

# Re-evaluating E. R. Dodds' Platonism<sup>1</sup>

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## I. THE QUESTION AND ANSWER WITHIN WHICH THE EVALUATION OF NEOPLATONISM OCCURS

In the Preface to his *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, Gilbert Murray (1866-1957) relates how the third stage, Hellenistic Religion, received its negative denomination, “The Failure of Nerve”:

The title of the third essay I owe to a conversation with Professor J.B. Bury. We were discussing the change that took place in Greek thought between say, Plato and the Neo-Platonists, or even between Aristotle and Posidonius, and which is seen at its highest power in the Gnostics. I had been calling it a rise of asceticism, or mysticism, or religious passion, or the like, when my friend corrected me. ‘It is not a rise; it is a fall or failure of something, a sort of failure of nerve.’<sup>2</sup>

Gilbert Murray was not only the predecessor of Eric Dodds (1893-1979) as Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, but also his teacher, mentor, and friend, as well as being almost solely responsible for inflicting the Regius Chair on him.<sup>3</sup> They had much in common—Murray, although born in Australia, was from an Irish family, and, as a lifelong atheist or agnostic also studied religion as an outside observer—and shared many interests from the history of Hellenic religion and humanism in Classical scholarship through to “psychical research.”<sup>4</sup> Dodds tells us that “the most exciting intellectual adventure” of his undergraduate years at Oxford was “Gilbert Murray’s course of lectures on the *Bacchae*”—a play Dodds would also edit<sup>5</sup>—and that he became Murray’s pupil when Murray “was at the height of his powers: he had just finished his *Four Stages of Greek Religion* and was about to publish his brilliant little book on Euripides.”<sup>6</sup> Murray acknowledges contributions by Dodds to the second edition of *Four Stages*, when it became *Five Stages of Greek Religion* by the addition of a new chapter, “The Great Schools,” where he locates “the high-water mark of Greek religious thought.” Murray explains the new third stage thus:

The decline—if that is the right word—which is observable in the later ages of antiquity is a decline not from Olympianism but from the great spiritual and intellectual effort of the fourth century B.C., which culminated in the *Metaphysics* and the *De Anima* and the foundation of the Stoa and the Garden.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay originated as a James Loeb Lecture in the Department of the Classics at Harvard delivered on April 14, 2005. I am grateful to Professor Albert Henrichs and the Department for their hospitality and generosity and to Professor Robert Todd of the University of British Columbia for sharing his wide knowledge of the life and work of E.R. Dodds.

<sup>2</sup> Murray 1912:8; the account and the title are repeated in his second edition which has become *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Murray 1935:xiii) where some notes are attributed to Dodds.

<sup>3</sup> For a full account see Todd 2000 and 2005b:142.

<sup>4</sup> See Todd 2000, which locates Murray’s “scholarly and intellectual influence” in such areas of their common interest as “Euripides, Greek Religion, Psychical Research, and Humanism in Classical Scholarship and Education.” On Murray, see Lloyd-Jones 1982:195–214 (Lloyd-Jones calls him “a lifelong atheist” at 195 and a “lifelong agnostic” at 209).

<sup>5</sup> Dodds 1944.

<sup>6</sup> Dodds 1977:28; Lloyd-Jones 1982:202 judges it to be “in many ways his most important book.”

<sup>7</sup> Murray 1935:ix.

I shall not pause to ask what calling a religious development a “failure of nerve” might mean, or from what attitude toward religion it might emerge, nor will I do more than remark that there is a positivism in making philosophical works and schools into a stage of religion. I want to move quickly on to look at the way in which Dodds continues Murray’s evaluation.

His infinitely more substantial reiteration of Murray’s *Stages* takes two books to complete: *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951—the lectures were delivered in 1949) and its continuation, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (which did not appear until 1965—the lectures were delivered in 1963). Although Dodds writes as an historian of religion, his interest is to understand and explain the irrational. In an essay on “Plato and the Irrational” published in 1945, he defines it by means of contemporary experience as he will continue to do throughout his life. By the irrational he means:

that surd element in human experience, both in our experience of ourselves and in our experience of the world about us, which has exercised so powerful—and as some of us think, so perilous—a fascination on the philosophers, artists, and men of letters of our own day.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, soon after he heard Murray’s lectures, Dodds was stunned by the irrational enthusiasm which overran Oxford, carrying the last students of the “Gilded Age” to the battlefields of the First World War.<sup>10</sup> In the essay on Plato, Dodds locates the high water mark of Hellenic culture in the fifth rather than in the fourth century, where Murray had placed it. For him the fourth-century irrationalism which he finds in Plato grew out of the disappointment of expectations which the progress in the previous century had engendered. Socrates and “all the great sophists,”

like the Victorians . . . had a vision of progress—of the perpetual onward march of civilization—and for the same cause: they had themselves in their formative years experienced progress, swift and indisputable, holding, as it seemed, the promise that human life could be lifted by the exercise of reason to always higher levels of material and intellectual achievement.<sup>11</sup>

In 1929, when writing of Euripides as “the chief representative of fifth-century irrationalism,” Dodds names “the disease of which Greek culture eventually died.” He writes that “Professor Murray called it the Failure of Nerve. My own name for it is systematic irrationalism.”

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<sup>8</sup> Dodds 1947:106; Dodds never defines the irrational exactly; something his reviewers pointed out, see especially Grube 1954. Grube noted that Dodds had not clearly enough distinguished “the non-rational—that which, being beyond reason, is the proper field of religion”—and “the irrational which, as superstition, reinvades the areas conquered, one might have hoped once and for all, by reason.”

<sup>9</sup> Dodds 1977 chapter 2 is entitled “The Last of the Gilded Age: Oxford.”

<sup>10</sup> Dodds 1977:38: “it seemed that the English had been seized by some sort of collective madness”; and Dodds 1919 [quoted in Todd 2005d]: “I see less reason than ever for departing from the opinion I held in 1914: that is, briefly and very generally, that for the governments the war was a crisis in the conflict of rival economic groups, and that for the peoples it was an epidemic madness or reversion to primitive ways of feeling and thinking, fostered and exploited by the governments and by the Press in all belligerent countries, and in itself a symptom of some radical unsoundness in the structure of European society.”

<sup>11</sup> Dodds 1947:109; the same analysis with the same judgment of Plato and Euripides is repeated in Dodds 1951:179–206.

In the previous year, Dodds had published a landmark article, generally regarded as the most important in Neoplatonic scholarship, “The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic ‘One’,”<sup>12</sup> which demonstrated that the teaching defining Neoplatonism and founding Plotinian mysticism had Hellenic sources and needed no Oriental explanation.<sup>13</sup> Now he maintains that Euripides shows that no influence from the East is needed to explain the irrationalism of the fifth century.

[Euripides] shows all the characteristic symptoms: the peculiar blend of a destructive scepticism with a no less destructive mysticism; the assertion that emotion, not reason, determines human conduct; despair of the state, resulting in quietism; despair of rational theology resulting in a craving for a religion of the orgiastic type.<sup>14</sup>

It is essential to his overall diagnosis of what makes us self-destructive that the irrationalism be “endemic.”<sup>15</sup>

Twenty years later his judgment of phenomena in late antiquity comparable to what he found in Euripides is given under the title, “The Fear of Freedom.” He writes:

If future historians are to reach a more complete explanation of what happened, I think that, without ignoring either the intellectual or the economic factor, they will have to take account of another sort of motive, less conscious and less tidily rational. I have already suggested that behind the acceptance of astral determinism there lay, among other things, the fear of freedom—the unconscious flight from the heavy burden of individual choice which an open society lays upon its members. If such a motive is accepted as a *vera causa* (and there is pretty strong evidence that it is a *vera causa* today), we may suspect its operation in a good many places.<sup>16</sup>

He concludes the chapter (and *The Greeks and the Irrational*), with reflections on parallels discerned between what was happening in his time to “Western civilization” and what happened to ancient Hellenic civilization. Here Bury’s failure of nerve reappears. Dodds quotes André Malraux to the effect that “Western civilization has begun to doubt its own credentials” and asks:

What is the meaning of this recoil, this doubt? Is it the hesitation before the jump?...Was it the horse that refused, or the rider? That is really the crucial question. Personally, I believe that it was the horse—in other words, those irrational elements in human nature which govern without our knowledge so much of our behaviour and so much of what we think is our thinking.<sup>17</sup>

In sum, in both ancient Hellenic and modern Western civilization, open, progressive societies producing the greatest flowerings of science known to humankind, what is

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<sup>12</sup> Dodds 1928.

<sup>13</sup> Dodds does the same for “the ‘indistinguishable identity’ of the soul with its divine ground” in Numenius, see Dodds 1960:22–23.

<sup>14</sup> Dodds 1929b:90.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Dodds 1951:252.

<sup>17</sup> Dodds 1951:254.

irrational in the human had produced a degenerating fear of freedom which had destroyed one of them and was on the way to destroying the other.

At this point, beyond the implicit positivism, we can identify at least four elements which characterise this analysis and evaluation: 1) first, the identity of the experience—we know what he is talking about in the ancient world because we experience the same thing now.<sup>18</sup> 2) Second, there is a parallel between the development within antiquity and the development from nineteenth to twentieth-century Europe.<sup>19</sup> 3) Third, rapid progress creates the conditions of its own reversal; we cannot sustain the effort which open, rational societies require. 4) Fourth, the will is the determining factor; it is will or nerve which fails or hesitates before the fear of responsibility. Dodds evaluates the religious and philosophical phenomena of late antiquity, including the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus which he had done so much to make intelligible, within this analysis of the destructive power of the irrational in our civilization.

The answers we have found are to a question Dodds had put in an article, ‘The Renaissance of Occultism,’ which he published in 1919 just after he had taken his First Class in Greats at Oxford. There Dodds asserts:

When the history of the early years of the twentieth century comes to be written . . . in terms of the prevailing postures of mind, the dominant thoughts and half-thoughts and implicit philosophies of life which by their sway over massed populations determine a cultural epoch: when such a book comes into being, there will almost certainly be found in it a chapter devoted to the Renaissance of Occultism.<sup>20</sup>

After listing many of the phenomena of this renaissance, including a number of his own activities and interests, Dodds seeks an explanation of the “symptoms clearly of some widespread and deep-seated disturbance in the mind of man.” He asks:

but are we to say [that they are] the disturbance of mortal disease; or the birth-pang of a new knowledge, a permanent enlargement perhaps of human faculty; or again, simply a phase in the eternal see-saw of our spirit between mystery and logic, the momentary swing of the pendulum from denial towards wonder, from the West towards the East, from the things which are seen towards the things which are not seen?<sup>21</sup>

His subsequent thirty years of research discerned a cyclic pattern of “systematic irrationalism” within our culture and eliminated any “permanent enlargement” of the human—although he clearly knew and cultivated throughout his life elements of the “wonder” of the irrational and blamed the Hellenistic and the Victorian for “the fatal mistake of thinking they could ignore it.”<sup>22</sup> In 1919, he had hoped that the development of

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<sup>18</sup> Dodds 1965:3 tells us that “in calling it ‘an Age of Anxiety’ I have in mind both its material and its moral insecurity; the phrase was coined by my friend W.H. Auden, who applied it to our own time.”

<sup>19</sup> For a striking instance of this see Dodds 1938.

<sup>20</sup> Dodds 1919b:337-8 reprinted and discussed in Todd 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Dodds 1919b.

<sup>22</sup> Dodds 1951:254. Whether he developed a conception of how the rational and the irrational can be integrated may be doubted. In Dodds 1936:4, he tells us that “By humanism in morals I mean the assumption that the values which govern man’s conduct can be elicited from man’s experience; in this sense it is opposed both to

“psychical research . . . into an exact science,”—a work to which he devoted much labour—would in the future enable a better answer than pointing at disease and the cycle. *The Greeks and the Irrational* closes with a feeble hope for improvement. Dodds asserts that, in contrast to the Hellenes, modern man “is beginning to acquire” an instrument by which to understand and to control what goes on “below the threshold of consciousness.”<sup>23</sup> The note at this point, criticising R.G. Collingwood’s conception of history as excluding the “irrational elements,” together with remarks elsewhere, indicate that this instrument includes the scientific development of psychical research, the liberation of psychology, individual and social, from philosophy—this liberation includes the work of Freud, Jung, and Eric Fromm, on all of whom *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* draws—, and the kind of writing of history taking full account of the irrational which he made his own proper work.

When I conceived the title for the Loeb lecture, my plan was to sketch how Eric Dodds’ negative evaluation of late antiquity and of post Plotinian Neoplatonism had undergone re-evaluation over the last forty years, especially at the hands of French scholars, philosophers, and theologians. Such an outline would help explain the greatly increased interest in late antiquity in recent years and an evolution in Classical studies—an evolution to which Dodds greatly contributed but from which he had little joy while Regius Professor. Evidently, the title for that talk should really be: “Re-evaluating E.R. Dodds’ Evaluation of Neoplatonism.” I adopted my shorter title because it seemed less barbaric. However, after rereading much of Dodds’ scholarly work and his autobiography, I now judge that he may in fact have been, in an attenuated sense, a species of Platonist, even of Neoplatonist, and that my contracted title may have been the correct one.

## II. DODDS IN HIS WORK, HIS DAEMON, AND HIS PLOTINUS

Dodds is personally engaged in his work in two ways. First, as we have seen, his studies were related to the terrible problems of the twentieth-century Europe manifest in the two world wars and in the destruction of what he called “open” societies.

From at least the publication of his “The Rediscovery of the Classics” in 1920, through his inaugural lecture at Oxford in November of 1936, and concluding with his address as President of the Classical Association in 1964, Dodds was severely critical of any reduction of Classics to the means by which the languages were passed on. He criticised his undergraduate tutor at University College for being one of those who “saw the task of scholarship not as the reinterpretation of ancient masterpieces or the rediscovery of ancient modes of thought, but simply as the transmission of the most exact knowledge possible of two ancient languages.”<sup>24</sup> He regarded this transmission of the languages as a technique “for an intelligent understanding of the literature” although he recommended that these techniques include composition. In a lecture at Oxford on *The Nature of University Studies in the Classics*, delivered soon after his appointment as Regius Professor, his determination to keep the means as means appears strongly:

composition is a means to an end; if it is treated as an end in itself, I fear it must fall into the class of elegant but useless accomplishments that once filled the too abundant leisure of the unemployed rich—its place on the scale of human values is

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supernaturalism and to ethical nihilism . . . by humanism in the conduct of thought I mean the assumption that reason is more to be trusted than feeling; in this sense it is opposed to irrationalism in all its forms.”

<sup>23</sup> Dodds 1951:254.

<sup>24</sup> Dodds 1977:27.

perhaps—shall we say a little higher than crochet work and a little lower than chess playing? “A good composer” and “a good scholar” are not convertible terms. I have encountered brilliant composers who knew almost nothing of ancient civilisation or ancient thought, and did not care to understand the literature they could mimic so skilfully.<sup>25</sup>

By 1964, he had pretty much despaired of maintaining composition which he now judged to be a minor but not indispensable didactic device.<sup>26</sup> That J.A. Denniston, the author of the great work on *Greek Particles*, was a leading internal candidate for the Regius Chair when Dodds got it will help explain the coolness of his reception there, a chill not lifted by his Inaugural Lecture on “Humanism and Technique in Greek Studies.”<sup>27</sup>

The dominating intellectual labours of Dodds’ life, those which resulted in his Neoplatonic books, his edition of the *Bacchae*, *Greeks and the Irrational*, and its continuation, all used his indubitable mastery of the techniques of Classical scholarship to an end, his need to explain how what is destructive in the irrational came to dominate again. Even his edition of the *Gorgias* is part of this project. It was conceived, Dodds tells us:

when at the outbreak of the last war I found myself lecturing to undergraduates who were soon to be soldiers. The circumstances of the time brought sharply home both to me and to my audience the relevance of this dialogue [concerned with the relation of rhetoric and politics] to the central issues, moral and political of our own day—a relevance which modern readers perhaps feel more directly because here Plato’s case is not yet encumbered with all the metaphysical baggage of the *Republic*.<sup>28</sup>

Dodds found the dialogue to be an attack “on the whole way of life of a society which measures its ‘power’ by the number of ships in its harbours and of dollars in its treasury, its ‘well-being’ by the standard of living of its citizens. Such a society was Periclean Athens . . . ”<sup>29</sup> He concludes by remarking that:

We also know from experience that as the belief in traditional moral standards is progressively undermined, the foundations of democracy become increasingly insecure; we are in a position to verify (as our parents were not) Plato’s analysis of the way in which the corruption of democracy opens the road to tyranny.<sup>30</sup>

Second, both in his autobiography, *Missing Persons*, and in his other writings, Dodds does not hide that his own interests and activities are part of the twentieth-century ‘Renaissance of Occultism’ and the resurgence of the irrational, and while he writes his histories he reveals his own relation to the phenomena. For example, he tells us that he is an “agnostic,”<sup>31</sup> that he did not believe in personal survival after death,<sup>32</sup> and that he is an

<sup>25</sup> Dodds 1937 which I quote from Todd 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Dodds 1964:8.

<sup>27</sup> There is a summary of the problems Dodds confronted at Oxford in Lloyd-Jones 1982:289–290.

<sup>28</sup> Dodds 1959:v; see Dodds 1977:171.

<sup>29</sup> Dodds 1959:33. See Todd 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Dodds 1959:34.

<sup>31</sup> Dodds 1965:5: “The historian’s interpretation of this period is inevitably coloured in some degree by his own religious beliefs . . . As an agnostic . . . I stand outside this particular battle [between pagans and Christians], though not above it.”

outside observer of Christianity. This distance is not, however, the only relation to the phenomena which is revealed. For example, we can place on the other side of the ledger his never failing enthusiasm for Plotinus and his identification with Stephen MacKenna (1872–1934), with whom he was linked by “our common love of Plotinus.”<sup>33</sup> In the opinion of Dodds, MacKenna sacrificed his life to translating the philosopher who was for both of them the culmination of Platonism as religion and who, at the very least, provided them both with a *religio mentis* for a period of their lives.<sup>34</sup> Dodds wrote and even published poetry which reflected the same turn of mind.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in his autobiography, he portrays his life as governed by a good fortune, “not wisdom,” and thanks fortune for “the strange and undeserved privilege of knowing the best four poets of my time—Eliot (with whom, “lately arrived from Graduate School at Harvard,” alone he shared a class on Plotinus at Oxford in 1915)<sup>36</sup> and Yeats, Auden and [Louis] MacNeice,”<sup>37</sup> a close friend whom ultimately he served as literary executor.<sup>38</sup>

Surveying the phenomena he lists as belonging to the ‘Renaissance of Occultism’, we find that he is himself part of “the revival among intellectuals of an interest in the classics of mysticism,” that, like Gilbert Murray, he undertook “psychical research” or “parapsychology”<sup>39</sup>—which Dodds used over and over again in his writing on Greek religion to look for what lay at the basis of oracles, revelation by dreams, and theurgy—, and that he uses “psycho-analysis” in his historical explanations. His autobiography relates instances of revelatory dreams which he takes very seriously,<sup>40</sup> and represents societies, his own life, and the lives of others<sup>41</sup> as governed at least in part by a daemon. Having talked about the role of fortune rather than rational control in his life, he concludes *Missing Persons* by thanking his daemon and fortune for giving him “a much fairer deal than most of my contemporaries.” He tells the reader that “At rare moments in my story an obscure being whom I call my daemon emerges upon the stage and assumes command.” To “him” he owed “the crucial decision” to take the Regius Chair at “an unknown and unloved Oxford.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>32</sup> He kept an open mind on the question, however; in his “Memoir” on the life of Stephen MacKenna, in Dodds 1937b:88, he records that he asked his dying friend “whether, if he should find himself surviving, he would attempt to establish the fact by communicating with me through a medium.” MacKenna declined the request.

<sup>33</sup> Dodds 1977:63; see 91.

<sup>34</sup> Dodds 1937b:“Memoir”:1–89.

<sup>35</sup> Dodds 1929; Todd 2000b judges that his poetry “reflects Neoplatonism and its dualistic psychology.” MacNeice 1966:136 placed it “in the Irish Romantic tradition.” The poems certainly speak from within a religious questioning.

<sup>36</sup> See Dodds 1977:40, and Todd 2000c.

<sup>37</sup> Dodds 1977:194.

<sup>38</sup> Dodds 1966 and MacNeice 1966. The MacNeice autobiography contains a few paragraphs on Dodds which emphasise his extraordinary character: “He had specialised in Neo-Platonism, a subject hardly known at Oxford because it is outside the syllabus. He had written poems in the Irish romantic tradition. He was a member of the Society for Psychical Research but ruthlessly insisted upon scientific evidence” (MacNeice 1966:136).

<sup>39</sup> Which together with “curiosity about the religious ideas of Classical Antiquity,” are “interests which have been with me through most of my working life” Dodds 1971:156; see Dodds 1977:97–111.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Dodds 1977:128.

<sup>41</sup> MacKenna “was plainly a man after my own heart, a man obstinately obedient to the demands of his daemon at whatever cost to his worldly success.” Dodds 1977:62.

<sup>42</sup> Dodds 1977:194–195. Perhaps the first example of the daemon “taking command” was when to Dodds’ own astonishment his hand did not raise itself to be punished, see Dodds 1977:20.

Some of this talk of fortune and the daemon seems to be metaphorical, for example, when he uses daemon interchangeably with *Zeitgeist*.<sup>43</sup> But the account of the activities of the personal daemon in his own life are too vivid and consistent, appearing both within the autobiography and in its last two paragraphs, to allow its reduction to a literary device. The daemon need not compromise the agnosticism of Dodds because he catalogues forms of “the daimonic as distinct from the divine.”<sup>44</sup> Dodds’ daemon is not the daimonion of Socrates, a “voice” or “sign,” something always accompanying him which, Socrates tells us “constantly opposed me even in the merest trifles, if I were about to make a mistake” [*Apologia*, 40a]<sup>45</sup> and worked only as a check on evil [*Apologia*, 31d].<sup>46</sup> Robert Todd who has devoted years of research to Dodds, judges that Dodds’ “daemon is pro-active . . . in ways that define his fundamental values.”<sup>47</sup> Because it actually moves him or prevents him moving, it looks most like the personal guardian force of such later Platonists as Plutarch, Apulius, Maximus of Tyre, Porphyry, and Proclus. In other words, his seems to be a Middle or Neo-Platonist daemon. Dodds does not, however, give an explicitly Platonist account of his daemon, and he knows of many more forms of the daimonic than those in Plato and the later Platonists.<sup>48</sup> In any case, with respect to the spiritual world, we get closest to what is dearest to Dodds with Plotinus, and certainly we find there that in comparison with which Proclus and the later Neoplatonists are judged so severely.

Anyone who set out to deduce what Dodds’ evaluation of Plotinus should have been from the judgment of the intellectual and spiritual culture of late antiquity by Bury and Murray, which Dodds followed generally if not exactly, should have supposed it to have been negative. Plotinus is regarded as the founder of the school or movement which terminated the history of Hellenic philosophy, “Neo-Platonism,” by his elevation of the First Principle to be the One beyond knowing and being. The transcendence of the First required that it be apprehended only by the “touch” of a union in which the adherent is carried ecstatically out of his or her self, beyond self-consciousness<sup>49</sup>. Plotinus not only developed a system in which all reality was moving consciously or unconsciously to or from the One, but he also testified to having experienced union. In the terminology of Dodds, Plotinus was both a “mystical theorist” and a “practicing mystic”.<sup>50</sup> He does not just mark the “rise of . . . mysticism,” which Murray judged so harshly, he can be regarded as its founder. Pierre Hadot

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<sup>43</sup> Dodds 1947:106n2: “Future historians will, I believe, recognise in this preoccupation with the surd element the governing impulse of our time, the *daimon* or *Zeitgeist* which in different guises has haunted the minds as various as Nietzsche, Bergson, Heidegger in philosophy; Jung in psychology; Sorel, Pareto, Spengler in political theory; Yeats, Lawrence, Joyce, Kafka, Sartre in literature; Picasso and the surrealists in painting.”

<sup>44</sup> Dodds 1951:40.

<sup>45</sup> I follow Dorion 2003, showing the demon to derive from Plutarch, Apulius, Maximus of Tyre, and Proclus. For Plato and Xenophon, Socrates encounters no intermediate being but the divine itself by way of a voice or sign. According to Porphyry, Plotinus recognises his daemon whom he attends eagerly (*Vita Plotini*:10). See Desirée and Smith 2005.

<sup>46</sup> See also *Alcibiades* 103a–b, *Euthydemus* 272e, *Phaedrus* 242b–c, *Respublica* 6, 496c, *Theaetetus* 151a, *Theages* 128d. On the daemonic warning away from politics in the *Republic* in comparison with that in the *Apology*, see Leroux 2002:661–662.

<sup>47</sup> Dodds 1977:194–95. Todd 2005: “Dodds’ daemon is pro-active but in ways that define his fundamental values on two notable occasions when he stuck his neck out (Dodds 1977:71&77) and perhaps a third (195: the decision to go to Oxford, which was a risk but made sense in all sorts of other ways; see 125). So, yes, ERD’s daemon is not prohibitive (Socratic) but (rare as it was) self-definitional.”

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, on “the daimonic as distinct from the divine,” Dodds 1951:40–43; on it and the human soul see Dodds 1951:213–214.

<sup>49</sup> Dodds 1965:85–86.

<sup>50</sup> Dodds 1965:70.

asserts that his “type of experiential knowledge which one is able to qualify as ‘mystical’” is “without precedent in the Greek tradition.”<sup>51</sup> Dodds judges that “the earliest application” of the term *ekstasis* “to mystical experience in the strict sense is in a famous sentence of Plotinus,” and he recognises that the practice of Christian mysticism “springs” from him—even if he denies, wrongly I think, that for Plotinus, in distinction from the Christians, the union is a gift.<sup>52</sup> He recognises that for Plotinus “the grandeurs and miseries of human life,” historical activity, and indeed the historical world itself are “not quite real”; they are more like stage performances.<sup>53</sup> “This is linked,” Dodds tells us, “with Plotinus’ general doctrine that action is everywhere ‘a shadow of contemplation and an inferior substitute for it’.”<sup>54</sup> Dodds knows also the implications of what Plotinus says of the good man:

[He] will altogether separate himself, as far as possible from his lower nature and will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires. He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods: for it is to them, not to the good men, that we are to be made like.<sup>55</sup>

If this be not the “fear of freedom,” it must at least be the condemned “despair of the state, resulting in quietism.” However, astonishingly, despite all these symptoms of irrationality, failure of nerve, and refusal of the costs of political freedom, in fact, from the beginning to the end of his writing, Dodds defends Plotinus from the charge of irrationalism and praises him.

His first work of Neoplatonic scholarship is *Select Passages Illustrating Neoplatonism*, published in 1923 by a missionary body of the Church of England, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (“not the publishers I would have chosen.”<sup>56</sup>) He had had his proposal for a Loeb edition of Plotinus rejected by T.E. Page, who “explained courteously that the Loeb Library was interested in authors for whose work there was a foreseeable demand.”<sup>57</sup> In 1937, after Dodds had published his edition of the *Elements* and had become Regius Professor, he was told that the Trustees of the Loeb texts would be glad to have him translate the critical edition of the *Enneads* at which Paul Henry, s.j. (1906-1984) was then working—Stephen MacKenna had turned Page down in 1931.<sup>58</sup> Having refused in 1936 Henry’s invitation to collaborate with him, in favour of a proposal from Oxford University Press that he edit the *Bacchae*, Dodds now also turned down the Loeb Trustees and recommends A.H. Armstrong (1909-1997) instead.<sup>59</sup> Armstrong began his translations in the 1950s and the last of the seven volumes finally appeared in 1988. In any case, although

<sup>51</sup> Hadot 1972a:273.

<sup>52</sup> Dodds 1965:72&85–99 comes close to the position of Hadot when quoting *Ennead* 5.3.14 and 6.7.35 (Dodds 1965:85) and he is right that the presence of the One is “different from the notion of individual acts of grace which we meet not only in Christian theology but in many pagan writers.” (Dodds 1965:90) For references to Hadot and other recent scholarship on the graciousness of the union, see Hankey 2003:212–213, for a comparison of Iamblichus and Augustine on the need for grace, see Feichtinger 2003, for Augustine’s descriptions of the mystical ascent as diminishing the action of grace in relation to human effort as compared to Plotinus, see Hankey 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Dodds 1965:8–10.

<sup>54</sup> Dodds 1965:10, quoting *Ennead* 3.2.15.

<sup>55</sup> *Ennead* 1.2.7.23–28, Armstrong 1966–1988:147; see Dodds 1965:78–86.

<sup>56</sup> Dodds 1977:75; and see 60.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> MacKenna letters 73 and 75, in Dodds 1937b:281&283.

<sup>59</sup> Todd 2005b:158.

the introduction to *Select Passages* is clearly the work of an enthusiast, it expresses judgments which will remain largely unchanged throughout his work.<sup>60</sup>

When introducing his *Select Passages* Dodds writes:

the claim of the Neoplatonists to be the spiritual legatees of Plato . . . is in the main substantiated. Better on the whole than any other writers, ancient or modern, they realise and reproduce, in their best work, the singular blend of humanism and asceticism, poetry and logic, the critical and the devotional spirit, which constitutes the Platonic temperament.<sup>61</sup>

Plotinus is “a thinker of first-rate speculative ability.” Dodds quotes a “recent critic” who calls him “the greatest individual thinker between Aristotle and Descartes.” He:

evolved a scheme of Reality at once more comprehensive and more closely knit than anything which had as yet been attempted; a scheme which was to hold together for the next three hundred years all that was worth saving among the results of seven centuries of free speculation; a scheme, finally, in which the religion of Platonism attained its mature expression in response to the demand of the new religious consciousness.<sup>62</sup>

There is a decline in later Neoplatonism associated with “outward ritual”; but Dodds judges that the “Insistence on the magical value of outward ritual is confined to the degenerate phase of Neoplatonism.” In 1923, he associates this turn to magic with the *De Mysteriis* which is still anonymous for him.<sup>63</sup> Thus he can judge that “the miraculous has no rôle” in the philosophy of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, there is a “lapse” toward “ritualism and occultism” in the fourth century, and, by the fifth, Neoplatonism “began to lose itself in the dry places of scholasticism.”<sup>65</sup> Still the *Elements of Theology* is praised as setting forth “with great precision and subtlety the Plotinian system and the interconnections of the different parts, with certain original additions.”<sup>66</sup> Ten years later when he published his edition of the *Elements*, he has like praise for Proclus who “reveals not only in the *Elements* but in many passages of the commentaries a critical acumen and a systematic grasp not easily to be matched within the post-classical period in any philosophical writer save Plotinus.”<sup>67</sup> However, by this time, Dodds has connected Iamblichus and the *De Mysteriis* and recognised the degree to which Iamblichus influenced Proclus.<sup>68</sup> Importantly, although he named the author correctly, I do not think he ever read the work sympathetically. In *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* Dodds still identified theurgy with “vulgar magic.” From the beginning to the end of his scholarship, Dodds entirely missed the central point of the *De Mysteriis*,

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<sup>60</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1982:288 judges that Dodds at first “studied Neoplatonism . . . with the enthusiasm of a believer in its doctrines.”

<sup>61</sup> Dodds 1923:9.

<sup>62</sup> Dodds 1923:10.

<sup>63</sup> Dodds 1923:15.

<sup>64</sup> Dodds 1923:16.

<sup>65</sup> Dodds 1923:20.

<sup>66</sup> Dodds 1923:21.

<sup>67</sup> Dodds 1963:xxvi.

<sup>68</sup> Dodds 1963:xvi–xx.

namely, that we do not manipulate the gods but cooperate in their activity.<sup>69</sup> In the introduction to the *Elements*, he opines that “In the matter of superstitious respect for theurgy there seems little to choose between” Iamblichus and Proclus.<sup>70</sup> Disastrously, with theurgy, “the whole basis of the Plotinian intellectual mysticism is rejected, and the door stands open to all those superstitions of the lower culture which Plotinus had condemned. . . .” and which Dodds so deeply feared.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, his editorial hands at work on Proclus were able to remain unstained because “all direct reference either to personal mysticism or to theurgy is absent from the *Elements*.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the “fundamental weakness” of that great systematic work is of the opposite kind; it lies “in the assumption that the structure of the cosmos exactly reproduces the structure of Greek logic.”<sup>73</sup>

As compared with *Select Passages*, the elevation of Plotinus at the expense of everyone from the first century onwards has been carried even higher in “The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic ‘One’” of 1928. Dodds writes there that: “after the manner of men of genius” Plotinus fashioned from “unpromising material an edifice which a few of his predecessors may have seen in their dreams but whose construction had remained altogether beyond their power.”<sup>74</sup> The *Enneads* are no longer “the starting-point of Neoplatonism but its intellectual culmination.”<sup>75</sup> In consequence, Plotinus is not “the subverter of the great tradition of Greek rationalism” but “its last constructive exponent in an anti-rational age.”<sup>76</sup> When we have soaked ourselves in such things as “the really unspeakable spiritualistic drivellings of the *De Mysteriis*,” Dodds assures us that we shall recognise Plotinus as “the one man who still knew how to think clearly in an age which was beginning to forget what thinking meant.”<sup>77</sup>

In 1946, Dodds concluded that neither the Platonic “practice of mental withdrawal and concentration” nor “the Plotinian mysticism which derives from it can . . . fairly be called irrational.”<sup>78</sup> In *The Greeks and the Irrational*, delivered three years later, Plotinus is held up as “the outstanding exception” to the abandonment of the inquiry after truth for its own sake. Plotinus “investigates,” and he “organised his teaching on the basis of a sort of seminar system, with free discussion.”<sup>79</sup> For his last book of Classical scholarship, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, “Plotinus emerges in the end as the upholder of Hellenic rationalism.”<sup>80</sup>

The analysis of the mystical union set out in the great article of 1928 is also sustained throughout more than forty years of subsequent writing: “The Plotinian ecstasy . . . is achieved by a sustained intellectual effort.”<sup>81</sup> “The Plotinian *unio mystica* . . . is attained, not by any ritual of evocation or performances of prescribed acts, but by an inward discipline of

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<sup>69</sup> Dodds 1965:291.

<sup>70</sup> Dodds 1963:xxii.

<sup>71</sup> Dodds 1963:xx. Despite his socialism, Dodds feared the “herd-morality” for which he acquired contempt when he read Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* when still at school, see Dodds 1977:19–20 and Todd 2002:56–59.

<sup>72</sup> Dodds 1963:xvii.

<sup>73</sup> Dodds 1963:xxv.

<sup>74</sup> Dodds 1928:140.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Dodds 1928:142.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Dodds 1947:118.

<sup>79</sup> Dodds 1951:265n78.

<sup>80</sup> Dodds 1965:26.

<sup>81</sup> Dodds 1928:142.

mind which involves no compulsive element and has nothing whatever to do with magic.”<sup>82</sup> “What is distinctively Plotinian—perhaps we should say, distinctively Hellenic—in the mysticism of Plotinus is not the experience itself but his approach to it and his interpretation of it. His approach is severely intellectual . . .”<sup>83</sup>

Surveying the whole set of judgments, the basis of evaluation becomes clear enough. Dodds is not opposed to religion. Plotinus is clearly for him an exponent of the “religion of Platonism” and the balance of reason and religion in Platonism is essential to its enduring value. Dodds praised MacKenna’s translation of the *Enneads* for “the deep religious feeling which gives warmth and dignity to the style.”<sup>84</sup> However, the religion Dodds embraces is strictly and exclusively a *religio mentis*, “severely intellectual” without ritual or sacrament. In *Missing Persons*, he reveals that before he married the daughter of an Anglican canon and sister of a future Anglican bishop, wedding her in an ecclesiastical ceremony,<sup>85</sup> he almost married an Irish Catholic girl.<sup>86</sup> When he realised that the children would have to be “brought up as Catholics,” he confesses:

At this point, the submerged ancestral Ulsterman within me rose in revolt and set me to the task of undermining my fiancée’s faith in Catholicism (and indeed in any form of Christianity) . . . Nothing else in the record of my past conduct fills me today with deeper regret and shame.<sup>87</sup>

Given what he values and hates in religion we might ask whether he ever freed himself from “the submerged ancestral” Protestantism of Ulster, his father’s birthplace, for which the son had little love, for whose politics he had no sympathy, whose bigotries got him all but expelled from Oxford.<sup>88</sup>

However, whether or not there is any connection between Dodds’ personal history and his evaluations of the relative merits of Plotinus and his successors, they were generally shared by the Neoplatonic scholars of his own and the previous generations, people of very different backgrounds from his own. It is the generation after him which will shift them.

### III. THE RE-VALUATION OF LATER NEOPLATONISM AND LATE ANTIQUITY

#### *A. Émile Bréhier, André Festugière, and Henri-Dominique Saffrey*

Émile Bréhier (1876-1952) belonged to the generation before Dodds. He produced the French standard history of philosophy for the last century and it was to him that the French owed the translation of Plotinus begun in 1924 only now being replaced.<sup>89</sup> He and Dodds have in common that they were thoroughly secular university scholars of the atheist or agnostic persuasions, that their philosophical backgrounds were imbued with the remains of

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<sup>82</sup> Dodds 1951:286. For a convincing refutation of Dodds, Armstrong, Festugière, and others of a like mind on this see Mazur 2003 and Mazur 2004.

<sup>83</sup> Dodds 1965:86.

<sup>84</sup> Dodds 1956:xiii.

<sup>85</sup> Dodds 1977:79–80; the parents were relieved when assured by his future wife that Dodds was an atheist rather than a Roman Catholic (84).

<sup>86</sup> For her identity, see Todd 2001:238n21.

<sup>87</sup> Dodds 1977:79.

<sup>88</sup> Dodds 1977:65–71&45.

<sup>89</sup> Bréhier 1924-38, Bréhier 1927, Bréhier 1928.

German Idealism,<sup>90</sup> and that they looked at Neoplatonism through an opposition between reason which enables freedom and the irrational.<sup>91</sup> Bréhier writes of his work as an historian: “my ultimate goal is progressively to extricate, in its purity, the essence of philosophy.”<sup>92</sup> For him, as for Dodds, Western civilization and its freedoms are at risk. Preserving the rare and fragile plant of Hellenic philosophy by searching the history in order to discern its pure essence is his life’s work.

In opposition to Dodds, however, the threatening irrational is associated for Bréhier with the Orient. In his labours on Plotinus, as in earlier studies, he discovered a duality of Occidental reason and Oriental mysticism, which made him unwilling to accept the argument of Dodds that there is no necessity to pass outside the Greek philosophical tradition to find the origins of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One.<sup>93</sup> This is not to say that he was not attracted to the thought of Plotinus. Like Dodds, Bréhier found in him a rhythm of continuity with Plato and a creative renaissance of his philosophical spirit (“ce retour passionné à Platon . . . il a, avec Platon, une affinité intérieure, bien que, pour un philologue moderne, . . . beaucoup de méprises”)<sup>94</sup>.

The balance between philosophy and Oriental mysticism in Plotinus, and other ancient thinkers, had “*une certaine allure*” for Bréhier.<sup>95</sup> It is also “the fundamental problem” of the philosophy of Plotinus: “At the same time a metaphysician and a mystic, he constructed a work from which flowed two currents which in diverse degrees separated and mingled anew.”<sup>96</sup> Bréhier is one with Dodds in judging that a balance of the two did not carry over to his successors and in supposing that the road downwards began with Iamblichus: “whose thought dominated the whole final stage of Neoplatonism; he was not less a mystagogue than a philosopher.” Proclus is represented as continuing and intensifying the negative characteristics identified in Iamblichus.<sup>97</sup> Although he identified himself as a positivist, Bréhier’s interpretation of Plotinus in terms of a mixing of the Oriental and the Occidental owes a good deal to Hegel.

On the crucial question of the relation of *Nous* and the One, Bréhier follows Hegel. In mystical elevation there is not a passage beyond thought; Hegel had shown that the philosophy of Plotinus was “an intellectualism or elevated idealism.” When we have to do with the One, “philosophical thought does not cease in order to be transformed into the inarticulate stammering of the mystic.”<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, Hegel also judged that the intellectualism of Plotinus was imperfect, his demand for experience gives some basis for the accusation that he was “*un mystique enthousiaste*.” For Bréhier, beyond this, insofar as there is a mysticism in Plotinus based in “the theory of the intelligence as unified with universal being,” he is altogether outside Greek rationalism and religion. Its source is credited to “L’Orientalisme de Plotin” and specifically to “les Upanishads”:

<sup>90</sup> Dodds 1977:39–40; for Bréhier see Hankey 2004:131–145.

<sup>91</sup> Bréhier 1947:8: “La philosophie a pris son élan en Grèce et, de cet élan, elle a gardé l’amour et la passion de la liberté; je ne disconviens pas que la philosophie soit une plante rare dans l’ensemble de l’humanité, et même une plante fragile; et il n’y a pas eu, que je sache, de philosophie ainsi précisément nommée et caractérisée ailleurs que dans notre civilisation occidentale.”

<sup>92</sup> Bréhier 1947:7&9.

<sup>93</sup> Bréhier 1938.

<sup>94</sup> Bréhier 1947:4–5.

<sup>95</sup> Bréhier 1947:3.

<sup>96</sup> Bréhier 1928b:222.

<sup>97</sup> Bréhier 1927:480–482.

<sup>98</sup> Bréhier 1928:180–181. There may be a remnant of Hegel in Dodds’ analysis also, Dodds 1923:13: “Like Spinoza and Mr. F. H. Bradley, he [Plotinus] was a mystic without ceasing to be a rationalist.”

[W]e find at the very center of Plotinus' thought a foreign element which defies classification. The theory of intelligence as universal being derives neither from Greek rationalism nor from the piety diffused throughout the religious circles of his day. . . . Thus I am led to seek the source of the philosophy of Plotinus beyond the Orient close to Greece, in the religious speculations of India, which by the time of Plotinus had been founded for centuries on the Upanishads and had retained their vitality. . . . With Plotinus then, we lay hold of the first link in a religious tradition which is no less powerful basically in the West than the Christian tradition, although it does not manifest itself in the same way. I believe that this tradition comes from India.<sup>99</sup>

Among twentieth-century Plotinian scholars Bréhier's theory of an Indian source for Plotinus is the exception.<sup>100</sup> It is essential to Bréhier's understanding of Plotinus, as well as to his shaping of the history of philosophy generally, that philosophy, and intellectual contemplation—which is for him peculiar to the Occident—and the desire for mystical union beyond thought—which for him belongs to religion and is Oriental—be kept separate.

In this separation of religion and philosophy Bréhier is not followed by his successor as the pre-eminent Neoplatonic scholar in France, the Dominican priest, contemporary and friend of Dodds, André-Jean Festugière (1898-1982). Festugière also shared Dodds' personal engagement with Neoplatonism—a characteristic of almost all the scholars we shall encounter—and a concern with the future of freedom and civilized life.<sup>101</sup>

Festugière turned to Neoplatonism in the hope of adapting Aristotle to Christian ends.<sup>102</sup> However, he ended up teaching and publishing primarily about Plato, pagan religion, and Neoplatonism, concentrating on their mystical aspects—the mystical is a widely encompassing category for him. In 1944, he started publishing *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*<sup>103</sup>—which appeared in the series *Études bibliques!* after having been rejected by *la collection Guillaume Budé*—we note the parallels with *Select Passages*.<sup>104</sup> In 1945, he began another four-volume collection of texts and translations, the *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>105</sup> The *Corpus* involved a collaboration with a friend, Arthur Darby Nock (1902-1963), an Englishman who, after many humiliations at Cambridge, had fled to Harvard, where Dodds, who also called him a friend, visited him.<sup>106</sup>

Père Festugière's scholarly life was a constant engagement in a deeply troubled religious quest. H.-D. Saffrey described the quest thus:

A.-J. Festugière was an anxious, complaining, indomitable man shaken by bouts of aggression. The reason is that for his whole life, Father Festugière had been haunted

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<sup>99</sup> Bréhier 1958: 116–118.

<sup>100</sup> Wolters 1982:296–299.

<sup>101</sup> For the latter, see Festugière 1987, based on talks produced between 1942 and 1945, not surprisingly he advocates a learning from history which unifies what Classical and Hellenistic philosophy can teach with Christianity and *Romanitas*.

<sup>102</sup> Runia 1989:1–2&26.

<sup>103</sup> Festugière 1944–1954.

<sup>104</sup> Saffrey 1984:x.

<sup>105</sup> Festugière 1945–1954.

<sup>106</sup> Nock established the text and Festugière commented and translated; for Dodds, see Dodds 1977:93&172.

by the problem of evil. It was not that he had put the existence of God in doubt, but his question was: “Does God love humans?” . . . [I]n his interior life . . . Father Festugière nursed the eternal and fundamental problem of the mystics: How do we know that God loves us? . . . *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* was the book which remained for him nearest to his heart.<sup>107</sup>

In reflections near the end of his life Festugière wrote about religion in the Hellenistic era:

The first century of our era produced an extraordinary phenomenon: men believed that God loved them. This is the most important of human revolutions. It is this which has made ancient man pass over to modern man. It is this which ceaselessly plunges the historian into the most total stupefaction.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast to this stupefying optimism, the Classical Greeks were unsurpassable guides in a realistic philosophical and religious treatment of the human condition. They judged:

Man is not happy. From the time of Homer and his reference to ‘men of a day’ no people has devoted so much thought to this matter as the Greeks. The Greek looked at life without illusion. It was the great theme of human misery which inspired the tragic choruses to their unforgettable laments. The moralists of Greece echoed the words of the poets: “The whole world,” says Epicurus, “lives in pain; it is for pain that it has the most capacity.”<sup>109</sup>

This realism was not destructive of piety among the Greeks. “Pessimism is natural to every man eager for life, once he measures the distance between what he aspires to and what he actually achieves.”<sup>110</sup> Festugière found among the Greeks both a popular and a reflective piety in which he saw everything which marked true religion. In Homer’s heroes he finds: “personal religion. It is a religion of deep friendship. The devotee does not place his confidence in the respect he has shown to the god; he places it in the god’s friendliness.”<sup>111</sup>

The closeness of his position to that of Dodds may be judged from his *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, to which Dodds refers often. When Festugière comes to what he calls reflective piety, he first speaks of Plato. Of his doctrine of the Good beyond thought and being in the *Republic* and that of the *VIIIth Letter*, he writes:

I am for my part convinced that this is the expression of a personal experience. In sum, the supreme object of knowledge, the final degree of our metaphysical investigations, the term on which all the rest depends, is an object which defies definition, and hence cannot be named. It is the Unknown God.<sup>112</sup>

Thus, with Dodds, Festugière identifies the origin of the “Undefinable God,” the “Ineffable God,” in Plato and the Platonic tradition:

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<sup>107</sup> Saffrey 1984:vii&xii.

<sup>108</sup> Festugière 1984:275.

<sup>109</sup> Festugière 1956:vii. Festugière shows his admiration for the Epicurean and Stoic solutions to the pain of life in Festugière 1987:32–38 actually delivered in 1945.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Festugière 1954:vii.

<sup>112</sup> Festugière 1954:44.

both in Plato and in his successors . . . the *noeton* is certainly the intelligible in the true sense of the word, the object we can comprehend and define. But at the same time it is the object above the intelligible . . . which we attain only by mystical contact . . . . [I]t is an ocean of joy in which we submerge ourselves. . . . Plato stands at the beginning of the great mystical tradition which, through Plotinus and Proclus, inspired Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Eriugena, and which then . . . exercised so great an influence in the Middle Ages . . . .<sup>113</sup>

With every word of this description, Festugière is setting himself against Bréhier and Hegel for whom precisely this aspect of Neoplatonism was attributed not to Greek philosophy but to “Orientalism.”

Despite his love of Platonic mysticism, Festugière was not attracted by all the religious phenomena of late antiquity. *Personal Religion* does not go far beyond Plotinus. Like Dodds, Festugière connects the religious turn in later Neoplatonism with the political and social decadence and the misery of late antiquity. In *Pagan and Christian*, Dodds quotes him: “As Festugière has rightly said ‘misery and mysticism are related facts.’”<sup>114</sup> Although his own attitude to Later Neoplatonism is profoundly ambiguous (contrast his “Je n’aime pas Jamblique et Proclus” with his “La Fin du paganisme”),<sup>115</sup> Pierre Hadot criticizes Festugière, and with him Dodds, on this point:

It seems to me that his vision of the Hellenistic and Roman world (as moreover that of his friend, the great E.R. Dodds) has been a great deal too much dominated by simplistic clichés on the social and political decadence of the political life of the ancient world, on the trouble of the collective ancient conscience. A formula like that of A.-J. Festugière: “Misery and mysticism are connected facts” is a pseudo-evidence . . . .<sup>116</sup>

Hadot, whose own motives were exactly the opposite ones, accuses Festugière of “the desire to show that antique man had lost hope and that he was waiting for the message of the Gospel.”<sup>117</sup> Only with the next generation of French scholars: Jean Trouillard, Henry Duméry, and Joseph Combès, will there be a positive appreciation of Iamblichus and of those who followed him into a revealed pagan religion which counterbalanced and contested Christianity by way of a philosophically justified cult and theurgy.

Despite this recoil from Iamblichus and his successors, that Festugière’s treatment of Platonism marked a transition was evident to Bréhier. After presiding over the defence of Festugière’s doctorate, Bréhier published a criticism of his interpretation of Plato “which made Plato appear to be a mystic, and which sought to find, like Plotinus, the foundation of the hierarchy of being in an intuition of pure being (the Good or the One), which the author does not hesitate to consider as an authentic mystical experience.” Thus, in other words, he erred by treating the Plotinian reading of Plato as correct both in method and content.<sup>118</sup> Festugière reduced to a unity what Bréhier wanted to preserve: “the duality between the

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<sup>113</sup> Festugière 1954:45.

<sup>114</sup> Dodds 1965:100.

<sup>115</sup> Hadot 2001:71 and Hadot 1972b; see Hankey 2003:200-204.

<sup>116</sup> Hadot 1983-84:34.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Bréhier 1938b:56. Festugière’s *thèse de doctorat ès lettres* was published as Festugière 1936.

mystical Plato and the intellectual.”<sup>119</sup> I am inclined to locate Dodds somewhere between the two. With Festugière, he values the mixing of the mystical and reason; with Bréhier his principal concern is for the preservation of the rational.

Festugière’s movement from Thomas Aquinas to Neoplatonic scholarship was repeated with his student and biographer, Henry-Dominic Saffrey. Also a Dominican, in 1954 Saffrey edited Aquinas’ *Super Librum de Causis Expositio*, the first text of Thomas to have a proper scientific edition.<sup>120</sup> This work was to have been the beginning of a map of the Proclean influence in Western theology and an indication of the consequences for theology of that influence.<sup>121</sup> Mostly, however, Saffrey stayed with later Greek Neoplatonism and especially with Proclus, who became both a guide to ancient philosophy, religion, and spirituality and the key to its future.<sup>122</sup> When his work on the *Expositio* 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 under Dodds’ supervision. Pressed forward with the collaboration of L.G. Westerink (1913-1990), the last of the six volumes of what amounted to a forty-year work appeared in 1997. In it Saffrey testifies to his formation by Dodds and Festugière. Of Dodds, he writes:

By his exemplary edition of the *Elements of Theology*, he must be considered as the pioneer of Proclean studies in the twentieth century; A.J. Festugière, by his admirable translations of the commentaries of Proclus on the *Timaeus* and the *Republic* of Plato,<sup>123</sup> has opened the way to a better understanding of the doctrines of Proclus and of Neoplatonism in general.<sup>124</sup>

However, the original Dominican project which Saffrey shared with Festugière was not entirely forsaken. He carries it forward by taking up a project envisioned by Dodds for whom Proclus is “one of the fountain-heads of that Neoplatonic tradition which, mingling unrecognised with the slow moving waters of medieval thought, issued beyond them at last to refertilize the world at the Renaissance.”<sup>125</sup> Saffrey advanced the sympathetic study by Festugière and Nock of the religion of the Hellenic and Hellenistic worlds, emphasising above all that there was a unification of religion and philosophy in later Neoplatonism, which was not at all the defeat of intellect but rather the basis of philosophy as *religio mentis* in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Theology as science arises out of the unity of religion and philosophy in pagan antiquity and enables the survival of both aspects of Hellenic culture after the Christianization of the Empire.

Saffrey sums up the role of later Neoplatonism in general and Proclus in particular for the exchanges between philosophy and Christianity in the first five centuries like this:

So far as pagan theology is expressed in the traditional terms of the official civic cults and that of the Emperor, the only possibility is to have opposition between these two theologies. But when pagan theology has ceased to be that of the religion of the State, and when it has formed itself into a scientific theology, then it offers a new

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 64; see Hadot 1983-1984:32.

<sup>120</sup> Saffrey 1954.

<sup>121</sup> Three articles showing his initial interest in the sources of Thomas are gathered in Saffrey 1987.

<sup>122</sup> Saffrey 1987b.

<sup>123</sup> Festugière 1966–1968, Festugière 1970; for a bibliography of Festugière, see Saffrey 1984:xvii–xxxiv.

<sup>124</sup> Saffrey 1968-1997:VI:vii–viii.

<sup>125</sup> Dodds 1963:xxvi.

space to Christian theology. This metamorphosis occurred in the Neoplatonic school in Athens; this is why one cannot underestimate the importance of Proclus' theology in the history of Christian theology. This theology as science will know its full flowering in the thirteenth-century West.<sup>126</sup>

Saffrey describes how philosophical paganism continues in the Christianised Ancient World:

Thus, when the Christian Emperors forbade the pagan cults, shut the temples and carried away the cultic statues in order to transform them into decorations in their palaces and gardens, pagan prayer and liturgy became interior prayer and domestic liturgy, best of all, philosophical activity itself, by its own proper aim, is worship rendered to the gods.<sup>127</sup>

The future mediaeval forms unifying philosophy and religion are inaugurated and anticipated in the Academy under Proclus:

Proclus, Saffrey writes, organised the studious life as a kind of monastic life, . . . the program of study as part of a true life of contemplation and prayer; it was he who viewed the philosophy of Plato as a “mystagogy,” as an “initiation into the holy mysteries themselves . . . installed, for eternity, in the home of the gods on High.” . . . That is why . . . the spirituality of Proclus heralds the spirit of mediaeval philosophy.<sup>128</sup>

Nor did the process stop in the thirteenth century. In his “Bringing the Theological Traditions into Accord: a Characteristic of Athenian Neoplatonism,” Saffrey carries us to the great Christian Neoplatonists and Peripatetics of the Renaissance, Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, writing:

Ficino himself sought the “Concord of the philosophers” in a return to the *Prisca Theologia*. Further still, Pico della Mirandola and his disciples . . . composed the *De Concordia mundi totius* and *De perenni philosophia*, two themes tied to the Italian Renaissance, which enabled them to inscribe in works of art their hope for and their cult of perfect Concord.<sup>129</sup>

Saffrey has transformed the Proclean system from being the end product of the degeneration of Hellenic philosophy to being a great renovation which above all enabled its unity of reason and religion to conquer the future. Defying the purple prose of Hegel echoed by many, Alain Segonds has reminded us that, far from having lost confidence in their religious and philosophical heritage and surrendering to Christianity, the Neoplatonists remained confident that the civilized culture, inclusive truth, and rich spiritual life of pagan Hellenism would return once the currently ascendant novelties of a narrow barbarism had had their day.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Saffrey 1997:339.

<sup>127</sup> Saffrey 1997:336.

<sup>128</sup> Saffrey 1989 in Armstrong 1989:264.

<sup>129</sup> Saffrey 1992:49-50.

<sup>130</sup> Segonds 2000:xix–xxi. See Hegel 1967:753.

*B. Jean Trouillard, Apophasis in Contemporary French Philosophy, and the Conversions of A.H. Armstrong*

Were we to give anything close to a complete account of the re-evaluation of the thought of late antiquity in the second half of the twentieth century which eventually affected the English intellectual world, we would have to deal with the work of four priest scholars: Henry Duméry, (1920-), Joseph Combès, (1920-) the great editor of Damascius, the Sulpicien Jean Trouillard (1907–1984), and the Passionist Stanislas Breton (1912-2005) who has described the other three as “la triade néo-platonicienne de France” developing a “radicalisme néoplatonicien.”<sup>131</sup> Breton might well have made French Neoplatonism a quaternity by placing himself among them. All four both contributed substantially to Neoplatonic scholarship and developed thoroughly Neoplatonic mentalities and approaches to life. In each case it was the later Neoplatonists, especially Proclus and Damascius in contradistinction from Plotinus, who inspired their creativity and enabled Neoplatonism to have a considerable effect on the development of postmodern thought in France through figures like Louis Althusser (1918-1990), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Michel Henry (1922-2003), and Jean-Luc Marion (1946-). To tell their stories would however take us far further than the compass of this paper allows, both because of the constraints of space and because we would need to enter the most difficult doctrines of the Neoplatonists and the most demanding questions in contemporary philosophy. We must content ourselves with enough about Jean Trouillard to understand his role in seducing A.H. Armstrong away from his judgments derived from Dodds.

With Trouillard, we arrive at Neoplatonism developed within an essentially postmodern position. Trouillard was the first to undertake a philosophical and theological revolution by means of henology, i.e. a system in which the first principle is designated by “one” rather than “being.” The Neoplatonisms of the religions of the Book (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have in general been ontologies, in the sense of metaphysics of pure being, rather than henologies. In contrast, the radical redevelopment of pagan henology is central to French Platonism in our time. Trouillard’s Proclean henology is retrieved as an alternative to what he regards as the Hegelian conclusion of the Augustinian following of Plotinus, because for him, as for his companions, the problem with our civilization lies not where Dodds put it, but where Heidegger located it, i.e. in the all-encompassing reason and will which reduced both God and being to objects (onto-theology).

Trouillard discovered a danger in the trinitarian speculations of Augustine. The Augustinian center in Western thought did not adequately protect difference, otherness, and transcendence. For Trouillard, in seeking to found self-reflexive subjectivity in God, the Augustinian tradition projects the finite on to the infinite. As he wrote, Augustine’s trinitarian speculations:

reduplicate the distinctions inherent in created spirit under the pretext of founding them in the Absolute. One of the weaknesses of the Augustinian tradition is to have remained within this side of the Plotinian exegesis of the *Parmenides* and not to have understood that in this the requirements of criticism and the necessities of religious life converge in order to liberate Transcendence from all that would draw it back within the Intelligible. Outside of this we would perpetually risk the *quiproquo*, as it

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<sup>131</sup> Breton 1992:31&152–153.

results in the Hegelian dialectic where no one is able to say if this is of God or this is of man and which plays upon this ambiguity.<sup>132</sup>

Against Augustinian reduplication of human subjectivity in the divine, Trouillard would have us reflect on the power of negation, the indeterminate, and absence. In a move which reminds us of a postmodern deconstruction, Trouillard writes that the Platonic tradition brings before us “the infinity of absence which all presence implies, more exactly the positivity and efficacy of this absence.”<sup>133</sup> He goes on: “If then the normative dominates presence and absence both, if it commands both possession and privation, the name Being [*Être*] seems badly chosen to designate it. The normative is beyond ontology [une hyperontologie].”<sup>134</sup>

Trouillard’s henological Neoplatonism comes with his discovery of the virtues of Proclus in comparison with Plotinus. He perceived that the universe was united in very different ways for Plotinus and Proclus. For Proclus, the One was present and powerful throughout the whole, even in the material. In consequence, the very last effect Trouillard would ascribe to Proclean philosophy is “the progressive withdrawal of divinity from the material world” of which Dodds speaks, a notion which is equally at odds with Iamblichan theurgy.<sup>135</sup> After noting the “well known divergence . . .” between “the rationalists . . . Plotinus and Porphyry on the one hand” and “Iamblicus, Syrianus, Nestorius, Proclus, who grant the first place to the *Chaldean Oracles* and theurgy, on the other,” Trouillard writes that, whereas Plotinus proceeds by negation, “Proclus shows rather a will for transfiguration. His universe . . . is traversed by a series of vertical lines, which like rays diverge from the same universal center and refer back to it the furthest and the most diverse appearances. . . . The sensible is thus susceptible to a transposition and a purification which announces and perhaps prepares for the intelligible expanse of the Cartesians.”<sup>136</sup> The subsequent philosophical heirs of the Neoplatonic revival in France will all choose this Proclean way as opposed to the Plotinian way, as the two are represented by Trouillard.

English Neoplatonic scholarship arrives at philosophical judgments moving in the same direction as French developments, as A.H. Armstrong’s insistence on negative theology, and his growing appreciation for post-Plotinian Neoplatonism after he came under the influence of Jean Trouillard, show.

As with Dodds, Festugière, and Trouillard, Armstrong’s relation to Neoplatonism was deeply implicated in his personal intellectual, spiritual, and religious quests.<sup>137</sup> Armstrong’s final position differed from that of Dodds, though they were originally closer than they came to be. He was with Dodds in opposing an explanation of Plotinus by means of an Oriental influence. His first article, “Plotinus and India” (1936), is a criticism of Bréhier’s *La philosophie de Plotin*. Armstrong rejects both Bréhier’s characterization of Plotinian mysticism and his hypothesis as to its Indian origin.<sup>138</sup>

Armstrong understood that Dodds “disliked” the Proclus whom he explicated so successfully.<sup>139</sup> In his early writings Armstrong partakes in these negative evaluations of later

<sup>132</sup> Trouillard 1961:24. For a relevant comparison of Hegel and Plotinus by Dodds, see Dodds 1923:19.

<sup>133</sup> Trouillard 1961:27.

<sup>134</sup> Trouillard 1961:28.

<sup>135</sup> Dodds 1965:37.

<sup>136</sup> Trouillard 1965:23-25.

<sup>137</sup> For Armstrong’s intellectual and spiritual biography, see Bergman 2002.

<sup>138</sup> Armstrong 1936 in Armstrong 1979:I.22; see Todd 2005b 154n74.

<sup>139</sup> Armstrong 1987 in Armstrong 1990:II.180.

Neoplatonism. For him, as with Dodds, Plotinus was a mystic; both agreed that, in contrast to his successors, this involved real inward intellectual experience.<sup>140</sup> For Armstrong the systems of the successors were abstract conceptual reflections parasitic on what Plotinus had actually known. Armstrong's first strong presentation of the apophatic and henological Plotinus, "The Escape of the One: An Investigation of Some Possibilities of Apophatic Theology Imperfectly Realised in the West," was not delivered until 1971.<sup>141</sup> The published article is set under a quotation of Jean Trouillard and quotes him at length. He records his debt to Trouillard most extensively in "The Hidden and Open in Hellenic Thought" (1985)<sup>142</sup> and again in "Iamblichus and Egypt," (1987) where he appears as a leader in the re-evaluation of theurgy.

The late emphasis on the apophatic by Armstrong came because Trouillard had shown him how "the last Hellenic Platonists" could explain and provide a way through our present religious crisis. According to Armstrong, in his contribution to a Trouillard festschrift published in 1981, Trouillard:

has tried to show that they can speak to our condition, and do something to illuminate the religious and philosophical perplexities of our own time. . . . What seems to me to have been happening for a very long time, but to have become particularly apparent recently, is the progressive breakdown of any and every sort of "absolutism." By "absolutism" I mean the making of absolute claims for forms of words and ways of thinking about God as timelessly and universally true . . .<sup>143</sup>

The re-evaluation of theurgy was, however, more difficult for Armstrong and the English generally. Since Dean Inge (1860-1954), English Neoplatonism has not been clerical, and Inge's Neoplatonism was Plotinian, Christian, Augustinian, and intellectual.<sup>144</sup> He set the general tone, and the English have generally preferred Plotinus to his successors.<sup>145</sup> Armstrong was strongly anti-clerical. He was willing "to grant more importance to material symbols, rites, and sacraments on the way to God than the pure intellectualism of Plotinus, or Porphyry . . . would allow."<sup>146</sup> Theurgy, however, implied something more: "The gods in Iamblichus are external to and far above the natural universe and the human *psyche*. . . . They intervene from above, and select the material means by which they deign to lead us to them in ways beyond our understanding." In consequence theurgy is not only exempt from philosophical examination but also involves uncritical submission to the "*magisterium* of the theurgist" to a "privileged group of human beings."<sup>147</sup> This Armstrong found profoundly objectionable. He was only able to accommodate himself to Iamblichus to the extent that in the intellectual mysticism of Plotinus, on one side, and in the return to cult of Iamblichus, on the other side, he could find "a mutual recognition of those two ways to God, without domination or exclusion of either." Significantly, because it represents a profound shift in his position, Armstrong's standard for this mutual recognition was "Indian teaching about and

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<sup>140</sup> See the remarks of Dodds in Dodds 1960:22–23.

<sup>141</sup> See Armstrong 1971.

<sup>142</sup> Armstrong 1985 in Armstrong 1990:V.101–6.

<sup>143</sup> Armstrong 1981b in Armstrong 1990:VII.47.

<sup>144</sup> See Harris 2002b.

<sup>145</sup> For the shift see Blumental, H.J. & Clark, E.G. 1993.

<sup>146</sup> Armstrong 1987 in Armstrong 1990:II.186.

<sup>147</sup> Armstrong 1987 in Armstrong 1990:II.187.

practice of the Yogas.”<sup>148</sup> Armstrong was not willing to allow apophatic theology and theurgy to lead him back to a Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchical Church either in an Eastern Orthodox or in a Roman Catholic form. He had grown increasingly to think that the Christian traditions generally, and the Latin tradition in particular, had eliminated the skeptical and apophatic, and hence the tolerant aspect of Neoplatonism. Having converted to Catholicism from Anglicanism in the 1930s, he returned to Anglicanism by way of polytheism at the end of his life.<sup>149</sup>

As he testified, it was to Trouillard, Saffrey, and Hadot that Armstrong owed much of his more positive attitude to theurgy. In fact Hadot breaks through the whole problematic in which these questions are set by connecting the so-called anxiety and irrationality of late antiquity and its solutions to the growth of individuality. He admits “une certaine tonalité affective commune” characterising Christians and pagans. However, there has been a problem in how historians account for this:

In order to define this psychological phenomenon, certain historians have spoken, with a degree of exaggeration, of “nervous depression,” others, of a crisis of “anxiety”; nearly all have deplored the “decline of rationalism” which manifested itself in this period. It is not perhaps exact to consider this vast transformation as a morbid phenomenon. It is true that there was a psychological crisis, but it was provoked by a phenomenon eminently positive: our taking consciousness of the “ego,” the discovery of the value of individual destiny. The philosophical schools, at first the Epicureans and the Stoics, then the Neoplatonists, give an increasing importance to the responsibility of the moral conscience and the effort for spiritual perfection. All the great metaphysical problems, the enigma of the cosmos, the origin and the end of the human, the existence of evil, and the fact of liberty, are posed in relation to the question of the destiny of the individual.<sup>150</sup>

Such a re-evaluation was certainly not only the result of a more exact and objective empiricism, what Armstrong called “a more careful reading of more easily accessible texts” and of “a detached scholarly interest inspired by the fascinating philosophical oddity of the doctrines being studied.”<sup>151</sup> Armstrong never faced the philosophical problems involved either in his division between the mystical and the reflective in Neoplatonism or in his turn to the apophatic. Moreover, despite his concern with contemporary religion, Armstrong had no interest in or patience for Heidegger and the deeper questions of contemporary philosophy, and he remained outside the philosophical problematic which enabled the French re-evaluation, the same is of course true of Eric Dodds.

Nonetheless, it is clearly Dodds as well as Festugière and others whom Hadot is criticising. As against the judgment that there was a degeneration of antique culture arising from the fear of responsibility, Hadot is pointing to the fact that this is the great period of the deepening of subjectivity, the development of individual self-consciousness, of the sense of moral responsibility, and of the importance of the spiritual itinerarium of the individual. I do not think that Hadot’s assertions can be denied. When we add to this that late antiquity and the early Middle Ages saw the encounter of all the religions of the Book with Hellenism

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<sup>148</sup> Armstrong 1987 in Armstrong 1990:II.188. See Armstrong 1986 in Armstrong 1990:IV.50.

<sup>149</sup> See Armstrong 1981.

<sup>150</sup> Hadot 1972b:346–347.

<sup>151</sup> Armstrong 1987 in Armstrong 1990:II.81&184.

and with one another, encounters of the greatest relevance to the most pressing questions of our time, and that in later Neoplatonism the most innovative contemporary philosophers discover the basis for the radical questions and answers they put to modernity, we may find some reason to claim the period for Classical Studies, and to recognise the great contribution Eric Dodds made to Classics with his edition of the *Elements of Theology*.

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