable" should be absent in Orphic systems.

As a result, this single ineffable principle cannot refer to "the Ineffable'" that transcends all systems. Instead, it corresponds to the One, that is prior to the primal dyad as well.

III. Chronos

From Water and Earth proceeds Chronos, an immense serpent with many heads[15] described as "the third principle" (τὴν τρίτην ἀρχήν) and "the generating cause of all things" (ἡ πάντων γεννητικῆς αἰτία). Not only is "the third principle" (ἡ τρίτη ἀρχή) repeatedly used to refer to The Unified by Damascius, but "the generating cause of all things" also is a description which fits the Unified, as the Unified is the actual generator of all compared with the One, which is the potential cause or the power that gives rise to all things.[16] These two terms are also employed by Damascius to associate the Father's Intellect with the Unified in his interpretation of the Chaldean Oracles. He characterizes the Father's Intellect as "the third principle which actualizes all things in act" (ἡ τρίτη ἀρχὴ τὸ πάντων μὲν ἐγερτικὸν εἰς ἐνέργειαν)[17].

But there is a difficulty in identifying Chronos with the Unified: Chronos is described as generated (γεννηθῆναι) from water and earth. But in Damascius' accounts of Philebus, the Mixture is not a product of Limit and the Unlimited[18], but is a direct aspect of the One like Limit and the Unlimited themselves. However, we should note that metaphors or analogies, full of "stuff of our world" – among which the sun is the most famous[19] – are widely used in the Platonic tradition to explain theology in a more accessible way. For Damascius, mythic metaphors are particularly employed to approach realms that cannot be expressed in any language.

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[14] These are ways of Plato used to teach theology...That used symbols to instruct the divine truth is Orphic way, and that used images is way of Pythagoreans.

[15] For a discussion of the figure of Chronos, see S. Junyan (2024)

[16] For detailed analysis see S. Rappe (2014) xvii-xxii.

[17] On First Principles II.71.9-10.

[18] See chapter 55 and chapter 56 of On First Principles (II.40.1-II.51.15). For a detailed discussion on this topic, see S. Rappe (2014) 19-21, J. Greig (2020) 142-143, 243-257, and K. Ana (2023).

[19] Republic 507b–509c.

On First Principles I.10.14-20:

τοῦτο γὰρ ἡμᾶς περιμενέτω. Ὥστε πολλαχῇ τὸ ἄρρητον καὶ ἄγνωστον, ὥστε καὶ τὸ ἕν τοιοῦτον. Ἀλλ' ὅμως καὶ νῦν ὧδε ἔχοντες, παραβαλλόμεθα πρὸς τὴν διάκρισιν τῶν τηλικούτων δι' ἐνδείξεων καὶ ὑπονοιῶν, καὶ διακαθαιρόμενοι πρὸς τὰς ἀσυνήθεις ἐννοίας καὶ δι' ἀναλογίας ἀναγόμενοι καὶ διά ἀποφάσεων, ἀτιμάζοντες τὰ παρ' ἡμῖν πρὸς ἐκεῖνα.[20]

As evidence a fortiori Damascius correlates Chronos with the Unified, this generation of Chronos from water and earth can reasonably be understood as an Orphic mythic metaphor, which does not in fact represent the relationship between the Unified and the first two henads, but "approach the discernment of very significant matters through allegories and hidden meanings."[21]

IV. Aether, Chaos, Erebos and the Egg

Following the realm of One, we come to the intelligible realm, which Damascius draws via two different Orphic theogonies, the Rhapsodies and theogony of Hieronymus or Hellanicus:

On First Principles III.159.17-160.16

Ἐν μὲν τοίνυν ταῖς φερομέναις ταύταις ῥαψῳδίαις ὀρφικαῖς ἡ θεολογία (τοιά) δε τίς ἐστιν ἡ περὶ τὸ νοητόν [III.159.18], ἣν καὶ οἱ φιλόσοφοι διερμηνεύουσιν, ἀντὶ μὲν τῆς μιᾶς τῶν ὅλων ἀρχῆς τὸν Χρόνον τιθέντες, ἀντὶ δε τοῖν δυεῖν Αἰθέρα καὶ Χάος, ἀντὶ δε τοῦ ὄντος ἁπλῶς τὸ ᾠὸν (1) [III.159.21] ἀπολογιζόμενοι, καὶ τριάδα ταύτην πρώτην ποιοῦντες, εἰς δὲ τὴν δευτέραν τελεῖν ἤτοι τὸ κυούμενον καὶ τὸ κύον [III.160.1] ᾠὸν (2) τὸν θεόν, ἢ τὸν ἀργῆτα χιτῶνα, ἢ τὴν νεφέλην, ὅτι ἐκ τούτων ἐκθρῴσκει ὁ Φάνης (ἄλλοτε γὰρ ἄλλα περὶ τοῦ μέσου φιλοσοφοῦσιν), τοῦτο μέν, ὁποῖον ἂν ᾖ, ὡς τὸν νοῦν, ὡς δὲ πατέρα καὶ δύναμιν ἄλλα τινά προσεπινοοῦντες οὐδὲν τῷ Ὀρφεῖ προσήκοντα, τὴν δὲ τρίτην τὸν Μῆτιν ὡς νοῦν, τὸν Ἠρικεπαῖον ὡς δύναμιν, τὸν Φάνητα αὐτὸν ὡς πατέρα. Μήποτε δὲ καὶ τὴν μέσην τριάδα θετέον κατὰ τὸν τρίμορφον θεὸν ἔτι κυόμενον ἐν τῷ ᾠῷ (2), καὶ γὰρ τὸ μέσον ἀεὶ φαντάζει συναμφότερον τῶν ἄκρων, ὥσπερ καὶ τοῦτο ἅμα καὶ ᾠὸν (2) καὶ τρίμορφος ὁ θεός. Καὶ ὁρᾷς ὅτι τὸ μὲν ᾠόν ἐστι τὸ

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[20] Despite the very fact we grasp – the realm of One is always ineffable and unknowable, we can only approach the discernment of such significant matters through allegories and hidden meanings, and we purify ourselves for the reception of unfamiliar concepts, and so we can only ascend by means of analogy and by negations, deprecating the things of our world by comparison to that is hyper-knowledgeable, being led to this away from what is less valuable, the things of our world, toward that is higher.

[21] E. Butler (2013) shows another example of Damascus' explaining the henads by mythic metaphor. M. Vlad (2017) discusses Proclus' endorsement for describing the realm of the One by metaphor and analogy. Both Proclus and Damascius, like other Platonists, are clear that analogies and metaphors are never literal and should finally be given up when attempting to grasp the One. See L. Pitteloud (2022) 316 and 328.

ἠνωμένον, ὁ δὲ τρίμορφος καὶ πολύμορφος τῷ ὄντι θεὸς τὸ διακεκριμένον τοῦ νοητοῦ, τὸ δὲ μέσον κατὰ μέν το ᾠὸν (2) ἔτι ἠνωμένον, κατὰ δὲ τὸν θεὸν ἤδη διακεκριμένον, τὸ δὲ ὅλον εἰπεῖν, διακρινόμενον. Τοιαύτη μὲν ἡ συνήθης ὀρφικὴ θεολογία.[22]

On First Principles III.161.14-162.18
Καὶ ὑπολαμβάνω τὴν ἐν ταῖς ῥαψῳδίαις θεολογίαν ἀφεῖσαν τὰς δύο πρώτας ἀρχὰς μετὰ τῆς μιᾶς πρὸ τῶν δυεῖν τῆς σιγῇ παραδοθείσης ἀπὸ τῆς τρίτης μετὰ τὰς δύο ταύτης ἐνστήσασθαι τὴν ἀρχήν, ὡς πρώτης ῥητόν τι ἐχούσης καὶ σύμμετρον πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀκοάς. [III.161.18] Οὗτος γὰρ ἦν ὁ πολυτίμητος ἐν ἐκείνη Χρόνος ἀγήραος καὶ Αἰθέρος καὶ Χάους πατήρ, ἀμέλει καὶ κατὰ ταύτην ὁ Χρόνος οὗτος δράκων γεννᾶται τριπλῆν γονήν, Αἰθέρα φησὶ νοτερὸν καὶ Χάος ἄπειρον, καὶ τρίτον ἐπὶ τούτοις Ἔρεβος (1) ὀμιχλῶδες. Τὴν δευτέραν ταύτην τριάδα ἀνάλογον [III.161.23] τῇ πρώτῃ παραδίδωσι, δυναμικὴν οὖσαν, ὡς ἐκείνην [III.161.24] πατρικήν, διὸ καὶ τὸ τρίτον αὐτῆς Ἔρεβός (2) ἔστιν ὀμιχλῶδες, καὶ τὸ πατρικόν τε καὶ ἄκρον Αἰθήρ, οὐχ ἁπλῶς, ἀλλά νοτερός, τὸ δὲ μέσον αὐτόθεν Χάος ἄπειρον. Ἀλλὰ μὴν ἐν τούτοις, ὡς λέγει, ὁ Χρόνος ᾠὸν (2) [III.162.1] ἐγέννησεν, τοῦ Χρόνου ποιοῦσα γέννημα καὶ αὕτη ἡ παράδοσις, καὶ ἐν τούτοις τικτόμενον, ὅτι καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων ἡ τρίτη πρόεισι νοητὴ τριάς. Τίς οὖν αὕτη ἐστί; Τὸ ᾠὸν (3), ἡ δυὰς τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ φύσεων, ἄρρενος καὶ θηλείας, καὶ τῶν ἐν μέσῳ παντοίων σπερμάτων τὸ πλῆθος, καὶ τρίτον ἐπὶ τούτοις θεὸν δισώματον, πτέρυγας ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων ἔχοντα χρυσάς, ὅς ἐν μὲν ταῖς λαγόσι προσπεφυκυίας εἶχε ταύρων κεφαλάς, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς κεφαλῆς δράκοντα πελώριον παντοδαπαῖς μορφαῖς θηρίων ἰνδαλλόμενον. Τοῦτον μὲν οὖν ὡς νοῦν τῆς τριάδος ὑποληπτέον, τὰ δὲ μέσα γένη τά τε πολλά καὶ τὰ δύο τὴν δύναμιν, αὐτό δὲ τὸ ᾠὸν (3) ἀρχὴν πατρικὴν τῆς τρίτης τριάδος. Ταύτης δὲ τῆς τρίτης τριάδος τὸν τρίτον θεὸν καὶ ἥδε ἡ θεολογία πρωτόγονον ἀνυμνεῖ καὶ Δία καλεῖ πάντων διατάκτορα καὶ ὅλου τοῦ

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[22] According to the transmitted Orphic Rhapsodies, the following is the theology about the Intelligible realm, which the philosophers also interpreted. The Rhapsodies put Time (Chronos) in the place of the single principle of whole [Intelligible realm], whereas Rhapsodies took Aether and Chaos as dyad principles [of whole Intelligible realm], and the egg (1) is in the place of absolute Being [of whole Intelligible realm], this is the first [Intelligible] triad. In the second triad, the last entity is that is conceived or the egg (2) that gives birth to the god, or the gleaming robe, or the cloud, we know Phanes leaps forth from [the entity called] these terms (as different philosophers have different explanations for this middle entity), but this, whatever term [they use], it is the equivalent of intellect, For father and power [in the second intelligible triad] Rhapsodies employed those are fundamentally extraneous to the Orphic [terms]. In the third triad, Metis is intellect, Erikepaios is power, and Phanes himself is father. We can also regard the middle triad as the trimorph god still being conceived inside the egg (2), as the middle always shows [the character of] both the extremes, and thus it is simultaneously the egg (2) and the trimorph god. And we see the egg is the unified [of intelligible realm], and the trimorph or polymorph god is the difference of the intelligible realm, and the middle as the egg (2) is still unified, but the god is already differentiated, or to speak more generally, beginning to be differentiated. And this is the current [form of] the Orphic theology.

κόσμου, διὸ καὶ Πᾶνα καλεῖσθαι. Τοσαῦτα καὶ αὕτη περὶ τῶν νοητῶν ἀρχῶν ἡ γενεαλογία παρίστησιν.[23]

I believe that to fully grasp Damascius' interpretation of Orphic theology, one should not divide his explanation in *On First Principles* chapter 123, into two separate and independent systems—the Rhapsodic system and the Hieronyman system—as Brisson does. Brisson equates Damascius' treatment of the Rhapsodies (III.159.17-160.16) with Proclus' own interpretation of the Rhapsodic system, where Chronos represents the One, Aether the Limit, Chaos the Unlimited, and the Egg the Mixture. This positions all elements of III.159.17-160.16 within the realm of the One and overlooks Damascius' further elucidation in III.161.14-18.[24] Damascius, however, as is clear in III.159.18 (Ἐν μέν τοίνυν ταῖς φερομέναις ταύταις ῥαψῳδίαις ὀρφικαῖς ἡ θεολογία (τοιά) δε τίς ἐστιν ἡ περὶ τὸ νοητόν), insists Rhapsodies (III.159.17-160.16) is merely the theology about the realm of Intelligible rather than the realm of One. Furthermore, III.161.14-18 confirms that it is impossible for Chronos, who is

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[23] From my perspective the theology of Rhapsodies has left out the two first principles and the single principle before the two by being silent [on them], but states from the third principle after the two, since it is the first principle that can be expressed in language and can be heard by human ears. For the highest in that [theology] was Ageless Chronos [who is] the father of Aether and Chaos. Actually, in this [theology] Chronos the dragon generates a triple offspring: Aether that he calls watery and infinite Chaos, and third after these is misty Erebus (1). And the second triad is analogous to the first, although the second is dynamic, whereas the first is paternal, and thus, the third entity of the second intelligible triad is [also] misty Erebos (2) but dynamic, and the paternal element of the second triad or an extreme is Aether, not unqualified, but moist, and the middle entity is infinite Chaos [which is dynamic]. But in the midst of these principles, [the tradition] says [in different terms] Chronos begot an egg (2), and this egg (2) is also the offspring of Chronos, being among other gods Chronos generated, because the third intelligible triad also proceeds from them. What is this third intelligible triad? It is the egg (3), a dyad consists of the two natures in the egg (3), male and female, and in the middle of the egg (3) is the various seeds as the multiplicity. And third after these is the double bodied god, with golden wings on its shoulders, which has the head of bulls growing on each side, and on the head [there is] a huge dragon likened to all kinds of beasts. This must be taken as the intellect of the [third] triad, the multiplicity among offspring is the middle entity or the dyad [of the third triad] which is also the power [of the third triad], and the egg (3) itself is the paternal origin of the triad. This is the third triad the third god belongs to, I mean the god [this] theology celebrate as Protogonos or who arranges everything and the entire world the theology calls Zeus, and this god thus is also called Pan. All these are accounts about the intelligible principles for this theology.

[24] See Brisson (1995) 171-172.

inferior to three total principles (the single ineffable principle, water and sand), to be the One itself:

On First Principles III.161.14-18
ὑπολαμβάνω τὴν ἐν ταῖς ῥαψῳδίαις θεολογίαν ἀφεῖσαν τὰς δύο πρώτας ἀρχὰς μετὰ τῆς μιᾶς πρὸ τῶν δυεῖν...ὡς [Χρόνος ἐστιν] πρώτης ῥητόν τι ἐχούσης καὶ σύμμετρον πρός ἀνθρώπων ἀκοάς.[25]

Moreover, III.161.14-18 shows that the two theogonies should not be separated. In Damascius' perspective, the two theogonies are unified: the Hieronyman theogony complements the Rhapsodies by supplying principles that precede Chronos, the first principle that can be expressed in language and can be heard by human ears.

Because III.159.17-160.16 is rather all about the Intelligible realm. The description of ἀντὶ μὲν τῆς μιᾶς τῶν ὅλων ἀρχῆς τὸν Χρόνον should indicate Chronos is the unique principle of the whole (intelligible realm), namely, the Unified.[26] This conclusion also corroborates former discussion that Chronos should correspond to the Unified.

For III.161.23 (Τὴν δευτέραν ταύτην τριάδα ἀνάλογον τῇ πρώτῃ παραδίδωσι, δυναμικὴν οὖσαν, ὡς ἐκείνην πατρικήν) Brisson reads the second triad (Τὴν δευτέραν τριάδα) as the triad of Aether Chaos and Erebus in last sentence (ὁ Χρόνος οὗτος δράκων γεννᾶται τριπλῆν γονήν, Αἰθέρα φησὶ νοτερὸν καὶ Χάος ἄπειρον, καὶ τρίτον ἐπὶ τούτοις Ἔρεβος (1) ὀμιχλῶδες) while he takes the "first (triad) which is paternal" (τῇ πρώτῃ... ὡς ἐκείνην πατρικήν) in III.161.24 as Water, Sand and Chronos[27]. But Damas-

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[25] From my perspective, the theology of Rhapsodies has left out the two first principles and the single principle before the two...but states from Chronos, the third principle after the two, since it is the first principle that can be expressed in language and can be heard by human ears.

[26] Similarly, in III.159.21 the description of "the absolute being" (τοῦ ὄντος ἁπλῶς) for the egg should signify the absolute being of intelligible realm, not of all. The first absolute being or the absolute being of all is the Unified itself.

[27] L. Brisson (1995) 201. D. Meinster (2018) 129-130, E. Afonasin (2024) note 8 and S. Rappe (2014) note 91 in page 499 follow Brisson's reading, taking first paternal triad in III.161.24 as that ends with Chronos, but Rappe's translation in page 416 (And the second triad is analogous to the first, although it is dynamic, as the first was paternal. And so the third member of it is ALSO misty Erebos) seems to take the first triad here as Paternal Aether, Chaos and Erebus especially by adding the "also" when translates διὸ καὶ τὸ τρίτον αὐτῆς (the second triad) Ἔρεβός ἐστιν ὀμιχλῶδες. That implies there have been an Erebus in "first triad" at III.161.24.

cius calls the third triad after the first triad and second triad as "the third **Intelligible** triad" in III.162.4 (ὅτι καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων ἡ τρίτη πρόεισι νοητὴ τριάς), thus "the first (triad)" in III.161.24 and "the second triad" in III.161.23 must be the omission of "first (Intelligible triad)" and "second (Intelligible) triad". Since the water and the sand rather entirely transcend the intelligible realm and Chronos is the unique origin of whole intelligible realm, there is no possibility for water, sand, Chronos to be "first (intelligible triad)" of III.161.24. Therefore, the first intelligible triad must refer to the triad of Aether, Chaos, Erebus in III.161.20-23.

"The second (Intelligible) triad is analogous to the first (intelligible triad), although the second is dynamic, as the first is paternal" thus indicates the existence of a dynamic Aether, Chaos, and Erebus, which together form the second dynamic Intelligible triad. "The paternal element of this second Intelligible triad or an extreme is Aether, not unqualified, but moist" (τὸ πατρικόν τε καὶ ἄκρον Αἰθήρ, οὐχ ἁπλῶς, ἀλλά νοτερός) implies there is an unqualified Aether before the moist Aether. The earlier Aether can only be the Aether in III.161.20-22. This supports the notion that the paternal first triad, to which the second triad is analogous, should be the triad which starts with unqualified Aether, described in III.161.20-23, rather than the triad of Water, Sand, and Chronos.

In conclusion, III.161.23-III.162.1 is more reasonable to read as: And the second (Intelligible) triad is analogous to the first (intelligible triad), although the second is dynamic, as the first is paternal. And so, the third member of the second intelligible triad is also misty Erebos (but dynamic), and the paternal element (of the second intelligible triad) and the one extreme (of the second intelligible triad) is Aether, not unqualified, but moist, and the middle term (of the second intelligible triad) is indefinite Chaos (which is dynamic).

When we consider the two theogonies in Chapter 123 as a unified system, Damascius' repeated mention of eggs becomes clear. In these theogonies, both the Egg and Erebus symbolize the third moment of the triad. The Rhapsodies refer to this third element as the egg, while Hieronymus and Hellanicus use Erebus. Acknowledging this correlation reveals three distinct eggs. The first is the paternal egg/Erebus, representing the third member of the first Intelligible triad (the egg mentioned in III.159.21-22 and the Erebus in III.161.23), denoted as egg (1)/Erebus (1). The second egg/Erebus from which the trimorphic god emerges, symbolizing the third member of the second intelligible triad, is mentioned in III.160.1-4 and III.161.25, marked as egg (2)/Erebus (2). Finally, the third intellectual egg, symbolizing the actualization of the polymorphic god (found in III.162.1-17), corresponds to the third Intelligible triad, and is denoted as egg (3).

Damascius expressed the third intelligible triad more clearly. Rhapsodies calls the third triad as Phanes-Erikepaios-Metis. And Hieronymus or Hellanicus' expression of the triad is 1. male and female, 2. the multiplicity [corresponds to] the various seeds in the middle of the egg, and 3. a god with two bodies and various names. Betegh attributes the last triad of three-fold god the Intelligible-Intellective realm[28], while Damascius is still discussing the Intelligible realm because he says in the last of chapter 123: "Τοσαῦτα καὶ αὕτη περὶ τῶν νοητῶν ἀρχῶν ἡ γενεαλογία παρίστησιν."[29](All these are accounts about the intelligible principles for this theology.) The triad of trimorph God is in fact the third and last intelligible triad.

Conclusively, we can clarify by schematizing Damascius' interpretation of the Orphic first principles as follows:

Damascian Neoplatonic Principles	Orphic Theology
The Ineffable	–
The One	The single ineffable principle in III.161.1
The One-All=Limit	Water
The All-One=The Unlimited	Sand
The Unified=Mixture	Chronos
The first element of first Intelligible triad	Paternal Aether
The second element of first Intelligible triad	Paternal Chaos
The third element of first intelligible triad	Paternal Erebus/the paternal egg
The first element of second intelligible triad	Potential Aether/Phanes in egg
The second element of second Intelligible triad	Potential Chaos/Erikepaios in egg

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[28] See G. Betegh (2005) 342-342. A. Mihai (2014) also follows this approach.

[29] Damascius, *On First Principles* III.162.16-17.

The third element of second intelligible triad	Potential Erebus/the potential egg Protogonos in egg/gleaming robe/cloud
The first element of third intelligible triad	Male and female/Phanes
The second element of third intelligible triad	Multiplicity corresponds to the seeds in the egg/Erikepaios
The third element of third intelligible triad	Protogonos/Metis

	Orphic Rhapsodies		
	Syrianus and Proclus	Damascius (III.161.16ff.)	Hieronymus or Hellanicus
The Ineffable			
The One	Chronos		
The One-All=Limit	Aether		Water
The All-One=The Un-limited	Chaos		Sand
The Unified=Mixture	Egg	Chronos	Chronos
Intelligible being		Aether	Aether
Intelligible life	?	Chaos	Chaos
Intelligible intellect	Egg/White Tunic/Cloud	(Eros)	Erebus
Intelligible-Intellective	Phanes		Egg
	Erikepaios		Male-female
	Metis		Protogonos

Intellective	Night 1		
	Night 2		
	Night 3		

Appendix: Betegh's diagram, which reasonably distinguishes between the system of Syrianus and Proclus and Damascius' system

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