

“Le Rôle du néoplatonisme dans les tentatives postmodernes françaises d’échapper à l’onto-théologie,” pour les sections sur “Hénologie et ontologie” et “Néoplatonisme et pensée de l’Un” of the XXVII^e Congrès de l’ Association des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française. Université Laval, Québec, 18 août - 22 août, 1998 published in *Actes du XXVII^e Congrès de l’Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française. La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, édité par Luc Langlois et Jean-Marc Narbonne, (Paris/Québec: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin/Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2000), 36–43.

Pierre Hadot refers to “l’importance du rôle qu’a joué Plotin dans la formation de la philosophie de Bergson” when considering “l’importance que le mouvement néoplatonicien revêt dans la formation de la pensée moderne.” And in looking at the retrieval of neoplatonism in French philosophy and theology in this century we may rightly begin with him.¹ Bergson was particularly and almost uniquely attached to Plotinus among previous philosophers, even if, by opposition both to the Plotinian turning of the soul toward the universal and to the conclusion of his mystical quest in contemplative rest, he turns Plotinus upside down, placing him on his feet!² The neoplatonism of Bergson we can place within the French attenuated following of Schelling mediated to him via Cousin and especially via Ravaisson whom he admired so much.³

But Bergson was not the last to turn to Plotinus from within the remains of “le mouvement romantique allemand s’accompagnera d’une renaissance parallèle du néoplatonisme.”⁴ Émile Bréhier was among the few who attended Bergson’s *conférences* on Plotinus at the Collège de France, which began with Bergson’s very first *cour* there.⁵ Bréhier recalled those commentaries on the *Enneads* “avec gratitude et admiration” and doubtless they partly inspired his own very important work on Plotinus.⁶

With Bréhier, the Idealist, indeed specifically the Hegelian, context and interpretation are clear even if he refuses to consider “la pensée plotinienne comme une réalité en soi” and judges that “l’histoire de la philosophie ne nous fait pas connaître d’idées existant en elles-mêmes, mais seulement des hommes qui pensent; sa méthode ... historique, est nominaliste; les idées, pour elle, n’existent pas à proprement

¹ Pierre Hadot, “Introduction,” *Le Néoplatonisme (Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969)*, Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche scientifique, Sciences humaines (Paris: CNRS, 1971), 2.

² Rose-Marie Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 1-2; Henri Bergson, *Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, (Genève: Albert Skira, 1945), 210-11; Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson, Past Masters* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), 82.

³ Henri Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, (Genève: Albert Skira, 1946), 242 & 245-46; Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, 3; and Dominique Janicaud, “Victor Cousin et Ravaisson, Lecteurs de Hegel et Schelling,” *Les Études philosophiques*, n° 4/1984, 451-66. And see Jean Trouillard, “Les notes de Ravaisson sur Proclus,” *Revue philosophique*, janv.mars 1962.

⁴ Hadot, “Introduction,” *Le Néoplatonisme*, 2.

⁵ Émile Bréhier, “Images plotiniennes, images bergsoniennes,” *Études de philosophie antique*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 292; Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, 2.

⁶ Most notably, Plotin, *Ennéades*, texte établi et traduit par Émile Bréhier 7 vols., (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1924-38) and Émile Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin*, Bibliothèque de la Revue des Cours et Conférences (Paris: Boivin, 1928).

parler.”⁷ For him “collective philological work pursued without intermission” must now correct the systematic visions which make modern history of philosophy possible, but, nonetheless, it is Hegel and Comte who are being corrected.⁸

On the crucial question of the relation of *Nous* and the One, Bréhier follows Hegel, who is praised as “un des hommes qui était le mieux préparé, par sa nature d’esprit, à comprendre Plotin.”⁹ When by *Nous* is considered “état de recueillement parfait où l’objet est pleinement absorbé dans le sujet, il n’y a plus alors aucune distinction précise entre l’Intelligence et l’Un.” In mystical elevation there is not in fact a passage beyond thought:

l’Un n’est pas ... la région où la pensée philosophique cesse pour transformer dans le bégayement inarticulé du mystique. ... C’est pourquoi Hegel a eu raison de dire que “l’idée de la philosophie plotinienne est un intellectualisme ou un idéalisme élevé.”¹⁰

So far as there is a mysticism in Plotinus seeking union beyond thinking this is credited to “L’Orientalisme de Plotin.”

The mixture of Hegelian and positivist shaping of the history of philosophy comes out strongly in Bréhier’s treatment of *La Philosophie du Moyen Âge*.¹¹ Henri Berr, the editor of the series in which Bréhier’s volume appeared, *Bibliothèque de synthèse historique, L’évolution de l’humanité*, sums up the author’s argument in terms of a recovery of the authentic Occidental heritage of the Greeks, by the elimination of this oriental element.¹² For Bréhier this will involve getting beyond “l’enseignement philosophique donné par le clergé” in order to arrive at “une speculation autonome, d’une recherche de la vérité pour elle-même.”¹³

It is significant, then, that after Bréhier, the future of Neoplatonism in France is primarily not with laïc but with Catholic scholars, theologians and philosophers most of whom were priests, (or at least started their scholarly careers as priests). Not surprisingly, one of the main accomplishments of these clerical scholars so far as Neoplatonic studies are concerned has been to show the intimate connection in

⁷ Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin*, 171.

⁸ See Émile Bréhier, “The Formation of our History of Philosophy, *Philosophy and History, essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, edited Raymond Klibansky and H.L. Paton, 1st edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936) reprint Harper Torch Books (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 159-172 at 171.

⁹ Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin*, 180.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 180-81.

¹¹ Émile Bréhier, *La Philosophie du Moyen Âge*, Bibliothèque de synthèse historique, L’évolution de l’humanité (Paris: Albin Michel, 1937).

¹² *Ibid.*, ii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 433 & 145. For similar views see George Davy, Préface to Émile Bréhier, *Études de philosophie antique*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), xiv-xv.

the schools of late antiquity between philosophy and religious life. Indeed, we may say that Pierre Hadot with whom I began has spent the greatest part of his scholarly career teaching, one might almost say preaching that philosophy is a way of life, *une spiritualité*. So we cannot leave the first part of our century without noting the sole Catholic Modernist in the circle of Bergson whose work escaped ecclesiastical condemnation.¹⁴

With Maurice Blondel, studied at length by Père Henry Duméry, Joseph Combès of the Oratoire de France tells us that we find fundamentals of the thought of the Sulpician priest Jean Trouillard.¹⁵ These three Stanislas Breton, the Passionist, described as “la triade néo-platonicienne de France” developing *un* “radicalisme néoplatonicien.”¹⁶ Both Duméry and Trouillard, saw in Blondel’s thought something of Neoplatonism.¹⁷ With Trouillard we arrive at Neoplatonism developed within an anti-metaphysical and essentially postmodern position. Trouillard’s *Proclina hénologie* stands sharply against Idealist interpretations of Neoplatonic texts and is developed as an alternative to what he regards as the Hegelian conclusion of the Augustinian following of Plotinus. It is equally an alternative to Thomism and is clearly shaped by Martin Heidegger’s critique of *onto-théologie*. Significantly, it is also in Blondel that Jean-Luc Marion, who in his questioning of metaphysics is explicitly postmodern,¹⁸ finds “la conversion de la volonté,” or *charité*, by which he would turn to God without returning to *onto-théologie*. This theology without ontology Marion first discovered in a retrieval of the Christian and Procline neoplatonism of the Pseudo-Denys.¹⁹ But between Bergson, Bréhier and Blondel, on the one hand, and

¹⁴ See R.C. Groggin, *The Bergsonian Controversy in France 1900-1914*, (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1988), 152-54; Émile Poulat, “Maurice Blondel et la crise moderniste,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, Janvier-Mars, 1987, 47-54.

¹⁵ See Joseph Combès, “Néoplatonisme aujourd’hui: La vie et le pensée de Jean Trouillard (1907-1984),” *Études néoplatoniciennes*, 2nd. éd., Collection Krisis (Grenoble: Million, 1996), 353-65, originally published in *Gonimos*, Mélanges offerts à L.G. Westerink, (Buffalo: Arethusa, 1988), 85-102, at 354-55.

¹⁶ Stanislas Breton, *De Rome à Paris. Itinéraire philosophique*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1992), 31 & 152-3; there is a summary of this *itinerarium* in idem, “Sur la difficulté d’être thomiste aujourd’hui,” *Le Statut Contemporain de la Philosophie première*, Philosophie 17 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), 333-46.

¹⁷ See Henry Duméry, *La Philosophie de l’action*, Préface de Maurice Blondel, (Paris: Montaigne, 1948), 113-14 quoted by Illtyd Trethowan, in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, (London: Harvil, 1964), 113; Jean Trouillard, “Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel,” *Archives de philosophie*, janv.-mars 1961, 21-28. At 24 one finds two sentences which express the problematic governing the turn by French Neoplatonic theology both from Augustine and from Idealism: “Une des faiblesses de la tradition augustinienne est d’être demeurée en deçà de l’exégèse plotinienne du Parménide et de n’avoir pas compris qu’en celle-ci les exigences de la critique et celles de la vie religieuse convergent pour libérer la Transcendance de tout ce qui revient à la intelligible. Hors de là où risquera perpétuellement le quiproquo, comme il arrive à la dialectique hégélienne dont nul peut dire si elle est celle de Dieu où celle de l’homme et qui joue de cette ambiguïté.” At 27 Trouillard’s own *hénologie* comes into view “Le point commun entre Blondel et la tradition platonicienne, c’est cette infinité d’absence qu’implique toute présence. Plus exactement, c’est la positivité et l’efficacité de cette absence.” This is explicit at 28: “La normative est une hyperontologie. ... Elle est être dans la mesure où elle réalise ses dérivés, mais elle leur impose aussi ‘la distance’. Elle est unité au sens où elle règle le divers, mais elle est également source de la multiplicité et de la bigarrure des êtres.” Here Trouillard quotes Proclus.

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *God without being: Hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), xx-xxi; see Graham Ward, “Between Postmodernism and Postmodernity: The Theology of Jean-Luc Marion,” *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion*, edited Keiran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp, (London: MacMillan, 1996), 192-93.

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, “La conversion de la volonté selon ‘L’Action’,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, Janvier-Mars, 1987, 33-46. and idem, *L’idole et la distance, Cinq études*, (Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1977).

Trouillard, Combès, Duméry, Breton and Marion, on the other, there is a considerable history and to some of that we must now attend.

This intervening history is primarily a history of scholarship, it involves a shift from a concentration on Plotinus to his successors, a connection with English scholarship and a move from laïcs to clergy. The Neoplatonic aspect of French postmodernity stands on the shoulders of the clergy. This is because a crucial determining factor in the revival of Neoplatonism is its connection with Thomism.

The development of French Neoplatonic scholarship occurs first within and then in reaction against the Neothomism of the Leonine revival. This Neothomism is a species of anti-modern thought which by a dialectical twist leads to a postmodern retrieval of Neoplatonism. From the perspective of the Neothomists, Neoplatonism appeared as an ally of modernity, the predecessor and support of its idealisms -- a judgement which the work of Bréhier and Bergson seemed to support. On the contrary, the positive present interest in Neoplatonism depends on a reversal of this judgment. In the last third of twentieth century, the dead Neothomism and Neoscholasticism of the nineteenth century revival, appears, instead of Neoplatonism, as having been thoroughly infected with modern objectifying rationalism. At its heart is discerned the onto-theologism criticized by Martin Heidegger. Thomas' identification of God with *ipsum esse subsistens* came to be regarded as profoundly problematic. For, about 1960, the French discovered, against the judgment of Étienne Gilson, that Heidegger had not made, and indeed, would not and could not make, an exception for Thomas in his history of onto-theology.²⁰ Neoplatonism, in contrast, especially the Procline and Dionysian variety, and medieval thought so far as it is thus Neoplatonic, is conceived as better means of responding to the questions to which modernity has come.

On the way into these reversals the work of A. M. J. Festugière (1898-1982) is indicative and essential.²¹ A Dominican, Père Festugière was originally moved by the hope of finding in Neoplatonism the medium by which Aristotle could be adapted to Christian purposes. The intended result was to have

²⁰ There is a short history of how Heidegger's thought came to be known and a beginning of a recognition of the problems it might cause in the introduction to Martin Heidegger, "Le Retour au fondement de la métaphysique," *Rev. sc. phil. theo.*, 43 (1959), 401-5. See Dominique Bourg, "Épilogue. La critique de la 'Métaphysique de l'Exode' par Heidegger et l'exégèse Moderne," *L'être et dieu*, Publication du Centre d'études et de recherches interdisciplinaires en théologie 13 (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 215-244; the essays by Vignaux, de Libera, Courtine, and É.-H. Weber in "Celui qui est." *Interprétations juives et chrétiennes d'Exode 3.14*, éd. A. de Libera et É. Zum Brunn, Centre d'études des religions du livre, CNRS. (Paris: Cerf, 1986); J. Beaufret, "ENERGEIA et actus," *Dialogue avec Heidegger, 1. Philosophie grecque*, "Arguments" 56 (Paris: Minuit, 1974), especially, 109-112, 130, 141-144; idem, "La philosophie chrétienne," *Dialogue avec Heidegger, 2. Philosophie Moderne*, "Arguments" 58 (Paris: Minuit, 1973), 9-27, 123; Géry Prouvost, "Postface," Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, *Deux approches de l'être. Correspondance, 1923-1971*, éd. G. Prouvost, (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 292-295; idem, *Thomas d'Aquin et les thomismes. Essai sur l'histoire des thomismes*, (Paris: Cerf, 1996); idem, "La question des noms divins: entre apophatisme et ontothéologie," *Revue thomiste*, XCVIII N° 3 (1997), 485-511.

²¹ See *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière: antiquité païenne et chrétienne*, éd. E. Lucchesi et H.-D. Saffrey, Cahiers d'Orientalisme 10 (Geneva: P. Cramer, 1984) which contains a bibliography. His "Portrait" in this volume is by H.-D. Saffrey is reprinted in H.-D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique 14 (Paris: Vrin, 1990), 297-305.

been that the Philosopher, identified by the Fathers as a veritable font of heresy, could become instead one foundation of Aquinas' thought.²² But, after a Thomistic beginning, Festugière ended up teaching and publishing primarily about Plato and pagan Neoplatonism. In 1944, he started publishing an edition of *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*²³ -- which came out in the series *Études bibliques* after having been rejected by *la collection Guillaume Budé*²⁴ -- and which is essential to the Iamblichan - Procline tradition in Neoplatonism.

There was nothing here of Bréhier's positivistic detachment, Père Festugière was all his life engaged in a deeply troubled religious quest. He studied the forms of the Hellenistic search for personal salvation and sought there answers to his own questions.²⁵ That Festugière's treatment of Platonism marked a transition was evident to Bréhier himself. After presiding over the soutenance of Festugière's doctorate, Bréhier published a criticism of his interpretation of Plato "en faisant voir chez Platon un mystique" and for treating Plotinus' interpretation of Plato as correct both in method and content. The criticism had little effect. In his teaching at the École pratique des hautes études, where from 1943 to 1968 Festugière was directeur d'études in a chair called alternatively "Religions hellénistiques et fin du paganisme" and "Religions de la Grèce ancienne," he moved freely back and forth between Plato and late Hellenistic philosophy, theology and religious life.²⁶

Especially problematic for Bréhier is, significantly, Festugière's sympathy for the Plotinian interpretation of the *Parmenides* and "la distinction radicale qu'il met entre l'Un de la première hypothèse ... et l'Un de la seconde hypothèse" in the interest of "la mystique platonicienne."²⁷ Trouillard and those who will be occupied with the problems posed by Heidegger's criticism of onto-théologie will affirm and develop this radical distinction so that being is not first. It is significant, however, that the interpretation merges first in a renewed religious interest in the Platonic tradition. This return to the religious side of

²² David T. Runia, "Festugière Revisited: Aristotle in the Greek Patres," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 43 (1989), 1-2 and 26.

²³ 4 vols., Paris, Lecoq, 1944-54.

²⁴ See H.-D. Saffrey, "Portrait," x.

²⁵ See H.-D. Saffrey, "Portrait," vii: "toute sa vie le Père Festugière a été habité par le problème du mal. Non pas qu'il mît en doute l'existence de Dieu, mais sa question était: "Dieu aime-t-il les hommes?"; xii: "Personal Religion Among the Greeks, était celui lui tenait le plus à coeur;" and Festugière, *Du Christianisme*, 275-281, both in *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière*; and Pierre Hadot's memorial for Festugière in the *Annuaire of the EPHE* V^e t. XCII, (1983-84), 31-35. This not to say that Festugière was attracted by all the religious phenomena of late Antiquity. Hadot criticizes him (34): "(comme d'ailleurs celle de son ami, le grand E.R. Dodds) a été beaucoup trop dominée par des chichés ... sur la décadence sociale et politique de la vie politique du monde antique, sur le trouble ... de la conscience collective antique." It was only through reading Trouillard that A.H. Armstrong got beyond such prejudices in respect to Later Neoplatonism. Another criticism of Festugière's approach to late antique religion comes from Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Les Sciences religieuses entre la sociologie, le comparatisme et l'anthropologie," in Jean Baubérot, Jacques Béguin, François Laplanche, Émile Poulat, Claude Tradits, Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cent ans de sciences religieuses en France à l'École pratique des hautes études, Sciences humaines et religions* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 85-6.

²⁶ Émile Bréhier, "Platonisme et néoplatonisme: A propos d'un livre du P. Festugière," *Revue des Études grecques*, LI, octobre, 1938, 489-98, republished in Bréhier, *Études de philosophie antique*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 56-64 Festugière's *thèse de doctorat ès lettres*, was published as *Contemplation et vie contemplative chez Platon*, Collection Le Saulchoir, Bibliothèque de philosophie, 2, Paris: Vrin, 1936. See Hadot's memorial, 32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-2. For Bréhier the great error of Festugière is separating the contemplative and the scientific in Plato.

Neoplatonism remains. Postmodern Neoplatonism will magnify the “dualité du Platon mystique et du Platon savant”²⁸ because it involves the possibility of separating theology and ontology as Heidegger demands.²⁹

Festugière’s movement from Thomas Aquinas to Neoplatonic scholarship was repeated with his student and biographer, Henri-Dominic Saffrey. Also a Dominican, in 1954, Saffrey edited the *Commentary on the Liber de causis*.³⁰ His edition was to have been a beginning of a map of the extent of the Procline influence in Western theology and an indication of the consequences for theology of that discovery, but, mostly, Saffrey stayed with Later Greek Neoplatonism.³¹ When his work on the *Commentary* was complete, he went to Oxford where he began his edition, translation and commentary on the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus as a D.Phil. thesis for E.R. Dodds. The last of the six volumes appeared in 1997. By studies of the objective connections between Proclus and the Pseudo-Denys, the last of which is *sous presse*, he assisted those who undertook to carry forward his initial project.³² The result of this and other scholarship is not only that Neoplatonism was developed as an alternative to Thomism but that a Neoplatonic Thomas also emerges. This will prove important in the response to Heidegger.

In 1966, the Jesuit Édouard des Places published an edition and translation of Iamblichus, *Les mystères d’Égypte*.³³ In 1971 and 1989, the same Société d’édition brought out his Greek text and French translation of the *Oracles Chaldaïques*³⁴ and of the *Protrepticus* of Iamblichus. So, between the Jesuit and the Dominicans, the picture of the oracular and theurgic aspects of Neoplatonic spirituality in Late Antiquity was filled out.

There is, of course, an English Neoplatonic scholarship, which was important for the French developments, as the mention of E.R. Dodds, makes evident.³⁵ Besides being, as Henri-Dominic Saffrey called him: “le pionnier des études procliennes en ce XX^e siècle,”³⁶ he was the encouraging friend of

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ See Jacques Derrida, “Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations,” in *Psyché: Invention de l’autre*, (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987), 584-595; Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l’être*, [1st ed. 1982 Librairie Arthème Fayard], (Paris: Quadrige & PUF, 1991), 81-154; idem, *L’idole et la distance*, 177-243; Louis Bouyer, *Mysterion, Du mystère à la mystique*, (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1986), 230 ff.

³⁰ *Super Librum de Causis Expositio*, éd. H.-D. Saffrey, o.p., Textus Philosophici Friburgenses 4/5 (Fribourg: Société Philosophique, Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts, 1954).

³¹ Three articles showing his initial interest in the sources of Thomas are gathered at the beginning of the first of two collections of his articles: Henri D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur la tradition platonicienne au Moyen Âge et à la renaissance*, (Paris: Vrin-reprise, 1987), the last of them was originally published in 1975.

³² The last of a series of articles is “Le lien le plus objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus,” *Roma, magistra mundi. Itineraria culturae mediaevalis, Mélanges offerts au Père L.E. Boyle à l’occasion de son 75e anniversaire*, (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d’Études Médiévales: Textes et Études du Moyen Âge, 1998), his conclusions about Denys are summarized in Saffrey, “Les débuts,” 201-220.

³³ Paris, *Les Belles Lettres*, for an incomplete bibliography of des Places, see his festschrift *Études platoniciennes, 1929-1979*, (Leiden: Brill, 1981); for additional bibliography, see *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, edited Stephen Gersh and Charles Kannengiesser, *Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 8* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame U.P., 1992), ix-xii.

³⁴ Jean Trouillard revised and corrected des Places’ edition of the *Oracles*.

³⁵ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. E.R. Dodds, 1st. edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

³⁶ H.-D. Saffrey, in H.-D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink, *Théologie platonicienne*, 6 vols., vi (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997), viii.

Festugière, and, along with Festugière, the teacher of Saffrey. This English Neoplatonic scholarship can involve philosophical judgments moving in the same direction as French developments, as A.H. Armstrong's insistence on negative theology and his enthusiasm for the thought of Jean Trouillard show.³⁷ But Armstrong had no interest in or patience for Heidegger and it is not until very recently under the influence of French philosophers and theologians, that English have combined Neoplatonism and postmodern thought, as the work of John Milbank indicates.³⁸ He and other members of a Cambridge school of postmodern theologians, including Graham Ward and Rowan Williams, "intègre des thèmes empruntés aux nihilistes français," e.g. Jacques Derrida, with the work of the "phénoménologues français," e.g. Jean-Luc Marion, Paul Ricour -- to use the description of Milbank himself. But since Dean Inge (a contemporary of Bergson), English Neoplatonism has not been clerical -- indeed Armstrong was strongly anti-clerical³⁹ -- and the English have until very recently, preferred Plotinus to his successors.⁴⁰

The opposite is true of the French and this coheres with clerical character of the revival of Neoplatonism in France.⁴¹ It is precisely the irrationality, (as Dodds' saw it, to Trouillard and Hadot⁴² we

³⁷ Armstrong's position differed from that of Dodds', though they were originally closer than they came to be. Dodds valued what remained of Greek philosophical reason in Plotinus before the decline to anxiety and irrationality which seemed to him to characterise the later Neoplatonists. He opposed explaining the Plotinian development of Platonism by means of an Oriental influence; see E.R. Dodds, "The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One," *Classical Quarterly*, 22 (1928), 129-142 and, in the same line, the earliest of Armstrong's articles "Plotinus and India," (1936) reprinted in *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, I (London: Variorum, 1979). For Dodds the anxiety and irrationality manifested themselves in an endless quests mediation by means of a ceaseless multiplication of conceptual entities and religious rites: see his *The Greeks and the Irrational*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959) and *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1965). For Armstrong, as with Trouillard, Plotinus was above all a mystic. Armstrong loved the apophatic mysticism of Plotinus which he contrasted with the systems of the successors which seemed to Armstrong to be abstract conceptual reflections dependent on what Plotinus knew. His first strong presentation of the apophatic Plotinus is found in A.H. Armstrong, "The Escape of the One," *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, XXIII, (London: Variorum, 1979). The article, delivered in 1971, is set under a quotation of Jean Trouillard and quotes him at length (83-4). He records his debt to Trouillard again in "Iamblichus and Egypt," [1987] in A.H. Armstrong, *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, I, (London: Variorum, 1990), 180-81, where he is a leader in the reevaluation of theurgy and, most extensively, in "The Hidden and Open in Hellenic Thought," [1987] in A.H. Armstrong, *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, I, (London: Variorum, 1990), 101-6.

³⁸ On this relation to French thought see John Milbank, "Postmodernité," in *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, dirigé par Jean-Yves Lacoste, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 916-17. On his mixing of Neoplatonism and postmodernity, see W.J. Hankey, "ReChristianizing Augustine Postmodern Style: Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayes and John Milbank," *Animus*, 2 (1997) an electronic journal at <http://www.mun.ca/animus>; idem, "Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, edited by Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, Studies in Christian Origins (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 139-184; idem, "Theoria versus Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas," *Modern Theology*, 15 (1999), in press; idem, "The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism in Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank and the Origins of Western Subjectivity in Augustine and Eriugena," *Hermathena*, 165 (Winter, 1998), "Platonism: Greek and Christian," in press.

³⁹ See Armstrong, "Iamblichus and Egypt," 186-87.

⁴⁰ For the shift see H.J. Blumental & E.G. Clark, "Introduction: Iamblichus in 1990," *The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. H.J. Blumental & E.G. Clark, (London: Duckworth, 1993), 1-4. The older view is represented by Dodds, *Elements*, xx or by the early writings of A.H. Armstrong. See Hadot's memorial for Festugière, 34 and for an appreciation of what was positive in Late Antique religion, his "La fin du paganisme," [1972] in Pierre Hadot, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, L'ane d'or (Paris: Les Belles Lettres: 1998), 339-74 at 346ff. In "Iamblichus and Egypt," 180, A.H. Armstrong, records that Dodds "disliked" Proclus and assisted in the general condemnation of theurgy from which Armstrong and other moved from about 1970 under the leadership of Jean Trouillard. I differ from Armstrong in seeing something more in Trouillard's role and that of Festugière and Saffrey than "a detached scholarly interest inspired by the fascinating philosophical oddity of the doctrines being studied." (*ibid.*, 184).

⁴¹ See Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 31, 152-54, 164. There is, of course, the work of Émile Bréhier, which makes my point. But one must not forget the work Paul Henry, s.j. on the text of Plotinus. For Henry's work and bibliography see *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 30 (1984), 205-9. Or, besides the work of Pierre Hadot on Porphyry and Victorinus which stems from his close relation with Henry,

owe a more positive description), in Iamblichus and his followers, which attracted the French Catholics. After Porphyry the Neoplatonists not only drew philosophy within theology, but they also drew theology within a spiritual life dependent upon theurgy for union with the principle of thought which was itself above intellectual comprehension.⁴³ Of course, the One of Plotinus is above *Nous*, and is the goal of a mystical *henosis*, but owing to his peculiar psychological teachings, the role of religious practice is not so prominent nor so clearly essential and there is an aspect of his teaching, an aspect exploited by Porphyry and transmitted to the West through Marius Victorinus and Augustine, which can lead to understanding the First in terms of being so that ontology will be absolute.

A philosophy in which reason is dependent upon theology, and theology is grounded in *spiritualité* dependent upon the elevation of the theurgist, has an obvious appeal to the clergy. But, in the intellectual circumstances of the French Church in the second half of the 20th century the appeal was connected with a necessity. By 1960, theologians were writing of *La Crise de la raison dans la pensée contemporaine*.⁴⁴ Whether or not that crisis existed outside philosophical and theological circles, it certainly was actual within them. Among philosophical theologians there was a reaction against a “philosophie aristotélico-thomiste.” Ultimately, this reaction can be summed up in their adoption of the Heideggerian critique of onto-théologie and the consequent demand either for an Neoplatonic alternative to Thomism or a recasting of Thomas in Neoplatonic terms.⁴⁵

Jean Trouillard had significantly developed Plotinian studies with his *La procession plotinienne*, published in Paris in 1955. For him, as for Festugière and Hadot, “Plotin est surtout un *mystique*.”⁴⁶ While this mysticism belonged to the critical self-negation of reason which the contemporary crisis required it was not until he moved on to Proclus from 1956, (e.g. *L’Un et l’Âme selon Proclus* in 1972 and *La mystagogie de Proclus* in 1982), that a new theological structure really emerged.⁴⁷ Trouillard was the first to

his new series begun in 1988: *Les Écrits de Plotin publiés dans l’ordre chronologique* (Cerf). Jean Trouillard began with work on the thought of Plotinus but moved on in 1956, see Combès, “Néoplatonisme aujourd’hui,” 359.

⁴² Hadot, “La fin du paganisme,” 346-47: “Il n’est peut-être pas exact de considérer cette vaste transformation comme un phénomène morbide. Il est vrai qu’il y a une crise psychologique, mais elle est provoquée par un phénomène éminemment positif: la prise de conscience du ‘moi’, la découverte de la valeur de la destinée individuelle. Les écoles philosophiques, d’abord épiciuriennes et stoïciennes, puis néo-platoniciennes, donnent une importance croissante à la responsabilité de la conscience morale et à l’effort de perfection spirituelle. Tous les grands problèmes métaphysiques : l’énigme du monde, l’origine et le fin de l’homme, l’existence du mal et le fait de la liberté, sont posés en fonction du destin de l’individu.”

⁴³ See Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996); for a brief outline of the developments and divergences in Neoplatonism, see H.-D. Saffrey, “Les débuts de la théologie comme science (IIIe-VIe),” *Rev. sc. phil. theo.*, 80:2 (Avril, 1996), 213ff.

⁴⁴ *La Crise de la raison dans la pensée contemporaine*, Recherches de philosophie v (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960); Trouillard contributed to this collection (see below).

⁴⁵ For the latter see Ghislain Lafont, “Écouter Heidegger en théologien,” *Rev. Sc. ph. th.*, 67 (1983), 371-98 and ultimately Jean-Luc Marion.

⁴⁶ Jean Trouillard, “Raison et négation,” *La Crise de la raison dans la pensée contemporaine*, 34.

⁴⁷ For an incomplete bibliography, see *Néoplatonisme, mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, Les Cahiers de Fontenay, 19-22 (Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1981), 313-16; Combès, “Néoplatonisme aujourd’hui,” supplies a list of subsequent work.

undertake a philosophical and theological revolution by means of a Proclean *hénologie* as a substitute for Aristotelian and Thomistic ontology. The significance of the “radicalisme néoplatonicien” developed by “la triade néo-platonicienne de France” in the 60’s⁴⁸ is summed up in the words of Stanislas Breton:

*Ce qu’ils ont inauguré, sous les apparences d’un retour au passé, c’est bel et bien une manière neuve de voir le monde et d’y intervenir, de pratiquer la philosophie, de comprendre le fait religieux, en sa forme chrétienne comme en son excès mystique; puis, et j’ai hâte de l’ajouter, de relier le vieil occident à son au-delà extrême-oriental.*⁴⁹

We will note the significant return to Neoplatonism as supplying an access to the Orient. Under the influence of Trouillard, A.H. Armstrong reversed his earlier opposition to seeing this influence in Plotinus. No one was interested in celebrating Occidental rationalism.⁵⁰

But Breton’s move -- and that of French Catholicism -- from Rome to Paris (his informal intellectual and religious autobiography, from which I am quoting, is entitled *De Rome à Paris. Itinéraire philosophique*) was not just a move from a Roman “philosophie aristotélico-thomiste” to a Neoplatonic thinking and spirituality, but it was also a relocation to a Parisian Athens where he could be open to the thought of his lay compatriots. In France, he and Combès continued the scholarly work of Trouillard, (see Breton’s *Philosophie et mathématique chez Proclus*⁵¹ and Combès, *Damascius, Traité des premiers principes*,⁵² *Damascius, Commentaire du Paménide de Platon*,⁵³ and *Études néoplatoniciennes*). Breton and Duméry worked on the philosophical and theological implications of this shift, one bound up with the consequences of the Second Vatican Council.⁵⁴ Inherent in the logic of Breton’s move and one of the consequences of the Council was a shift from the exclusive domination of the clergy in philosophy and theology. As a result the last two figures we shall look at in this history are a lay Protestant philosopher, Pierre Aubenque, and a lay Catholic philosopher and theologian, Jean-Luc Marion.

Pierre Aubenque is the author of a most important article so far as “Le Rôle du néoplatonisme dans le tentatives postmodernes français d’échapper à l’onto-théologie” is concerned. This is his “Plotin

⁴⁸ Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 31 and 152-3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 154, see also, particularly, 164.

⁵⁰ See A.H. Armstrong, “The Divine Enhancement of Earthly Beauties: the Hellenic and Platonic Tradition” [1986] in A.H. Armstrong, *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, IV, (London: Variorum, 1990), 50.

⁵¹ *Bibliothèque des archives de philosophie* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1969).

⁵² trans., intro. et notes, J. Combès, 3 vol., (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986-1991).

⁵³ trans., intro. et notes, J. Combès, 2 vol., (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997).

⁵⁴ For further relevant bibliographical indications to the work of Trouillard, Duméry, Breton and critics like Y. Labbé, see W.J. Hankey, *God In Himself: Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 13-14.

et le dépassement de l'ontologie grecque classique," delivered in 1969 and published in 1972.⁵⁵

Aubenque considers not only how in virtue of the priority of the One, Plotinian thought might escape Heidegger's critique of *onto-théologie*, and how in virtue of the development of the Porphyrian alternative within Neoplatonism it might found an absolute *ontologie*, but he also suggests how Neoplatonism might belong to a Derridean deconstruction of *ontologie*. Evidently some of the questions which occupied Trouillard are now of a strictly philosophical interest.

The context of Marion's postmodern turn to Neoplatonism is defined as much by Levinas⁵⁶ as by Heidegger and his *dépassement de l'ontologie* is not so much by a *hénologie* as by a leap *hors-texte* to the Good or charity. His first efforts "to shoot for God according to his most theological name - charity"⁵⁷ are in his *L'idole et la distance*, where, in the pseudo-Denys, he discovered a genuinely theological relation to the divine names.⁵⁸ While Denys persists as the norm of what Marion seeks in pre-modern theology, he increasingly assimilates others to that norm, recently Aquinas, and to a considerable degree also Augustine.⁵⁹ In *L'idole et la distance* and in *Dieu sans l'être*, Aquinas was placed with the onto-theologians because he made being the first of God's names. But in the "Preface to the English Edition" of *God Without Being*, and in "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie," and later works,⁶⁰ the teaching of Thomas has been Neoplatonised by Marion as a *théo-onto-logie*, for which God is before being which he gives even to himself. Aquinas is shifted toward Denys and Proclus.

Neoplatonism in French philosophy and theology in this century is passed from different kinds of hands, serves varied purposes, and suffers several mutations but it cannot be doubted that it belongs to the actuality of contemporary thought and spiritual life.

Wayne J. Hankey
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⁵⁵ In *Le Néoplatonisme (Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969)*, Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche scientifique, Sciences humaines (Paris: CNRS, 1971), 101-108. For a reflection on this article see Lafont, "Écouter Heidegger," 384, note 35.

⁵⁶ See E. Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, Paris, Vrin, 1982.

⁵⁷ Marion, *God without being*, xxi.

⁵⁸ Revived Dionysius provides an alternative at the origins of modernity, see Jean-Luc Marion, "The Idea of God," *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayres, 2 vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), i, 270-72.

⁵⁹ On Augustine: Jean-Luc Marion, *Questions cartésiennes, II, Sur l'ego et sur Dieu*, Philosophie d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), "Formulations augustinienne et cartésiennes," at 37-43. In general, see W.J. Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation," *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994*, édités Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 414-15; idem, "Denys and Aquinas;" idem, "ReChristianizing Augustine Postmodern Style;" and idem, "Self-knowledge and God as Other in Augustine: Problems for a Postmodern Retrieval," *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter*, in press.

⁶⁰ *Revue Thomiste*, 95:1 (1995), [*Saint Thomas et l'onto-théo-logie*], 31-66, his *retractio* is at 33 and 65; for Marion's shift or "recantation" here, see Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 150-52 and Gery Prouvost, "La tension irrésolue: Les *Questions cartésiennes, II*, de Jean-Luc Marion," *Revue thomiste*, XCVIII. No 1 (1998), 99-101. For later treatments of Aquinas, see Marion, "The Idea of God," 265-67.

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