

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF NEOPLATONISM IN FRANCE: A BRIEF PHILOSOPHICAL  
HISTORY

by  
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in

*Levinas and the Greek Heritage*, by Jean-Marc Narbonne (pages 1-96), followed by *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*, by Wayne Hankey (pages 97-248), *Studies in Philosophical Theology* (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006) ISBN-10 90-429-1766-0 & ISBN-13 9789042917668.

Preface to the English Edition, Acknowledgements, and Dedication

This essay has its origins more than twenty-five years ago, when I was working on what would become my *God in Himself*, a study of Aquinas' doctrine of God. I desired to understand the reasons for a reversal I was discovering, one which enabled my particular treatment of St Thomas. It had become apparent to me that the "Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy" had largely given way within the French Catholic Church to more Platonic forms of philosophy, theology, and spirituality and that Aquinas had now been relocated within these. My quest spanning decades has been assisted by many who have passed, we may hope, to a far better reward than words of mine can bestow. I remember them all with joy and gratitude, but a memorial of one must be erected here: the *sine qua non* of my life in Paris was the never failing hospitality, friendship, learning, and the enthusiasm for the inquiry of which this book is the fruit of Bruno Charles Neveu. That he died while *Cent ans* was in press and was not able to see it added to my sorrow at his departure, a grief shared by the enormous flock of the scholars whom he supported and promoted so generously. To his memory this volume is piously dedicated.

Of those who remain the first who must be thanked is Père Louis Bataillon, o.p. who set me off in the right direction in 1978 by sending me to Père Henry-Dominique Saffrey, o.p. without whom I would have gotten nothing right and whose generosity has always answered every request for help. Père Ghislain Lafont, o.s.b., along with my *Doktorvater* at Oxford, the Reverend Professor Ian Macquarrie, first showed me the connection between the Neoplatonic revival and the influence of Heidegger. Three from my Oxford days and another from a more recent time at Cambridge provided essential encouragement by understanding and supporting my work: the Reverend Professor Sir Henry Chadwick, the Reverend Professor Andrew Louth, and Dr Douglas Hedley. To Douglas, Jean-Marc Narbonne and I also owe the reception of this volume in the series he co-edits.

The wisdom and friendship of Olivier Boulnois, Philippe Hoffmann, Alain de Libera, Marc Fumaroli, Christian Trottmann, Rudi Imbach, Zbigniew Janowski, and the Reverend Canon Édouard Jeuneau have been given with an abundance which demands recognition. Special thanks is owed to Jean-Luc Marion whose generous support has not ceased even when we disagreed; his intellectual charity has been excessive. The librarians of the old Bibliothèque Nationale, Études augustiniennes, le Saulchoir, and l'Institut Catholique de Paris, Boston College, Harvard University, and the University of King's College have combined expertise with patience and compensated for the inadequacy of my research methods. The remarkable collections both in Neoplatonism and in French philosophy and theology gathered by the librarians at Dalhousie University and by the Jesuits at St Mary's University in Halifax in the days before books succumbed to computers and librarians to Anglophone narrowness enabled research at home in Nova Scotia for which future scholars will be forced to go elsewhere.

Salvatore Lilla, Cristina D'Ancona-Costa, Giovanni Catapano, and Father Robert Dodaro, o.s.a., have maintained Italy as a *cornucopia* of help for my work. From universities in the United States, Lewis Ayers and Kevin Corrigan at Emory, the Reverend Professors Denis Bradley and Paul Rorem at Georgetown and Princeton respectively, John Inglis at Dayton, Gregory Shaw at Stonehill, Eric Perl and Brad Stone at Loyola Marymount, and Eileen Sweeney and Stephen Brown at Boston College have provided ever profitable exchanges, even when they became heated. The Department of the Classics at Harvard helped me turn *Cent ans* into English by appointing me as a Visiting Scholar and opening the

rich resources of Harvard; I am particularly grateful to Professor Albert Henrichs for his hospitality.

Christopher Elson, Ian Stewart, Eli Diamond, and Stephen Blackwood made Halifax a place where those for whom a connection with French intellectual life is a necessity can be at home. They would want to join me in hearty thanks to Louis-André Dorion, Georges Leroux, and Jean-Marc Narbonne for their unquenchable generosity and ever-open welcome which has turned Québec into a second home for us. I cannot imagine a better collaborator than Jean-Marc; to him and to Martin Achard I am indebted not only for the translation of my essay into French but also for forcing me both to complete it and to make myself clearer than I would otherwise have been. Eli Diamond read through all my French translations and made many corrections for which I am grateful. For the faults which remain I alone am responsible.

When producing this English version of my essay, I have taken the opportunity to correct some small errors I have discovered in *Cent ans*, especially in the footnotes, and to clarify its argument by small expansions, but I have not changed the character of the work. It was not conceived as a complete survey of Neoplatonic scholarship, philosophy, or spirituality in twentieth-century France. Rather my aim is to trace a line of connections which constitute both a series of interactions between intellectuals and a development in which a general character keeps reappearing. The fecundity of the Neoplatonic rebirth in twentieth-century France means that my “brief philosophical history” does not—and could not while remaining brief—include all the contributors and all the perspectives and interests which moved it.

Where they exist and I have been able to find them, I have used published English translations of the works quoted in French in *Cent ans*—with occasional silent corrections—otherwise the translations are my own. Two reasons moved me to use the published translations. First, in many cases, they are “authorised translations” and have the authority of their French authors. Second, I aim to help readers who wish to explore further the authors I treat by providing access to a bibliography in English.

## INTRODUCTION

As is appropriate to a movement which seeks union with the simple divine Goodness to which no language or thought is adequate, but which is more powerfully the cause than anything directly manifest, the retrieval of Neoplatonism in twentieth-century French philosophy, theology, and spiritual life is powerfully, widely, and significantly present, but little recognised. This movement in French thought and religion has important sources and connections outside the French world—leading examples include Hegel, Schelling, Eric R. Dodds, Martin Heidegger, A. Hilary Armstrong, and Werner Beierwaltes. Nonetheless, central directions of contemporary French intellectual and religious life are at work here—we may mention the endeavours to get beyond modernity and the metaphysics believed to belong to it, on the one hand, and beyond Neothomism, which was a reaction against the same, on the other.<sup>1</sup>

One notable exception to the neglect by scholars of the rôle played by Neoplatonism in contemporary philosophy is the “Liminaire” by Alain Ph. Segonds to a volume celebrating the completion at the end of the last century of one of the greatest products of French Neoplatonic scholarship in our time: the new edition, translation, and annotation of *The Platonic Theology* of Proclus, jointly the work of a French scholar, Henri-Dominique Saffrey, and a Dutch scholar teaching in the United States, Leendert Gerritt Westerink. Segonds’ introduction gives a remarkable thumbnail sketch both of how the Neoplatonic works have come down to us and of the philosophical interest which prevented “the Neoplatonic authors—and particularly Proclus—from becoming simple curiosities, before being shelved in the museum of the horrors of human reason.”<sup>2</sup> In the course of his sketch Segonds notes that, in contrast to Germany, where editions of Neoplatonic texts appeared as part of the great work of Classical philology, “in France, philology has very great difficulties in constituting itself as a scientific discipline.”<sup>3</sup> Still, France has made a contribution, unequalled elsewhere in the twentieth century, to the edition and translation of the Neoplatonic texts, as well as to the revitalization of their ideas and spiritualities. In respect to the latter, Segonds writes:

It is necessary above all to pick out the influence of H. Bergson, who, in his celebrated course of lectures at the Collège de France, revealed Plotinus to the public, and stamped his imprint for a long time on the French interpretation of this author, who was very attached to the idea of personal experience.<sup>4</sup>

One of the leading figures in the French retrieval of Neoplatonism, Pierre Hadot, when considering “the importance which the Neoplatonic movement assumed in the formation of modern thought,” refers, among others, to Hegel and Schelling and concludes by noting: “the importance of the rôle which Plotinus has played in the formation of the philosophy of Bergson; even the thought of Heidegger does not remain independent of this strong current.”<sup>5</sup> We must refer to the other figures Hadot named, but, in looking at the

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<sup>1</sup> For earlier treatments of what is moving in contemporary French Neoplatonism see W.J. Hankey, “The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism,” idem, “Le Rôle du néoplatonisme,” idem, “Neoplatonism and Contemporary Constructions,” idem, “Why Heidegger’s ‘History’ of Metaphysics is Dead.”

<sup>2</sup> A.Ph. Segonds, “Liminaire,” xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>5</sup> P. Hadot, “Introduction,” *Le Néoplatonisme*, 2.

French retrieval of Neoplatonism in the twentieth century, we have good reason to begin with Bergson. As we shall see, that retrieval has two major characteristics: it is generally opposed to the Western metaphysical tradition insofar as this is understood to determine modernity, and it is also generally anti-Idealist, endeavouring to link the sensuous and corporeal immediately with the first Principle. This second characteristic sets the twentieth-century retrieval in opposition to that in the nineteenth century, and even to ancient and medieval Neoplatonism generally. Hegel is central to the philosophical interest in Neoplatonism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but this interest declines with the later return to Kant.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, Bergson is connected positively and negatively both to the metaphysical tradition and to the German Idealist appropriation of Platonism. In his philosophy, some of the characteristics of the anti-intellectualist and anti-Hegelian Neoplatonism which will dominate in twentieth-century French Neoplatonism are established.

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<sup>6</sup> Segonds, "Liminaire," xi.

## HENRI BERGSON: THE END IS IN THE BEGINNING

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was particularly and almost uniquely attached to Plotinus among previous philosophers. Émile Bréhier, remembering his lectures at the Collège de France, commented:

Plotinus is one the very rare philosophers with whom Bergson felt an affinity which bridged the centuries; and, he always affirmed that sympathy—not, it is true, without reserve....I do not speak only of the outstanding gift he had for clarifying the most difficult texts of Plotinus, but above all of the easy familiarity with which he treated him, as if he recognized himself in Plotinus.<sup>7</sup>

As Bréhier indicates, the sympathy was not unconditional. A profoundly ambiguous evaluation and a reshaping around his own interests and views are present both in what few records we have of Bergson's course of lectures on Plotinus and in his published works.<sup>8</sup> Bergson found in Plotinus not only a "dynamic schema"<sup>9</sup> which corresponded to his own understanding of reality, but also what for him comprised the most fundamental error of the metaphysical tradition, viz. the ignorance of the difference between intellect and the fluidity of reality. This ignorance had the momentous consequence for Bergson that life and movement are misrepresented in the stability which intellect gives to its objects and seeks as its goal.

Bergson judged that the metaphysics of most ancients and moderns was bogged down in contradictions:

Metaphysics dates from the day when Zeno of Elea pointed out the inherent contradictions of movement and change, as our intellect represents them. To surmount these difficulties raised by the intellectual representation of movement and change, to get around them by an increasingly subtle intellectual labour, required the principal effort of ancient and modern philosophers. It is thus that metaphysics was led to seek the reality of things above time, beyond what moves and what changes, and consequently outside what our senses and consciousness perceive. As a result it could be nothing but a more or less artificial arrangement of concepts, a hypothetical construction. It claimed to go beyond experience; what it did in reality was merely to take a full and mobile experience, lending itself to a probing ever-deepening and as a result pregnant with revelations—and to substitute for it a fixed extract, desiccated and empty, a system of abstract general ideas, drawn from that very experience or rather from its superficial strata.<sup>10</sup>

Plotinus is not free from this fundamental problem with the old metaphysics. Indeed, Bergson places him at the conclusion of the intellectualism of Greek philosophy established by Plato and Aristotle. He describes the error of the philosophers of Antiquity thus:

<sup>7</sup> É. Bréhier, "Images plotiniennes," 107–8.

<sup>8</sup> For a "report" and critical analysis of "a private seminar," see M. de Gandillac, "Le Plotin de Bergson."

<sup>9</sup> R.-M. Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, 8; see 2–9 for the ambiguity in Bergson's citations of Plotinus.

<sup>10</sup> H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 16–17; see 166–167. See also Bergson's course at Lycée Henri IV, idem, *Cours*, i, 213–218, and the course at the Collège de France, idem, *Mélanges*, 716–717.

It consisted in adopting the belief so natural to the human mind, that a variation can only express and develop invariabilities. The result of this was that Action was a weakened Contemplation, duration a false, deceptive, and mobile image of immobile eternity, the Soul a fall of the Idea. The whole of that philosophy which begins with Plato and ends with Plotinus is the development of a principle that we should formulate thus: “There is more in the immutable than in the moving, and one passes from the stable to the unstable by a simple diminution.” Now the contrary is the truth.<sup>11</sup>

None of the Greek philosophers expressed the opposition of speculation and action more forcefully than Plotinus:

“All action,” he said (and even added “all fabrication”) “weakens contemplation.” And faithful to the spirit of Plato, he thought that the discovery of truth demanded a conversion of the mind, which breaks away from the appearances here below and attaches itself to the realities above: “Let us flee to our beloved homeland!”—But, as you see, it was a question of “fleeing.” More precisely, for Plato and all those who understood metaphysics in that way, breaking away from life and correcting one’s attention consisted in transporting oneself immediately into a world different from the one we inhabit, in developing other faculties of perception from the senses and consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

In this mistake Kant shared, but, finding that intellectual intuition—the Plotinian vision of reality in itself necessary to metaphysics—did not exist, Kant decided that metaphysics itself was impossible.

We shall not be surprised that Bergson criticises the Plotinian turning of the soul by means of intellectual vision toward what he regards as the abstract universal; he called instead for “the extension and revivification of our faculty of perceiving.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, Bergson has problems with the mystical side of the Plotinian system

That there is a kind of mysticism in Plotinus, Bergson does not deny:

[I]he doctrine in which the movement [of Greek philosophy] culminated, and which brought Greek thought to a climax, claimed to transcend pure reason. There is no doubt that the Dionysiac frenzy was continued into Orphism, and that Orphism went on into Pythagoreanism: well, it is to this latter, perhaps even to the former, that the primary inspiration of Platonism goes back.... True, no influence of this kind is noticeable in Aristotle and his immediate successors; but the philosophy of Plotinus, in which the development culminates, and which owes as much to Aristotle as it does to Plato, is unquestionably mystic.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the religious and mystical is an element within the Greek philosophical tradition, and, as a result, whether or not his mysticism in fact owes something to the Orient, Bergson

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 227–228.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 163–164.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>14</sup> H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality*, 208.

judges that Plotinus thought himself to be “merely condensing all Greek philosophy.”<sup>15</sup> Bergson’s ultimate question is whether this final stage of Greek philosophy could in principle reach and does in fact attain a complete mysticism.

The final end of mysticism Bergson specified as “the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God himself.”<sup>16</sup> In consequence the mystic transcends the conditions which materiality imposes on humanity and continues and extends the divine action. True or complete mysticism is very rare and would be action, creation, and love. Where does Plotinus stand in respect to mysticism so understood? Bergson situates him by means of a comparison with Moses at the end of his life:

As regards Plotinus, there is no doubt about the answer. It was granted to him to look upon the promised land, but not to set foot upon its soil. He went as far as ecstasy, a state in which the soul feels itself, or thinks it feels itself, in the presence of God, being irradiated with His light; he did not get beyond this last stage, he did not reach the point where, as contemplation is engulfed in action, the human will becomes one with the divine will. He thought he had reached the summit: in his eyes, to go further would have meant to go downhill. This is what he expressed in language of rare beauty, yet which is not the language of thoroughgoing mysticism. “Action,” he said, “is a weakening of contemplation” [*Ennead* 3.8.4]. Therein he remains faithful to Greek intellectualism, he even sums it up in a striking formula.<sup>17</sup>

Despite “impregnating” Greek intellectualism with mysticism, Plotinus was unable to overcome the limits the Hellenic tradition sets on experience; thus Bergson arrives at this final judgment: “In short, mysticism, in the absolute sense in which we have agreed to take the word, was never attained by Greek thought.”<sup>18</sup>

In consequence, both the Plotinian ascent to the intellectual, and what Plotinus represents as beyond it, suffer from the fundamental problem of Hellenic metaphysics and its heirs. What then does Bergson love in Plotinus?

In fact, Bergson prizes not the goals which he supposes that Plotinus seeks but rather: 1) a mystical ecstasy which he judges Plotinus to have only partially attained, 2) the harmonious self-moving and self-explicating life of Soul, which Plotinus takes from Stoicism and which, significantly, lies at the bottom of the spiritual hierarchy as he represents it, and 3) despite his privileging of intellectual vision, the Plotinian attention to the experience of the individual soul.<sup>19</sup> In other words, he reverses Plotinus, placing him firmly on his feet in the experience of embodied life. In respect to mysticism, Bergson seeks to remove the intellectual mediation, the *Nous* which is essential both to the way up and to the way down in Plotinus. Bergson wants to join immediately the bottom to the top, i.e. he connects the moving vital to a creative energy which is a pure love beyond what he conceives as the fixity of the intellectualised One of Plotinus.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> See Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, 3–9; Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson*, 82.

In the relation of life to thought, the intellectual is not for Bergson, as it was for Plotinus, the realm of perfect actuality, the always-complete motionless activity which the vitality of soul imitates weakly. Instead, for Bergson, inverting the locus of strength within the schema, intellectual effort shares the character of psychic life. He constructs a parallel between the intellectual and the vital and seeks to understand how the material emerges from the immaterial, as Plotinus also does. However, whereas for Plotinus soul is an image of *Nous* which reigns over it, Bergson manifests the character of intellect by referring to the moving vital. The vital is the paradigmatic and normative. He speaks of something intermediate “between impulsion and attraction, between the efficient and the final cause.” There Bergson finds:

a form of activity from which philosophers have drawn, by way of impoverishment and disassociation, in passing to the two opposite and extreme limits, the idea of efficient cause on the one hand and of final cause on the other. This operation, which is the very operation of life, consists in the gradual passage from the less realized to the more realized, from the intensive to the extensive, from a reciprocal implication of parts to their juxtaposition. Intellectual effort is something of this kind. In analysing it, I have pressed as far as I could, on the simplest and at the same time the most abstract example, the growing materialization of the immaterial which is characteristic of vital activity.<sup>20</sup>

In the Plotinian conceptions of individual soul, of World Soul, of *logos* and of procession, Bergson finds fundamentals of his own understandings. Rose-Marie Mossé-Bastide shows that Bergson accepts: “the Platonic idea of a Soul of the World, explaining by its descent into the sensible universe the harmony of the whole.”<sup>21</sup> Such a notion of soul is close to that of a self-explicating *logos*: “The intellectual creation is, in effect, presented there as the progressive realization of a plan of the whole, called the ‘dynamic schema’.”<sup>22</sup> In consequence there is an exact parallel between intellectual and vital creativity: “Life and thought are thus always, and conformably to the Plotinian schema of ‘procession,’ a passage from unity to multiplicity.”<sup>23</sup> Bergson places this aspect of Plotinus against what in his thought is characteristic of intellectualist metaphysics: objectification and the reduction of the moving to the static.

In common with those who succeed him in a turn to Neoplatonism, Bergson wishes to rescue both the world and the self from these rational objectifications and reductions. Like those leaders of the French Phenomenological tradition who, later in this century, stand within this turn to Neoplatonism, Bergson attacks traditional metaphysics and attributes the problem pervading its history to the self-closure of a subjectivity caught in its own intellectualist objectifications. Equally in common with them, the escape involves both the anti-intellectualist elevation of the One and Good and a voluntarism. Freeing the subject from the absoluteness of the subject-object dialectic of *Nous* will enable recovering the philosophical conditions of an “integral experience,” experience which is genuinely open to

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<sup>20</sup> H. Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, 230.

<sup>21</sup> Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

what is other. At this point, Bergson anticipates later developments which will also judge Plotinus to have been too intellectualist.

Significantly for the relation of Bergson's thought to the past rather than to the future, in treating what he finds attractive in Plotinus, he makes reference to Félix Ravaisson (1813-1900). While considering "The geometric order inherent in matter," and reflecting on the harmony present in the division of elements, Bergson writes in a note:

Our comparison does no more than develop the content of the term *logos*, as Plotinus understands it. For while the *logos* of this philosopher is a generating and informing power, an aspect or a fragment of the *psyche*, on the other hand Plotinus sometimes speaks of it as a *discourse*. More generally, the relation that we establish...between "extension" and "detension" resembles in some aspects that which Plotinus supposes (some developments of which must have inspired M. Ravaisson) when he makes extension not indeed an inversion of original Being, but an enfeeblement of its essence, one of the last stages of the procession.<sup>24</sup>

However, discerning how Bergson understands those thinkers with whom he associates his ideas—while difficult enough—is easier than discriminating the difference between their own positions and what he takes from them. Dominique Janicaud (1937-2002) notes misrepresentations of Ravaisson by Bergson in this passage and significant differences between Bergson himself, Ravaisson, and Plotinus. Janicaud judges that Ravaisson's Christianity is not taken into account by Bergson, and that Ravaisson does not identify the vital and the divine. There is a somewhat paradoxical result:

The humiliation of the Divine is never envisaged by Ravaisson as a return to its essence, neither is its condescension a self-conversion. It is true that Ravaisson is inspired by Plotinus, but more literally than Bergson.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, we can situate Bergson's Neoplatonism within the French attenuated following of Schelling mediated to him via Victor Cousin (1792-1867), who edited Proclus and translated Plato, and especially via Ravaisson. To Ravaisson Bergson devoted an essay full of praise, even if he may be convicted of misunderstandings and self-serving misrepresentations.<sup>26</sup> Connecting Bergson to Ravaisson brings us to another figure essential to the beginning and the end of the history we are tracing, Maine de Biran (1766-1824), whom Victor Cousin declared: "the greatest metaphysician who had honoured France since Malebranche."<sup>27</sup> From him Cousin learned the omnipresence of will in knowing.

Ravaisson had worked out his own philosophy in relation to de Biran, who also intruded directly into Bergson's connection to past philosophy. Dominique Janicaud judged that de Biran "may perhaps be considered as the first authentic 'spiritual positivist' and to have been recognised as such by Ravaisson as also definitely by Bergson."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Bergson linked the two with Plotinus in counting up his philosophical obligations: "I am certain," he

<sup>24</sup> H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 230, note 1. Bergson refers us to *Enneads* 4.3.9–10 & 3.6.17–18.

<sup>25</sup> D. Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 65.

<sup>26</sup> H. Bergson, "The Life and Work of Ravaisson"; see Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin*, 3 and Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 37–73.

<sup>27</sup> B. Halda, *La Pensée de Maine de Biran*, 5 quoting Cousin.

<sup>28</sup> Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 4.

confided to Gilbert Maire, “that I owe a profound debt to only two or three philosophers...: Plotinus, Maine de Biran, and somewhat to Ravaisson.”<sup>29</sup> Jacob Schmutz proposes that Louis Lavelle (1883-1951), who was a contemporary of Bergson and Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), belongs with the other two in “reproducing a gesture that, broadly speaking, can be described as ‘Neoplatonic,’ against the ontological and scientific type of metaphysics inherited from Aristotle and his medieval commentators.”<sup>30</sup> Lavelle noted de Biran’s sense of isolation, and, despite some important books on him which appeared in France during the 1920s and 1930s, by the second half of the twentieth century, Lavelle judged with regret that de Biran had been generally forgotten.<sup>31</sup> The neglect was reversed at the century’s end. Michel Henry (1922-2003) is a great admirer and significantly he belongs among the continuators of Neoplatonism in our time.

Henry explains de Biran’s genius, the cause of his isolation among nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophers, including Ravaisson and Bergson, thus:

The first and actually the only philosopher who, in the long history of human reflection, saw the necessity for originally determining our body as a *subjective body* is Maine de Biran, that prince of thought, who merits being regarded by us in the same way as Descartes and Husserl, as one of the true founders of a phenomenological science of human reality. How is it that this fundamental discovery of a subjective body, a discovery whose consequences...are limitless, could pass completely unnoticed, and, how is it that the meaning of the work of Maine de Biran was so rarely understood?...Biranean thought has nothing to do with introspection, with the interior life *such as it might be understood by the neo-Kantians* or with the intuition of Bergson...Isolated from philosophers who thought they were pursuing his undertaking, Maine de Biran, because of the very nature of his enterprise, was all the more cut off from the public at large.<sup>32</sup>

De Biran’s anticipation of phenomenology was also recognised in lectures given by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) in 1947-1948 and published from students notes in 1968, under the significant title: *The Incarnate Subject: Malebranche, Biran, and Bergson on the Union of Body and Soul*.<sup>33</sup>

Evidently, Maine de Biran gives in a seminal form elements of the philosophical and theological ideas which have drawn some of the most philosophically and theologically creative French minds of the twentieth century to phenomenology and Neoplatonism simultaneously, e.g. Emmanuel Lévinas, Henry Duméry, Stanislas Breton, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michel Henry. The connection of the two needs extended consideration because what is sought in Neoplatonism certainly goes beyond phenomenology as generally conceived, and, it is crucial to notice that Henry, Marion, Duméry, Breton proposed reaching beyond the Husserlean reductions. Henry, for example, is deeply critical of the adequacy of intentionality as definitive of consciousness. Douglas Brick remarks: “Henry’s effort is to demonstrate the

<sup>29</sup> G. Maire, *Bergson mon maître*, 222 as quoted in Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 6–7.

<sup>30</sup> J. Schmutz, “Escaping the Aristotelian Bond”: 171.

<sup>31</sup> L. Lavelle, *La philosophie française*, 68. On the attention to de Biran in the 1920s and 1930s, see Paul B. Milan’s Introduction to M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Incarnate Subject*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> M. Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 8–9. His fidelity to de Biran is examined in M. Lemoine, “Affectivité et auto-affectation”: 242–67 and turns on questions which also separated him and Ravaisson.

<sup>33</sup> See Milan in Merleau-Ponty, *The Incarnate Subject*, 19–21.

possible (and indeed necessary) existence of a preintentional consciousness, which he calls alternately ‘appearance,’ ‘affectivity,’ ‘life,’ etc.’<sup>34</sup> It is not accidental that the unconscious figures largely in the philosophy of Plotinus—indeed he may be the first philosopher to make it fundamental—and a notion such as “preintentional consciousness” is helpful in considering the way in which the One of Plotinus apprehends. Thus, paradoxically, if the initial attraction of Plotinus for twentieth-century French philosophy lies in his analysis of consciousness, the final and perhaps greater pull of Neoplatonism comes from its exploration of what lies beyond and under it, an exploration unparalleled in other philosophical movements.

At both ends of the twentieth century, the attempt to reopen the subjectivity which modern metaphysics is accused of closing motivates the unification of a disciplined attention to experience with crucial elements of Neoplatonism. Nonetheless, the differences between ancient Neoplatonism and its contemporary forms are also important. Returning to our consideration of the beginning of the century, what unites de Biran, Ravaisson, and Bergson illumines the points where Plotinus is not followed by “French spiritualism.” Thus we can use its connection to de Biran to help expose the character of the present retrieval of Neoplatonism. Unfortunately the nature of “French spiritualism” and the role of de Biran in it are vexed problems.

Together with de Biran, Bergson is engaged with the question of the relations between subjectivity and life, interiority and sensuality, but whether they both belong to a single “French spiritualism,” or in contrast radically divide it, remains a much-controverted question. We have seen that Michel Henry sharply opposes them. Henri Gouhier (1898-1994) also contrasts them but differently:

On one side, spirituality coincides with interiority of the vital; on the other, it defines itself by a subjectivity radically different from vitality. The Biranean anthropology inaugurates this second tradition, the position of Bergson is the full-bloom of the first.<sup>35</sup>

In another consideration, Janicaud proposes that, in seeking to remain within “interior reflection and the observation of ‘the play of the [bodily] organs,’” de Biran paradoxically divides what Ravaisson unites in seeking to “rise to the reason why.”<sup>36</sup> Ravaisson, using an argument by analogy, draws self-consciousness back to God:

The intuition within ourselves of our own liberty is the anchor of the synthetic operation by which we relate our being to its final reason and by which we understand all being starting from this reason. Once the principle is discovered, “God serves for the understanding of soul, and soul for the understanding of nature.”<sup>37</sup>

In a division of the traditions within French thought on the unity of soul and body made by Merleau-Ponty, this would place Ravaisson in the “Cartesian tradition within which the

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<sup>34</sup> D. Brick in M. Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 334.

<sup>35</sup> H. Gouhier, *Bergson et le Christ*, quoted by R. Barbaras, “Présentation”: 145.

<sup>36</sup> Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> F. Ravaisson, *De l'Habitude*, 45, quoted in Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 31; the quotation is not exact.

soul's relation to the body is clarified by its relation to God." Merleau-Ponty puts de Biran and Bergson in "the Pascalian tradition in which the soul's relation to God is clarified by its relation to the body."<sup>38</sup>

Sorting out the precise place of Bergson *vis-à-vis* de Biran, Cousin, and Ravaisson, is beyond the scope of my essay. However, it is worth noting that in them Bergson found something of what he also found in Plotinus, namely a focus on moving introspective experience in which the connection and distinction of the corporeal, the psychic, the vital, and the divine appeared. In addition, through the mediation of Ravaisson and Cousin, Bergson has an important connection with German Idealism. It is most significant, however, that he stands in the tradition of Schelling as opposed to that of Hegel. Jean-François Courtine (born 1944) connects Schelling, Cousin, Ravaisson, and K.L. Michelet (1801-1893) at the point where Schelling opposes Hegel by refusing the identification of being, thought, and God.<sup>39</sup> This anticipates a direction the French retrieval of Neoplatonism will take. Crucially, "the realism or positivism" of "French spiritualism" refers back to Schelling in a way which will divide it from Plotinus.

Hegel is known by those who mediated German Idealism to Bergson. The systematic character of his philosophy is maintained (if not the character of his system), but he is both misrepresented and rejected. Cousin had many exchanges with Hegel, but his is an "insipid Hegelianism" and he passed from him to Schelling. Janicaud judges: "We certainly find there [with Cousin] Hegelian characteristics, but it is immediately necessary to be disillusioned, because nothing is deepened, neither the concept of harmony, nor the dialectic, nor the development of reason in history."<sup>40</sup> Ravaisson had no personal relations with Hegel—his were entirely with Schelling whose lectures he attended in Munich. For him the genius of Hegel is to have understood "...the rational connections of the logical conditions which form in some way the mechanism of the intellectual world."<sup>41</sup> Hegel takes form to be reality and reduces all to logic: "According to Ravaisson, the Hegelian philosophy is a logistic formalism and an intellectualist mechanism."<sup>42</sup> In opposition to the Hegelian philosophy as thus represented, Ravaisson presents his own philosophy and that of France in his time as "a realism or a spiritualist positivism."<sup>43</sup> Ravaisson takes the side of Schelling against Hegel, saluting the:

system by whose completion Schelling has brought his glorious career to a conclusion, and of which the absolute liberty of will, in comparison with the mechanistic logic of Hegel, forms at once the foundation and the crown...<sup>44</sup>

Looking at Hegel's criticism of Schelling, Janicaud notes that it would apply also to Ravaisson:

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<sup>38</sup> Milan in Merleau-Ponty, *The Incarnate Subject*, 17.

<sup>39</sup> See J.-F. Courtine, "La critique schellingienne de l'ontothéologie," 217–57.

<sup>40</sup> D. Janicaud, "Victor Cousin": 456. For an enthusiastic presentation of Hegel as the true heir of the Neoplatonic tradition and Schleiermacher as the founder of a new Kantian Platonism in opposition to that, and thus of the anti-intellectualist French Neoplatonism of this century, see D. Hedley, "Was Schleiermacher an Idealist?"

<sup>41</sup> F. Ravaisson *La Philosophie en France*, 130–31, as quoted by Janicaud, "Victor Cousin": 458.

<sup>42</sup> Janicaud, "Victor Cousin": 459.

<sup>43</sup> Ravaisson, *La Philosophie en France*, 258.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 264, quoted by Janicaud, "Victor Cousin": 463.

In both cases, the target is the intuitionist irrationalism, that is to say, that thought which retains only from Kantianism the determination of the limits of the understanding, in order all the better to release the bridle which restrains intuition so as to hold it within the realm of the unknowable. For Hegel, indeed, “all that is real is rational,” for Ravaisson the understanding outlines only “the ideality of things” and the union between idea and being is made by an operation of which the secret is hidden to reason.<sup>45</sup>

The association of Ravaisson with Schelling at the point of their opposition to Hegel brings us to a crucial difference between Ravaisson and Plotinus which helps reveal the position of Bergson. Defining this difference requires us to bring Maine de Biran back into view.

Janicaud sees two philosophers as essential in understanding Ravaisson and Bergson: Plotinus and Maine de Biran. They are different, even opposed. Can both of them be embraced? He opines:

The first reconstitutes the world and rediscovers matter starting from the absolute summit, the Principle; the second, on the contrary starts from the most everyday experience, the collision with the obstacle of matter, in order to rise by a gradual progress to the spiritual Cause. Does this divergence correspond to a contradiction at the heart of “spiritualist positivism?”<sup>46</sup>

He judges, I think correctly, that “the influence of Plotinus on our philosophers seems less, and above all less homogenous, less identifiable, than that of Maine de Biran.”<sup>47</sup>

For Bergson, Ravaisson is an Aristotelian, who would not divorce the sensible and the intellectual, but would move instead within the sensible to the intellectual. According to Bergson, Ravaisson identified himself with Aristotle in the way that he characterised him: “the idea he puts at the bottom of Aristotelianism is the very one which inspired most of his meditations.”<sup>48</sup> As Bergson tells it, by Ravaisson’s account, Aristotle’s *modus operandi* is: “to extend the vision of the eye by a vision of the mind: without leaving the domain of intuition, that is, the intuition of things real, individual, concrete, to seek an intellectual intuition beneath the sensible intuition.”<sup>49</sup> This involves intuiting the dynamic unity “joining beings to one another.” The unity ends “in divine thought, which thinks all things in thinking itself.” The Aristotle who proceeds from inorganic matter to the divine in this way is “the founder of metaphysics and the initiator of a certain method of thinking which is philosophy itself.”<sup>50</sup> Bergson generally agrees with Ravaisson’s representation of Aristotle, but judges him as having looked

at Aristotle occasionally through the Alexandrians, themselves so highly colored with Aristotelianism. He may also perhaps have pushed a little too far, even to the point

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<sup>45</sup> Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 110.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Bergson, “The Life and Work of Ravaisson,” 266.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

of converting it into a radical opposition, the frequently light and superficial, if not to say verbal, difference separating Aristotle from Plato.<sup>51</sup>

In fact, Bergson himself reduces this difference to words only, insofar as he does not exempt Aristotle from the false intellectual fixing of the moving and vital in the old metaphysics. When Aristotle is understood as Ravaisson represents him, Bergson finds in one side of Plotinus what Ravaisson found in the Stagirite, namely the unity of “the intuition of things real, individual, concrete” with “an intellectual intuition.” Furthermore, insofar as Ravaisson seeks to hold together the intuition of a dynamic unity joining the whole with the divine self-thinking—an endeavour which causes him to prefer Plotinus to Proclus—, he turns out once more to have the same aim as Bergson.

Jean Trouillard writes correctly that in his reflections on Proclus, Ravaisson:

did not comprehend that the One was beyond activity and intelligibility itself. The mystical dimension of Neoplatonism, although fundamental to it, escapes him in the way he looks at it in the second volume of his *Essay on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*. One feels that he continues to identify the absolute with the self-thinking Thought [of Aristotle]. Moreover, he prefers Plotinus to Proclus, judging the first to be the more idealist, and within his perspective, the closer to Aristotle.<sup>52</sup>

Although, as Bergson noted, Ravaisson devotes serious study to the Neoplatonic transmission of Aristotle in his *Essay*, Ravaisson is ultimately critical of the One as compared to the Aristotelian First Principle. He convicts Platonism of: “evident contradictions, which are consequences of irremediable confusion hidden in its own first principle.” The endeavour of Platonism to escape “the primitive chaos, the prime matter” is vain:

the more Platonism does its best to separate its absolute Unity from matter, of which it is really so close a neighbour, the more its efforts have the effect of reducing the difference... It is necessary that there not be in God a vague unity equally similar to nothingness...<sup>53</sup>

These two, a God beyond thought and the material, are what Bergson would join as immediately as possible. Bergson will move beyond Ravaisson toward the mystical side of Neoplatonism and, indeed, as we have seen, in this regard he will want to push beyond Plotinus. Janicaud seems to be correct, therefore, that Ravaisson and Bergson have not a homogeneous relation to Plotinus. How do they stand to Maine de Biran?

Both Ravaisson and Bergson acknowledge a profound debt to him. Bergson’s formulation of it is most revealing. Bergson characterises the method of de Biran thus:

To concentrate the attention of philosophy on the interior life:..., to penetrate experimentally into the beyond, or at least... up to the threshold, while taking as a guide the observation of the interior.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> J. Trouillard, “Les notes de Ravaisson sur Proclus”: 75.

<sup>53</sup> F. Ravaisson, *Essai sur le métaphysique d’Aristote*, ii, 582–583.

<sup>54</sup> H. Bergson, “Rapport sur le Prix Bordin,” ii, 245.

Janicaud observes that Bergson is less ambitious than de Biran, so far as de Biran puts the “ego” and “the person of God” on the same level in describing them as “the two poles of the human person.” Nonetheless, “The method of Bergson is a close neighbour of the one which Biran maintains: it is an interior vision, an intuition, which directly reveals reality, that is to say ultimately God.”<sup>55</sup>

Bergson recognised that he, Ravaisson, and de Biran were essentially united in this method which Janicaud characterises (quoting Bergson) as: “a new empiricism, a ‘true empiricism’ as measured by an ‘integral experience’.” This “true empiricism,” Bergson tells us, is ‘the real metaphysics’.<sup>56</sup> Although Bergson will not go all the way with the “‘superior empiricisms’ of Schelling and of Ravaisson,” Janicaud seems correct in judging that “Ravaisson and Bergson, both claiming the authority of de Biran, must therefore be resituated within the common perspective of ‘spiritualist realism or positivism’.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, I think we can judge that Janicaud is also right to maintain that such an empiricism is not the introspection of Plotinus. Among other things, de Biran’s unification of the physiological and the psychological, and Bergson’s general rejection of Hellenic intellectualist metaphysics which is the corollary of the radically temporal character of his own metaphysics, his vitalism, and his refusal to turn to the intelligible as the true site of knowledge, exclude such an identification. Nonetheless, there is a parentage and many echoes reveal it.

With Schelling as against Hegel, in the way they are represented in the nineteenth-century French reception of them, Bergson criticises previous philosophy for its reduction of reality to the noetic understood as a false objectifying and fixing of both world and subject. In order to circumvent that reduction, Bergson turns to experience, to action and will, and to a mysticism, which is represented as beyond the Greek and Plotinian because, for Bergson, in mystic union contemplation and productive action are one. Plotinus is too intellectualist for Bergson and the tendency of contemporary French Neoplatonism will be to reduce the noetic. Thus its general character appears at the beginning. Because of the crucial role of Iamblichus in the French retrievals of Neoplatonism later in the twentieth century, it is significant that, although important differences remain, what Bergson seeks seems closer in several ways to Iamblichus than to Plotinus. Iamblichus elevated the Principle beyond the intelligible more securely than Plotinus had—the first is even before the One. For him, the way our soul, descended into body, must take in order to return back toward our origin embraces the corporeal; correlatively, for Iamblichus the gods include the material. The ultimate human goal is beyond philosophy as theoretical knowledge. It lies in the soul’s association with the gods, in her return to being and revolution in communion with them, in her activity before her incarnation. The soul joins in the productivity of the gods.<sup>58</sup>

In contrast, for some twentieth-century enthusiasts of Neoplatonism, Plotinus was both the inaugurator and the culmination of the movement. What followed him was a degeneration. Moreover, his virtue lay not, as with Bergson, in his subversions of Greek rationalism but in being its last constructive exponent in an irrational age. Indeed, some

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<sup>55</sup> Janicaud, *Une généalogie*, 141.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. Janicaud is quoting Bergson, “A propos des *Principes de Métaphysique et de Psychologie* de P. Janet,” i, 112 and his “Introduction to Metaphysics,” in *The Creative Mind*, 237 & 206.

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

<sup>58</sup> Iamblichus, *Protrepticos*, 3.10, 47,25ff.; 3.11, 58,8–19.

judged that precisely by his intellectualism Plotinus summed up all that was best in the Greek spiritual heritage. To views of this kind we come next.

ÉMILE BRÉHIER: AN HEGELIAN AND INTELLECTUALIST PLOTINUS

Bergson was not the last to turn to Plotinus from within the remains of “the German Romantic movement” which favoured “a parallel renaissance of Neoplatonism.”<sup>59</sup> Émile Bréhier (1876-1952) was among the few who attended Bergson’s *conférences* on Plotinus at the Collège de France, which began with Bergson’s first course there.<sup>60</sup> Bréhier recalled those commentaries on the *Enneads* “with gratitude and admiration” and doubtless they partly inspired his own very important work on Plotinus.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, if one were to regard the history of the retrieval of Neoplatonism in France as a series of actions and reactions, which take their points of departure from something common, we would set Bréhier against Bergson, just as we shall set Bréhier’s own successor A.-J. M. Festugière (1898-1982) against Bréhier himself. Having found the opposition between Schelling and Hegel important for understanding the difference between Plotinus and Bergson’s use of him, and having placed Bergson on the side of Schelling, the character of Bréhier’s relation to Neoplatonism emerges when we recognise that Hegel is his pre-eminent guide to Plotinus.

Like Bergson, Bréhier sees in philosophy the freedom of humanity and refuses to reduce it to anything else, whether natural science, religion, or historical circumstances. For example, he speaks in a way which reminds us of Bergson’s notion of the unique timeless message born out of the single true intuition of each of the great philosophers. Bréhier writes:

The history of philosophy is first of all for me the history of spiritual initiatives, and secondarily the history of traditions....Its history is thus a description not of a necessary progress, but of a free movement, movement which sometimes slows itself down and settles, sometimes resumes a previous position, or rather, it is the description of the intensity and the direction of the thoughts of each philosopher.<sup>62</sup>

This brings to mind Bergson’s judgment: “A philosopher worthy of the name has never said more than a single thing; and even then it is something he has tried to say rather than actually said. And he has said only one thing because he has seen only one point....”<sup>63</sup> Still, here we see also a difference. Bergson paid little attention to the history of philosophy and certainly did not unite history and philosophy, a unification Hegel made essential to his philosophy. In this, as in some other crucial matters Bréhier stands with Hegel. Bréhier says of himself, “I remain a philosopher.” He writes of his work: “it is first a recitation as faithful as I am capable of making it; it is, however, not only a recitation and...my final purpose...is to disengage, in its purity, the essence of philosophy”<sup>64</sup>—the rationality, which along with his contemporary Neoplatonic scholar at Oxford, E.R. Dodds, he regarded as needing to be protected and promoted. With Bréhier, as with Bergson, the Idealist background is present. With the great historian of philosophy the connection is more explicit: Hegel (and Comte) provide the basis, and Hegel (and Leibniz) give the model for unifying philosophy and history.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, Bréhier’s contrast between “necessary progress” and “free

<sup>59</sup> Hadot, “Introduction,” *Le Néoplatonisme*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Bréhier, “Images plotiniennes,” 292; Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson et Plotin* 2.

<sup>61</sup> Most notably, Plotin, *Ennéades*, texte établi et traduit par Émile Bréhier, and idem, *La philosophie de Plotin*.

<sup>62</sup> É. Bréhier, “Comment je comprends,” 7–8.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 132.

<sup>64</sup> Bréhier, “Comment je comprends,” 7 & 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

movement” is intended to differentiate his histories from those of Hegel and Comte. These nineteenth-century predecessors represent an extreme position where “The past is no longer opposed to the present; the past conditions it and, justified by it, the past merely unfolds the unity of a systematic and preconceived plan.”<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, this criticism is not a rejection. Bréhier identifies his own work in writing the history of philosophy with a conception of philosophical reason he finds in Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*:

The history of philosophy is the development of a “single living mind” taking possession of itself; it merely sets forth in time what philosophy itself, “liberated from external historical circumstances, sets forth in a pure state in the element of thought.”<sup>67</sup>

Beyond his difference from Bergson precisely because he felt it necessary to write a history of philosophy, in Bréhier there is also a rejection of Schelling’s “intuitive positivism.” “In Schelling,” he writes “the victory [over dualism] terminates finally in a failure, a disassociation between rational philosophy and positive philosophy.”<sup>68</sup>

Bréhier’s interpretations of Neoplatonism and the judgments he makes also owe much to Hegel. Indeed, he stands almost alone as a French thinker of the twentieth century who is positively attached both to Hegel and to Plotinus. As we shall see, the turn to Neoplatonism among Catholic thinkers is generally anti-Hegelian and also often anti-Augustinian. With Claude Bruaire (1932-1986), we find almost uniquely a French philosopher who both would call himself Catholic and would identify his thought with Absolute Idealism. It is justly said of him: “Nothing is more foreign to the philosophy of Bruaire than apophatic theology which he repudiates as atheism, and which he situates with good reason inside the sphere of influence of Neoplatonic metaphysics.”<sup>69</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, when he himself moves from negative theology to mystical theology, quotes Bruaire: “It is therefore necessary to assign negative theology its official place, to give it its exact status, apart from the pious sentiments which cover with a sensible outer layer, with religious scraps, the unalterable absolute, sign of the Nothing: negative theology is the negation of all theology. Its truth is atheism.”<sup>70</sup> Marion contrasts the “crude assimilation” which negative theology involves to the chapter on “The Ineffable God” in de Lubac’s *The Discovery of God*, where the positive is fundamental (see below).

As already indicated by his stress on the free spiritual initiatives of the great thinkers, Bréhier’s following of Hegel is limited. At the beginning of the concluding chapter of his book on Plotinus, he writes:

Not that I consider Plotinian thought an entity in itself which was purely and simply added to prevailing ideas and maintained in full in later thought. The history of philosophy does not reveal to us ideas existing in themselves, but only the men who

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<sup>66</sup> É. Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, i, 23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Bréhier, “Comment je comprends,” 4 and idem, *Schelling*, 306.

<sup>69</sup> D. Leduc-Fagette, “Claude Bruaire, 1932-1986”: 13. See C. Bruaire, *L’être et l’esprit*, 6–7, 96ff. and X. Tilliette, “La théologie philosophique de Claude Bruaire”: 689.

<sup>70</sup> J.-L. Marion, “In the Name,” 49, note 8 quoting Bruaire, *Le Droit de Dieu*, 21. Decades earlier, Marion had quoted the same passage of Bruaire for the same purpose in *The Idol and Distance*, 146.

think. Its method, like every historical method, is nominalistic. Ideas do not, strictly speaking, exist for it.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, for Bréhier, “collective philological work pursued without intermission” must now correct the great systematic visions which make modern history of philosophy possible. Nonetheless, the systems of Hegel and Comte are also sustained while being corrected because he affirms that their visions are the ones we must modify:

It is in the philosophy of mind of Hegel and in the positivism of Comte that we must seek the explanation of the riddle of history, or rather, the authority for treating history as a riddle to be solved. . . . [Previous historians] always write history as if we had arrived at what the Apocalypse calls the ‘end of time’. This allows the Hegelians to treat the history of philosophy as a revelation of the mind to itself, and to approach the history of thought with the respect which the theologian shows for the Scriptures: the *Entwicklung* is a *Selbstoffenbarung*.<sup>72</sup>

On the crucial question for the twentieth-century retrieval of Neoplatonism, namely, the relation of *Nous* and the One, Bréhier determinatively follows Hegel, who is praised as “a man who was particularly qualified through his mental disposition to comprehend Plotinus.”<sup>73</sup> When by *Nous* is considered: “the state of perfect peaceful contemplation in which the object is completely absorbed in the subject, there is no longer any precise distinction between Intelligence and the One.”<sup>74</sup> In mystical elevation, however, there is not in fact a passage beyond thought, instead, Bréhier judges, quoting Hegel:

Replying to the objections of those who make of Plotinus a mystical enthusiast, Hegel says that for Plotinus ecstasy was “pure thought which exists in itself [*bei sich*] and has itself for object.” “Plotinus had the idea that the essence of God is thought itself and that the essence is present in thought.” . . . It follows from this that the One is not, as one might think at first, the region where philosophic thought leaves off in order to be transformed into the inarticulate stammering of the mystic. The reality of the One corresponds to the affirmation of the essential autonomy of the spiritual life when this life is comprehended in itself, not through isolated fragments but in its concrete fullness. That is why Hegel was right in saying that “the thought of the Plotinian philosophy is an intellectualism or a lofty idealism.”<sup>75</sup>

Nonetheless, according to Hegel, the intellectualism of Plotinus is imperfect; his demand for experience gives some basis for the accusation of that he is a mystical enthusiast as well as an intellectual. For Bréhier, this element does not come from within Hellenism:

[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

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<sup>71</sup> Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 182.

<sup>72</sup> É. Bréhier, “The Formation,” 168 and 171.

<sup>73</sup> Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 190.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 190–191. Bréhier is quoting Hegel, *Werke*, XV, 39–41.

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>76</sup>

Among twentieth-century Plotinian scholars, Bréhier's theory of an Indian source for Plotinus is exceptional, placing him outside the overwhelming consensus.<sup>77</sup> It belongs, however, to how he understands philosophy, how he narrates its history, and the purpose of his life's labour.

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 are 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. The rejection of this separation in a number of different ways both by his contemporaries and also by his successors is crucial to the history we are following. Among his French contemporaries, the issues involved emerge clearly in respect to the history of medieval philosophy.

The mixture of Hegelian and positivist shaping of the history of philosophy comes out strongly in Bréhier's *The Philosophy of the Middle Ages*. Henri Berr, the editor of the series in which Bréhier's volume appeared, significantly titled: "Library of the Evolution of Humanity, collective synthesis; Second section, VII: the intellectual evolution," sums up Bréhier's argument in terms of a recovery of the authentic Occidental heritage of the Greeks by the elimination of this Oriental element.<sup>78</sup> Bréhier himself writes that:

Philosophy received its original impulse in Greece and, from this impulse, it has retained the love and the passion for freedom; I do not deny that philosophy is a rare plant in the whole of humanity, indeed we may even call it a fragile plant; and there has not been, so far as I know, any philosophy named and characterised precisely in this way elsewhere than in our Western civilization.<sup>79</sup>

Preserving this rare and fragile plant by searching the history in order to discern the pure essence of philosophy was the work to which he devoted his life. For Bréhier, in respect to the Middle Ages, purifying philosophy will involve getting beyond "the philosophical teaching given by the clergy" in order to arrive at "an autonomous speculation, which enables a search for the truth for its own sake."<sup>80</sup> He asks:

Did there, then, really occur in the Middle Ages a break in the continuity of progress? Such a view seemed absolutely impossible to minds cast in the mould of

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 116–18.

<sup>77</sup> A.M. Wolters, "A Survey of Modern Scholarly Opinion," 296–99.

<sup>78</sup> É. Bréhier, *La Philosophie du Moyen Âge*, ii.

<sup>79</sup> Bréhier, "Comment je comprends," 8.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 433 & 145. For similar views see G. Davy, "Préface," xiv–xv.

Auguste Comte; for it was he, above all, who displayed the immense superiority, from the intellectual point of view, of medieval Christendom over Antiquity; and Hegel, for his part, saw in Christianity, from the time it first began, the essential principle of modern philosophy. It was in this period and under these influences that the idea was introduced of an intimate fusion of rational thought and Christian revelation.<sup>81</sup>

The benefit of this fusion derives to philosophy: “its overall result is to have incited reason to take a more perfect consciousness of herself and of her own nature.”<sup>82</sup> Philosophy, thus, remains exterior to religion and increases its autonomy: “philosophy is several centuries anterior to Christianity....She retains an altogether external relation to Christianity, and, if one is able to speak of Christian philosophers, it is hard to see any positive sense which one can give to the notion of Christian philosophy.”<sup>83</sup>

Demonstrating that “Christian philosophy” did not exist in fact had already been Bréhier’s aim a decade earlier when treating “Hellenism and Christianity” in his *History of Philosophy*. Bréhier asserted there that:

The first centuries of the Christian era are obviously characterized by an intellectual order common to all....[D]uring the first five centuries there is no distinctive Christian philosophy that implies a table of intellectual values fundamentally original and different from that of pagan thinkers....[T]here was nothing speculative about Christianity; its main concern was mutual assistance, both spiritual and material, in different communities. To begin with, however, the spiritual life practiced in these communities is not peculiar to Christianity: the need for the inner life or self-consciousness was felt throughout the Greek world long before the triumph of Christianity....Furthermore, the spiritual life and practices of the Christians had not the slightest influence on the image of the universe that resulted from Greek science and philosophy....The spiritual life of the Christians evolved alongside the Greek cosmos without giving birth to a new concept of reality.<sup>84</sup>

He went on to reveal that his purpose and this view of the facts belonged together: “We hope then to show that the development of philosophical thought was not strongly influenced by the advent of Christianity and, to sum up our thinking in one statement, that there is no Christian philosophy.”<sup>85</sup> This volume, published in 1927, together with his repetition of the assertion in conferences delivered in Belgium in 1928, initiated the great French discussion as to whether philosophy could qualify itself as “Christian.”<sup>86</sup> Opposing Maurice Blondel in 1931, Bréhier wrote: “One is no more able to speak of a Christian philosophy than of a Christian mathematics or a Christian physics.”<sup>87</sup> Here we run up

<sup>81</sup> Bréhier, “The Formation,” 168.

<sup>82</sup> Bréhier, *La Philosophie du Moyen Âge*, 435.

<sup>83</sup> Bréhier, “Comment je comprends,” 9.

<sup>84</sup> É. Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, ii, 224–5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>86</sup> É. Fouilloux, *Une Église*, 151. The conferences were published in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 38 (avril-juin, 1931). See Henri de Lubac, “Sur la philosophie chrétienne,” 127, X. Tilliette, “Le Père de Lubac”: 193–204, and É. Gilson, *L’esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, 1–62 together with his “Notes bibliographiques.”

<sup>87</sup> Bréhier, “Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?” 162.

against a defining landmark: everything against which Blondel and the neo-Augustinian and Neoplatonic Catholics of the twentieth-century France set themselves was represented in this notion that Christian spirituality and philosophy were external to one another. We cannot explore all the nuances of the debate, but must nonetheless refer to it later. Before leaving Bréhier's treatment of medieval philosophy, it is important to indicate a division he makes within it.

In one of his last works, *The Themes Current in Philosophy*, when treating "Man and the Transcendent," Bréhier repeats in a way useful for our purposes a distinction habitual with him between two ways in which philosophy and Christianity were united in the Middle Ages. He relates these two directions which "affirm a transcendence" to twentieth-century "Neothomism" and "Augustinianism." Neothomism:

takes up again in effect in its essentials the task which Saint Thomas had attempted to resolve in the XIII<sup>th</sup> century; discovering in Aristotelianism...a philosophy which was the autonomous product of a reason not illumined by the faith, Saint Thomas had the great audacity to introduce it into Christianity....The transcendent is entirely different in what I call Augustinianism: it is the principle less of a hierarchy between the forms of being than of an interior life; it fastens itself to Neoplatonism and to the Greek Fathers...Its essential thesis is that the interior life, communion with oneself, is a way to God, a way to the transcendent.<sup>88</sup>

When we add the characteristic Bréhier had earlier ascribed to the Thomism, that is "an external relation [with the faith]...the solution of an abstract problem,"<sup>89</sup> and when we recollect the character of "French spiritualism" already encountered with Bergson and with those to whom he recognised a debt, it is not difficult to see that there must be Augustinian and Neoplatonic reactions against such a Thomism. In fact, the Neoplatonic reaction will take an Augustinian form in Blondel, a Greek Patristic form in his followers, and there will be a more direct retrieval of pagan Neoplatonism in Festugière, Trouillard, and others.

The externality of religion and image vis-à-vis philosophy presented itself to Bréhier from the beginning of his historical studies. These commenced with a consideration of the works of Philo of Alexandria. In his first book, Bréhier found that by means of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture "Philo had wished to reconcile Greek philosophy with his religious beliefs."<sup>90</sup> Later in his *History of Philosophy*, he wrote: "Through this method Philo brings into his commentary every philosophical theme of his time, and his vast work is a veritable museum in which we find a jumbled assortment...."<sup>91</sup> Eric Dodds shared Bréhier's assessment of Philo at this point, notoriously calling "his eclecticism that of the jackdaw rather than the philosopher."<sup>92</sup> In the judgment of Bréhier the result of this "amalgam" was ambiguous. On the one hand, Platonic doctrines replaced characteristic Jewish ones, and, there is present in Philo's doctrine "the idea of a transcendent God who shares no relation with man, who is reached only by pure spirits, spirits who have broken loose from the world and themselves and attained to a state of ecstasy."<sup>93</sup> On the other

<sup>88</sup> É. Bréhier, *Les thèmes actuels de la philosophie*, 42–3.

<sup>89</sup> Bréhier, *La Philosophie du Moyen Âge*, 434.

<sup>90</sup> É. Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques*, 314.

<sup>91</sup> Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, ii, 169.

<sup>92</sup> E.R. Dodds, "The *Parmenides* of Plato," 132, note 1, see 142.

<sup>93</sup> Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, ii, 170.

hand, Jewish conceptions are retained. In Philo's doctrine: "we find all the piety of a Jew who thinks that God maintains constant, multiple, and individual relations with man, sustaining him, succouring him, and punishing him."<sup>94</sup> The two can function together. Thus, according to Bréhier's initial study, Philo's:

conception of the supreme God, always more elevated than the soul which wishes to reach it and never ceasing to allude her attempts to grasp it, remains very much that of the Jewish God... This God introduces into human life a principle of moral activity, an endless search for an object always desired which is lacking to Alexandrian mysticism and to the Hermetical books.<sup>95</sup>

From Philo understood in this way, Bréhier not only learned what would enable him to differentiate and associate philosophy and Oriental mysticism, but he also learned things which would determine how he would write his history of philosophy:

the true philosophy is not a system of ideas, but a progress, it is not a result, but a way and a passage; what I see in a philosopher is a certain rhythm, a certain elegance of thought, such as that which we remark in Philo with his allegorical method, which, as totally absurd as it appears to be, does not any the less indicate an essential process of the human spirit, that which moves from the image to the idea.<sup>96</sup>

Shortly after his book on Philo appeared, Bréhier published a monograph on *Chrysippus* and then moved on to finding "a disassociation between rational philosophy and positive philosophy" in Schelling, partly owed to religion. With this behind him, he undertook the study of Plotinus. There he found again the duality of Occidental reason and Oriental mysticism, a rediscovery which made him unwilling to accept the argument of Dodds, generally accepted by other Neoplatonic scholars, that there is no necessity to pass outside the Greek philosophical tradition to find the origins of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One.<sup>97</sup> He also uncovered in Plotinus a rhythm of continuity and creative renaissance ("this passionate return to Plato... an interior affinity... a great many misunderstandings.")<sup>98</sup> These two, the discovery of duality and the rhythm, and the search to reveal and defend philosophy in its rational purity, moved and enabled him to write his *History of Philosophy*.<sup>99</sup>

The balance between philosophy and Oriental mysticism in Plotinus, evidently had "a certain elegance" for Bréhier.<sup>100</sup> It is also "the fundamental problem" of his philosophy: "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>101</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. Damascius is an exception. Bréhier finds in his work "an animated dialectic more characteristic of Plotinus than of

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques*, 317.

<sup>96</sup> Bréhier, "Comment je comprends," 3.

<sup>97</sup> Bréhier, "Le 'Parménide' de Platon."

<sup>98</sup> Bréhier, "Comment je comprends," 4–5.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> É. Bréhier, "Sur le problème fondamental," 222.

Proclus.” Indeed, “by criticising as he does the method of Proclus, Damascius comes close to abandoning Neo-Platonism.”<sup>102</sup> Iamblichus, whose teachings “dominated the last stage of Neoplatonism...was not less a mystagogue than a philosopher...thus [for him] the dialogues [of Plato], when correctly read, are but one vast guide to the spiritual life.” The ascendancy of the religious side in Iamblichus produces “the multiplication of the terms of the hierarchy of realities.”<sup>103</sup> Although some see in this nothing more than an extension of the insertion by Plotinus of Mind and Soul between the First Principle and the world, in fact:

There was a veritable reaction against the Plotinian spirit under the leadership of Iamblichus....His vast classification is devoid of the spiritual life that animated the *Enneads* but now degenerates on the one hand to applied theology and on the other to the practice of theurgy.<sup>104</sup>

Proclus is represented as continuing and intensifying the negative characteristics identified in Iamblichus. It is crucially significant that a positive re-evaluation of Iamblichus and his successors vis-à-vis Plotinus is perhaps the single most important contribution of French scholarship after Bréhier to the understanding of Neoplatonism.

Bréhier’s negative judgment of most of post-Iamblichean Neoplatonism does not, however, stem from ignorance and he was struggling against contemporary academic prejudice. Trouillard described the context in which Bréhier wrote his audacious “The Idea of Nothingness and the Problem of the Radical Origin in Greek Neoplatonism.” He wrote: “For about forty years, it had been difficult to get a thesis on him [Proclus] accepted at the Sorbonne. The fine study which Émile Bréhier dedicated to him in the *Revue de Métaphysique et Morale* in 1919 remained an isolated initiative in France.”<sup>105</sup> Bréhier showed that he understood the basis in Neoplatonism for the religion, mystical theology, and negative henology found there later, especially by priests like André-Jean Festugière, Édouard des Places, and Jean Trouillard. These would be joined by Pierre Hadot and others in bringing about the re-evaluation by scholarship, or the philosophical reconsideration, or both, of these aspects of the Platonic tradition. Pierre Aubenque, describing the Neoplatonic endeavour to prevent the One as cause of all entity from becoming itself an entity, writes:

É. Bréhier commented very well on this movement of thought, which characterises under diverse forms all of Neoplatonism, when he writes: “The origin is not able as such to possess any of the characteristics which are possessed by the beings to be explained and derived, because then it would be one thing among other things, one being among other beings. But, possessing none of the characteristics of beings, it appears to the thinking which wishes to grasp it as a pure non-being.” Let us for now leave open the question, raised by Bréhier, of knowing if to make of this non-being the one, is not to “determine” it and, as a result, to make it once again into a being, apropos of which “because it is a being one would be required once again to ask what is its origin.” It remains that the relativisation of ontology, and the correlative

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<sup>102</sup> Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, ii, 212–213.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 202–203.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 203–204.

<sup>105</sup> J. Trouillard, “Préface,” Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, 10.

necessity of passing beyond it, are logically inscribed in the question, considered radically, of the Being of the existent [*l'être de l'étant*].<sup>106</sup>

Aubenque has found in Bréhier the foundation for the movement beyond Plotinian Neoplatonism to the clerical philosophy of the Middle Ages and for the movement in twentieth-century French philosophy for a positive reappraisal by the clergy of Iamblichus and his followers. Characteristically, Bréhier himself went on in this article to explore the confounding of two opposite elements which Ravaisson judged to be destructive in Neoplatonism, summing up the difficulty in this problematic formula: “if nothingness is what underlies all reality, the origin is, on the contrary, what is above.”<sup>107</sup> He searches the history of Neoplatonism beginning with Plotinus, travelling by way of his successors up to Proclus, and concluding with Damascius, trying to discern what this formula means and to discover “if and how the two terms, both of them situated outside all thinkable reality, can be prevented from being confounded with one another.”<sup>108</sup> Trouillard, and the Neoplatonic radicals associated with him, will take up this search again in the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>106</sup> P. Aubenque, “Plotin et le dépassement,” 103, quoting from É. Bréhier, “L’idée du néant,” 248; see also his “Mysticisme et doctrine chez Plotin,” (1948) 225–31.

<sup>107</sup> Bréhier, “L’idée du néant,” 250.

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

## PRIESTLY NEOPLATONISM AND MAURICE BLONDEL: THE LAY PHILOSOPHICAL MYSTIC

It tells us much about the purposes which Neoplatonism serves in twentieth-century France that, after Bergson and Bréhier, for the greater part of the century, the future of Neoplatonism in France is primarily not with laymen or with those who taught at the universities, but with Catholic scholars, theologians and philosophers most of whom were priests, or who, like Pierre Hadot, Jean Pépin, Henry Duméry, and Michel Tardieu,<sup>109</sup> started their scholarly careers as priests. It will also tell us a great deal about philosophy and the Catholic Church in France in our time that, at the end of the century, when the great priestly scholars, philosophers, and theologians who built the breadth and depth of the Neoplatonic revival in France and gave it its particular character have died or retired without new clerical sons to succeed them, their work is now largely carried on by lay philosophers, theologians, and scholars. One of the consequences of these shifts, is that, after Bréhier, owing to the law forbidding the participation of Catholic priests in the state institutions of higher education, most advanced work on Neoplatonism in France moved from the universities to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), the various Instituts Catholiques, Catholic seminaries, and the houses of study of the religious orders, where priests could be employed.

At the end of the century this part of the history of philosophy regained its place in the universities where it is now regularly taught. This is especially the case since Plotinus—and this is an important sign of the evolution in the French intellectual mentality—has become one of the prescribed authors for the annual competition for the Aggregation in philosophy, which in France decides nearly everything about what is studied and taught. These changes help to distinguish sharply French from Anglo-American departments of philosophy, the study of Neoplatonism being almost totally excluded from the curricula of the leading Protestant and secular institutions where what counts as philosophical reason for the English-speaking world is largely defined.

Despite the absolutely essential rôle which the Church played in this change of mentality in France, there was a titanic struggle within the Catholic Church to create a culture in which Neoplatonic studies and spirituality would be at home. Bergson and Bréhier were certainly not Catholics and were free of all institutional restraints on their intellectual work, but the early interest in Neoplatonism among Catholic intellectuals was not welcomed within the anti-Modernist and Neothomist culture of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Not surprisingly, one of the main accomplishments of the clerical scholars in respect to Neoplatonism was to show the intimate connection between philosophy and religious life, especially in the developments subsequent to Plotinus and Porphyry. Thus, even if they accept, as Bréhier did not, E.R. Dodds' demonstration that no recourse to the Orient is required to explain the Plotinian doctrine of the One,<sup>110</sup> they were happy to find in Neoplatonism an opening to the Oriental, whether this be Oriental mysticisms and religions,<sup>111</sup> or the spirituality, theology, and liturgy of the Greek Fathers and Eastern Orthodoxy which was more strongly affected by theurgic Neoplatonism than was the Augustinian West. With priests like André-Jean Festugière, Jean Trouillard, Henry Duméry,

<sup>109</sup> Among the auditeurs of Jean Pépin in the IV<sup>e</sup> section of EPHE in 1973-74 was "le P[ère]. M. Tardieu (attaché au CNRS)" he was also a student of Hadot. In 1976 Tardieu assumed a chair in "Gnose et manichéisme" in the IV<sup>e</sup> section; he passed to the Collège de France and a chair in "Histoire des syncrétismes de la fin de l'Antiquité" where he began to teach in 1991.

<sup>110</sup> See Dodds, "The *Parmenides* of Plato."

<sup>111</sup> S. Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 154.

Joseph Combès, Henri-Dominique Saffrey, Édouard Jeuneau, and Stanislas Breton (to list notable examples) their Neoplatonic studies were implicated in their religious lives. Especially after Vatican II, and the rejection of Neothomism which followed it, Neoplatonic and Patristic studies affected general Catholic religious practice by opening Latin Rite Catholicism to Eastern Orthodox and Oriental spiritualities. Neoplatonism also became a substitute for Catholicism among laicized priests and the ecclesiastically disenchanted.

For example, Pierre Hadot has spent the greatest part of his scholarly career teaching, one might almost say preaching, that “philosophy is a way of life, a spirituality.”<sup>112</sup> In the *Annuaire* of the *Section on Religious Sciences* of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, his “Report” on the work of his seminar centering on Marcus Aurelius in 1971-72—less than a decade after he started teaching there—describes his course thus:

The study has been undertaken with the intention of reclaiming the fact that in Antiquity, at least in its last stage, philosophy boils down to spiritual exercises (meditation, the premeditative formation of our attitudes, the examination of conscience) which are intended to provoke a radical transformation of the being of the philosopher.<sup>113</sup>

He tells us that his introductory article for the *Annuaire* “in 1977” entitled “Spiritual Exercises” is a significant moment in the development of his work.<sup>114</sup> This “Liminaire,” subsequently republished several times, begins with a substantial text which Hadot reports elsewhere that he has “often cited,” and which “seems to be of capital importance...insofar as it shows how a contemporary man, engaged in political struggle, realizes that he can and should live as a philosopher.”<sup>115</sup> Hadot reveals that the contemporary text reminds him of Marcus Aurelius, and his introductory essay is primarily devoted to the Stoics—although there are significant references to the Epicureans and the Platonists.<sup>116</sup> Apparently, then, Hadot’s aim in presenting ancient philosophy as a spiritual exercise is directed to the well-being of his own contemporaries. He seeks to offer “to those who were not able or did not wish to live according to a religious mode of life, the possibility of choosing a purely philosophical way of life.”<sup>117</sup> He takes pains to in his book on the nature of ancient philosophy to explain that:

In antiquity, the philosopher encountered religion in his social life (in the form of the official cult) and in his cultural life (in the form of works of art and of literature), yet he lived religion philosophically, by transforming it into philosophy.<sup>118</sup>

Hadot labours to make this transformation of religion into philosophy apply even to theurgic Neoplatonism, where the transformation would seem to be in the other direction.<sup>119</sup> He writes:

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<sup>112</sup> For an outline of what this means see P. Hadot, “Forms of Life.”

<sup>113</sup> P. Hadot, “Rapport sur l’exercice, Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce,” (1971-72 & 1972-73), 277.

<sup>114</sup> P. Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière*, 68.

<sup>115</sup> P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 276.

<sup>116</sup> P. Hadot, “Spiritual Exercises.”

<sup>117</sup> Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière*, 68.

<sup>118</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 271.

<sup>119</sup> For the complexity of the interconnections, see Z. Mazur, “Unio Magica,” parts 1 and 2.

Even the late Neoplatonists, who practiced theurgy, integrated it into a course of spiritual progress which was essentially philosophical, in order to rise ultimately to a transcendent and unknowable God who was completely foreign to traditional religion.<sup>120</sup>

There are a number of problems with this argument and it conflicts with what Hadot says about Neoplatonism in other contexts, including his analysis of the relation of philosophy and mystical union in Plotinus, which we shall consider below. Nonetheless, Hadot makes clear repeatedly that there are important interconnections between his personal spiritual quest, his formation as a Catholic priest, his studies of Neoplatonism, and his presentation of philosophy. These make it difficult for him to treat the relations between philosophy and religion in Neoplatonism and in Christianity with scholarly objectivity and it may be doubted that he does so.<sup>121</sup> It is indubitable not only that his studies of Neoplatonism have crucial implications for his personal life but also that his philosophical study and teaching belong to an endeavour to find a substitute for Catholicism.

Hadot had had mystical experiences as a youth which were not associated with his practice of Catholicism.<sup>122</sup> After reading some of the classic Christian mystical authors while at seminary, he ardently attempted mystical union, but was discouraged by his spiritual directors. Indeed, he was brought to the point of questioning whether “ultimately the Christian message is compatible with mysticism.”<sup>123</sup> However, when he read Plotinus in 1945-46, he discovered “the existence of a purely philosophical mysticism.”<sup>124</sup> In the context of this attraction to mysticism, Hadot asked to study Plotinus at the university but was set by Father Paul Henry, a Belgian Jesuit and editor of the text of Plotinus, to work on Victorinus and Porphyry instead.<sup>125</sup> By 1963 when he wrote his *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, Hadot had begun to have doubts concerning Plotinian mysticism and had started to seek an immanentist spirituality:

Seventeen centuries now separate us from Plotinus. Modern history is accelerating more and more, sweeping us inexorably away from the sage dying alone in a Campanian villa. An immense abyss has opened up between us and him.... There can be no question of slavishly imitating the spiritual itinerary of Plotinus here in the twentieth century: that would be impossible or illusory. Rather, we must consent, with as much courage as Plotinus did, to every dimension of human experience, and to everything within it that is mysterious, inexpressible, and transcendent.<sup>126</sup>

Nonetheless, the book was a work of an enthusiast, as he discloses in the Postface to the second edition in 1973:

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<sup>120</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 271.

<sup>121</sup> See W. J. Hankey, “Philosophy as Way of Life.”

<sup>122</sup> Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière*, 25–32; see 128–129.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 126; see 32.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Hadot, “Postscript,” 279–80.

<sup>126</sup> P. Hadot, *Plotinus*, 110–3.

...it was written from the heart, in a kind of moment of enthusiasm....I sincerely believe that our most urgent task today is, as Goethe said, to “learn to believe in simplicity.” Might it not be the case that the greatest lesson which the philosophers of Antiquity—and above all Plotinus—have to teach us is that philosophy is not the complicated, pretentious, and artificial construction of a learned system of discourse, but the transformation of perception and life, which lends inexhaustible meaning to the formula—seemingly so banal—of the love of the Good? <sup>127</sup>

The origin of his interest in Neoplatonism continued, nonetheless, and, from the beginning of his appointment to the *École Pratique* in 1964, he developed research on the mystical treatises of Plotinus. His appointment had been to the chair in Latin Patristics, <sup>128</sup> but, in the 1971-72 academic year, at his request, the title of his post was changed to “Theologies and Mysticism of Hellenistic Greece and of the end of Antiquity” to better reflect his interests.<sup>129</sup>

In volume 79 of the *Annuaire* of the *École Pratique*, in the first report of his work in the newly named post, he wrote of “a type of experiential knowledge which one is able to categorise as ‘mystical’.” For him the character of this special knowledge occurring with Plotinus seems to be “without precedent in the Greek tradition”:

The new elements appear to me to be these: 1) the idea of a vision of an object without form, ultimately, the idea of a pure vision without an object; 2) the idea of a transformation of the visionary who at the same time is no longer himself and becomes truly himself; 3) the idea of the transcendence of the ego in respect to its natural determinations: the visionary remains a self but no longer a human.<sup>130</sup>

This knowing meets the requirements of philosophy as way of life because in it the knower is transformed to become more truly himself.

However, Hadot reports more recently that personally, mystical experience, whether Christian or Plotinian, no longer holds a vital interest for him, and that Neoplatonism no longer seems a tenable position. What is involved in his turn, both from Plotinian mysticism in particular, and also from Neoplatonism generally, back to the Stoicism with which his study of philosophy as spiritual exercise began comes out in an interview with Michael Chase:

in 1946, I naively believed that I, too, could relive the Plotinian mystical experience. But I later realized that this was an illusion. The conclusion of my book *Plotinus* already hinted that the idea of the “purely spiritual” is untenable. It is true that there is something ineffable in human experience, but this ineffable is *within* our very perception of the world, in the mystery of our existence and that of the cosmos.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>127</sup> P. Hadot, quoted in the Translator’s Preface, in *Plotinus*, xi.

<sup>128</sup> P. Vignaux (éd.), *Problèmes et Méthodes*, 211–9.

<sup>129</sup> Hadot, “Postscript,” 280–1.

<sup>130</sup> P. Hadot, “Rapport sur l’exercice 1970-71, Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce,” 273.

<sup>131</sup> Hadot, “Postscript,” 281.

Moreover, in common with many of his contemporaries, he feels an increased attraction to Stoicism and Epicureanism:

As I grow older, Plotinus speaks to me less and less...I have become considerably detached from him. From 1970 on, I have felt very strongly that it was Epicureanism and Stoicism which could nourish the spiritual life of men and women of our times, as well as my own. That was how I came to write my book on spiritual exercises. Indeed, here at the end of the century—and no one is more surprised at this than myself—we are witnessing an increase in these two philosophies on the part of the reading public.<sup>132</sup>

In 1963, Hadot's book on Plotinus had displayed the spiritual biography of that ancient sage, and explicated his system not as an intellectual abstraction but so that its levels of reality might be seen as aspects and stages of the inner life. It was intended to make the Plotinian spiritual itinerarium accessible to the general public. The "Postface to the Third Edition" written in 1988 displayed his increasing distance from Plotinus, and his surprise that his mysticism could still move others as it had once moved him:

I have been deeply touched by the testimonies I have received from many readers, telling me of the spiritual benefit they had derived from reading this little volume. They also surprised me, I confess; I am very much aware of the distance separating Plotinus' Platonism from this, our end of the twentieth century. It would seem, therefore, that despite this distance, Plotinus' message has conserved all its power of suffusing light. Doesn't this prove that, above and beyond differences of mentality and civilization, the "call of the mystics"<sup>133</sup> still remains mysteriously alive?<sup>134</sup>

Perhaps he ought to have added that what surprised him in 1988 showed that Trouillard was right to have objected to his conclusion in 1963.

Three decades after the first edition of *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, Hadot provided the reading public with means for its increasing interest in Stoicism with *The Inner Citadel*. Its Preface began with a quotation from the *Meditations*: "Soon, everyone will have forgotten you"<sup>135</sup> and went on to assert:

Marcus Aurelius was wrong. Eighteen centuries—almost two millennia—have passed, and the *Meditations* are still alive...for centuries they have brought reasons to live to innumerable unknown people,...and they still do today. The *Meditations* are an inexhaustible source of wisdom; an "eternal Gospel," in Renan's words.<sup>135</sup>

Hadot's preference for Stoicism and Epicureanism, as against Neoplatonism, as well as his initial attraction to Neoplatonism, worked out in the course of a career devoted to historical and philosophical scholarship and teaching, combine the needs and experiences in his own spiritual quest, judgments about what is most accessible to his contemporaries, and an

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 280–1 and idem, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, 137.

<sup>133</sup> In his conclusion to *Plotinus* Hadot had quoted Bergson on this "call," see Hadot, *Plotinus*, 110.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>135</sup> P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, vii. See G. Catapano, "È Possibile Ricuperare."

evolving philosophical judgment about the nature of reality. The last amounts to a denial or redefinition of transcendence which goes along with his departure from the Catholic priesthood and his determination to offer philosophy as a way of life to those who do not find it given by religion.

Having brought the question of the future of Neoplatonism in France after Bréhier into connection with French Catholicism, the problems of “Christian” philosophy, and of relations of clergy and laity, we cannot leave the first part of the century without noting the sole Catholic Modernist in the circle of Bergson whose work escaped ecclesiastical condemnation.<sup>136</sup> It belongs to the shape of the history we are exploring that an important part of the reason Blondel was spared was that he was laïc. Nonetheless, he inspired more of what overcame the anti-Modernist crusade in the French Catholic Church than anyone, and the revival of Neoplatonism was crucial to that overcoming.<sup>137</sup> Nor were those who suspected him of Modernist sympathies entirely wrong. Before the break between the Modernist Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) and the Catholic Church, Blondel agreed with him that the crisis which modernity posed for Catholicism could not be unloosed “by way of scholasticism, by a return to medieval *fixisme*.”<sup>138</sup> When one recollects that the anti-Modernist crusade takes place within the Leonine revival of Thomism, and that the attempt to return to Scholasticism as the mode of Catholic philosophy was the positive side of the crusade, this agreement was very dangerous.

When locating Maurice Blondel’s position we may begin with Bréhier’s description of the reaction against “immanentism”: “It is precisely against this pretension of Idealism that religious philosophy is protesting when it affirms a transcendence.”<sup>139</sup> Certainly, Blondel opposes “the illusion of a speculative idealism”<sup>140</sup> and his is a religious philosophy protesting against the oppositions and separations which belonged to the traditional metaphysics. We shall recollect that he initiated the defence of Christian philosophy against Bréhier.<sup>141</sup> For Blondel, with whom, as Goulven Madec puts it, the texts of Augustine “seem to spring up out of his own memory,” and for whom, as Henri Gouhier writes, the history of philosophy was “the opportunity to deepen his study of a metaphysical problem and to make his own thought more precise,” Augustine “always remains a philosopher.”<sup>142</sup> Retracting an earlier position of his own rejecting “a Christian philosophy,” Blondel writes that Augustine’s doctrine was “religious by its own spontaneous development and not by accident, and remained essentially philosophical, even while welcoming data inaccessible to reason.” Indeed, “Augustine... is still the initiator and the animator of ‘Catholic thought’ and ‘Christian philosophy’.”<sup>143</sup> After a Neoplatonic representation of Augustine—“nothing, indeed, is visible, because nothing is real, except only by God... One divines... the importance and the character of the spiritual dialogue which is achieved only in a unitative

<sup>136</sup> R.C. Grogin, *The Bergsonian Controversy*, 152–54. See Alexander Dru in Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetic*, 13–79 and Fiachra Long’s Introduction in Blondel, *The Idealist Illusion*, 31–41; the volume contains a useful bibliography of works on Blondel in English, 151–3.

<sup>137</sup> See Fouilloux, *Une Église*, 149–91.

<sup>138</sup> É. Poulat, “Maurice Blondel”: 50 quoting Blondel to Loisy in 1903.

<sup>139</sup> Bréhier, *Les thèmes actuels*, 42.

<sup>140</sup> M. Blondel, *L’Action* (II), i. 86; see *The Idealist Illusion*, in Blondel, *The Idealist Illusion and Other Essays*, 75–94.

<sup>141</sup> M. Blondel, “Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?": 599–606.

<sup>142</sup> G. Madec, “Maurice Blondel,” 100 and H. Gouhier, “Préface,” in Blondel, *Dialogues*, 7, and idem, “Pour le quinzième,” in *Dialogues*, 144.

<sup>143</sup> Blondel, “Pour le quinzième,” 145 and 190. For a good account of Blondel on Christian philosophy, see Trethowan in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics*, 105–12.

contemplation, but not without having passed *per gradus debitos*—, Blondel judges “We have, not without reason, called Augustine the Christian Plato.”<sup>144</sup> A view of philosophy is developing which will welcome the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists back into the ranks of the philosophers.

Evidently, then, of the two directions affirming transcendence identified by Bréhier, Blondel takes the second, characterised by Bréhier as “Augustinianism” which has for its essential thesis “that the interior life, communion with oneself, is a way to God, a way to the transcendent.”<sup>145</sup> His writings are filled with statements which unite philosophical and religious language. We can even find an early use of the language of theurgy in *L’Action* (1893):

The moment we seem to touch God through a trace of thought, He escapes us, if we do not keep Him, if we do not look for Him, through action. His immobility can be aimed at as a fixed goal only by a perpetual movement. . . . All that we have seen or felt of Him is only a means to go further. It is a road; therefore, we do not stop in it, otherwise it is no longer a road. To think of God is an action; yet we also do not act without cooperating with Him and without having Him collaborate with us by a sort of necessary *theurgy* which integrates the part of the divine in the human operation, in order to achieve the equation of the voluntary action in consciousness. And it is because action is a synthesis of man with God that it is in perpetual becoming, as if stirred by the inspiration of an infinite growth.<sup>146</sup>

In his new version of *L’Action* published in 1936, the language of Augustinian and Dionysian Neoplatonism were united in constructing this road:

We have just described these inevitable trials and errors of the *intellectus irrequietus* and of the *cor agitatum* as an “*itinerarium mentis et animae ad Deum*.” Before and in order to be able to explain, justify, sustain the labour, regressive and elevating at the same time, which allows the linking up and the progress of the second causes to their *primus movens* and their *ultimus finis*, it is good to fix a little our attention and our admiration on this mysterious centre of all truth from whence radiates light, life, and action. Not that we would have the least presumption of seeing face to face, of penetrating, and of capturing the inviolable secret of that which is beyond all finite intelligence and all created power. But what is just and good is, on the contrary, to kindle the feeling for and the reasons of this same inviolability, a conviction which grows to the degree that we perceive a little better what a mystic named the “Great Darkness” in the excess of light.<sup>147</sup>

In this Neoplatonic neo-Augustinianism, Blondel is plagued throughout his life by the rigid Neothomists—although he is not himself hostile to Aquinas. The anti-Scholastic followers of Aquinas like the Jesuits Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944) at Louvain, Pierre

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<sup>144</sup> Blondel, “Pour le quinzième,” 156.

<sup>145</sup> Bréhier, *Les thèmes actuels*, 43.

<sup>146</sup> M. Blondel, *Action* (1893), 325.

<sup>147</sup> Blondel, *L’Action* (II), i. 113–4.

Rousselot (1878-1915), and Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) admired Blondel profoundly.<sup>148</sup> The way he took disturbed the Neothomists because of its essential interiority and the interpenetration of action and knowing—which do not satisfy their demand for a metaphysics of being. Moreover, he opposed the externality of the relation between philosophy and theology which they maintain.<sup>149</sup> At the Premier Congrès National des Sociétés Françaises de Philosophie held during 1938, in the presence of Bréhier who spoke immediately after him, Blondel exposed “the necessary importance of a philosophy of action, of faith, of human destiny, of the problem of transcendence, under its double aspect: metaphysical and philosophically religious.”<sup>150</sup> So far as Blondel conceived metaphysics to be trapped within a logic of self-objectification by a pretence to speculative completeness apart from action, he followed Bergson’s indications as to the way out. Jacob Schmutz judges that Blondel’s version of “French spiritualism” sought to move simultaneously toward transcendence and a deeper experience which would bring union “with the principle of thought which is itself *beyond* every intellectual comprehension....[W]e are not in the presence of a metaphysics of understanding or speculation, but in a metaphysics of union with the very first principle. We are closer to Neoplatonism than to Aristotelianism.”<sup>151</sup> The Augustinianism of Blondel is clear and well recognised, but for the future developments we must turn in another direction. The connection to Blondel’s thought of those priests who most radically turned to Neoplatonism as a way out of what in Western modernity they judged must necessarily destroy Christianity as religion is most significant.

Blondel has been studied at length by Henry Duméry (born in 1920),<sup>152</sup> a follower who as late as 1958 had four works consigned by Rome to the *Index of Forbidden Books* for philosophical deviations “of a metaphysical order,” involving a “misconception of the analogy of being.”<sup>153</sup> Father Joseph Combès, a student of Jean Trouillard, tells us that with Blondel we find fundamentals of the thought of Trouillard, a Sulpician.<sup>154</sup> Stanislas Breton has described these three priests—Duméry, Combès, and Trouillard—as “the Neoplatonic triad of France” developing a “Neoplatonic radicalism.”<sup>155</sup> Breton, a Passionist priest, might well have made French Neoplatonism a quaternity by placing himself in it. Both Duméry and Trouillard saw in Blondel’s thought something of Neoplatonism. Duméry unites Blondel with Bergson when considering how Blondel unifies conversion and procession, ascent and descent, thought and being, will and knowledge:

When one welds together at every point the ascending and descending dialectics, the two processes of intelligible determinism and of ontogenetic dynamism, they marry and make each other fecund. The will by which we pass beyond essence in order to position it becomes then identical with the law of procession which realises it, that is to say, at the end of the reckoning, with the will by which God himself has produced

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<sup>148</sup> For Maréchal see Dru in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics*, 62.

<sup>149</sup> On which see É. Gilson, *Les Tribulations*, 58–64.

<sup>150</sup> M. Blondel, “Allocution de M. Maurice Blondel,” 7.

<sup>151</sup> Schmutz, “Escaping the Aristotelian Bond”: 184–5. Schmutz finds the same Neoplatonic structure in the thought of Louis Lavelle.

<sup>152</sup> See H. Duméry, *La Philosophie de l'action*, which contains a “Bibliographie analytique” of Blondel’s works; idem, *Raison et religion*; idem, *Blondel et la Religion*.

<sup>153</sup> Fouilloux, *Une Église*, 35 quoting *L’Osservatore Romano* July 6, 1958 columns 841 and 842.

<sup>154</sup> See J. Combès, “Néoplatonisme aujourd’hui,” 354–5.

<sup>155</sup> Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 31 & 152–3.

it: there is, as Bergson says: “a coincidence between the act by which our mind knows truth perfectly, and the operation by which God engenders it...the ‘conversion’ of the Alexandrians, when it becomes complete, is indistinguishable from their ‘procession’.” (*The Creative Mind* <sup>156</sup>) Consequently, intellectualism and voluntarism are no longer points of view which are exclusive of one another, and the option, in the midst of this *connubium* between being and thought, is no longer...an abduction of being; she consecrates a true union....The option is not something other than this interior reading of the creative plan realised in the thickness of the objective series. It becomes constitutive of being because, in the Plotinian manner, it finds being as the trace of the One.<sup>157</sup>

In another place, Duméry connects this doctrine to Trouillard and Plotinus:

Jean Trouillard gives the true formula: “consciousness realises itself by *detouring* from its origin, thought by *returning* toward it.”...The first is procession, the second conversion. But there is no consciousness without thought and no thought without consciousness, at least for the terms that “proceed.” Thus, we can understand the solidarity, through the alternate (more profoundly: *simultaneous*) mutual promotion, of procession and conversion.<sup>158</sup>

Duméry goes on to speak of how in consciousness and thought the spirit both touches and springs from the One. Thus it is not inappropriate to conclude here with the continuation of the passage Duméry quoted from Bergson’s *The Creative Mind*: “when man, sprung from divinity, succeeds in returning to it, he perceives that what he had at first taken to be two opposed movements of coming and going are in fact a single movement....”

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<sup>156</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 133–4.

<sup>157</sup> Duméry, *La Philosophie de l'action*, 113–4.

<sup>158</sup> H. Duméry, *The Problem of God*, 96, note 35, quoting Trouillard, *La purification plotinienne*, 96.

## THE BLONDELIAN JESUITS: PLATONISM AND THE GREEK FATHERS

Blondel desired a mystical way in philosophy and theology, one oriented to inner knowledge, union, and transcendence. Moreover, in his correspondence with Loisy, concerned with the relations of history, dogma, and philosophy, he had discovered “philosophical gaps within critical exegesis.”<sup>159</sup> His questions about how history and philosophy were done within the Catholic Church and about their relations with theology had a strong effect among the Jesuits at Fourvière where they helped inspire the great series of Patristic texts “Sources chrétiennes,” founded there.

This return to sources was by no means theologically or philosophically neutral. Partly it was a reaction, inspired by Blondel’s “method of immanence,”<sup>160</sup> against the divorce of Scripture and tradition and of truth and history. Partly it was a reaction against the rigidities of Neothomism, and the walls it erected between philosophy, theology, and spirituality. Insofar as these separations and rationalism characterised the scholasticism which developed in the Latin Middle Ages, it was a turn back to the Fathers of the ancient church. It was also, however, a turn towards the Greek Fathers as against the unilateral privileging of the Latins, and especially of Augustine.<sup>161</sup> Henri de Lubac tells us that “Sources chrétiennes? ... dates back to 1940. The initiator of the series, which at first was to include only the Greek Fathers... in an ecumenical spirit, ... saw it as an instrument of *rapprochement* with the Orthodox Churches.”<sup>162</sup> There was even a *rapprochement* with the far Orient: ultimately de Lubac will quote with approval words of a priestly colleague suggesting that the union of philosophy, theology, and mysticism in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa anticipates “the Indian form of Christian thought.”<sup>163</sup> De Lubac himself undertook an extensive study of Buddhism exploring the relation between selfless love in Buddhism and charity in Christianity.<sup>164</sup> The Jesuits, Henri Cardinal de Lubac and Jean Cardinal Daniélou (1905-1974)—they and the French Dominican Yves Congar were made cardinals near the ends of their lives in recognition of their contributions to the Second Vatican Council—were with Blondel in opposing a scholastic philosophy which was logical and metaphysical to the detriment of an itinerarium simultaneously philosophical, theological, exegetical, and mystical.<sup>165</sup> Rather than undertaking a new metaphysics in imitation of Blondel, their way to his end was historical study which aimed to retrieve what existed before the modern dualisms, separations, and oppositions.

The most important, influential, and initially controversial work of de Lubac was his historical and theological study of the supernatural which stretched over more than twenty years, having been first sketched in 1924 when he was a student of theology. The major result was the publication of *Surnaturel* in 1946.<sup>166</sup> In his introduction to the republication of an English translation of the first part of the work, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, Louis Dupré “confidently” calls it “the most significant study in historical theology” of the entire

<sup>159</sup> Poulat, “Maurice Blondel”: 52 quoting Blondel to Loisy.

<sup>160</sup> See Peter Casarella’s Introduction to de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, xvii–xix.

<sup>161</sup> Fouilloux, *Une Église*, 184.

<sup>162</sup> H. de Lubac, *At the Service*, 94. There are bibliographies of his writings in idem, *L’Homme devant Dieu*, iii, 347–56 and idem, *Théologie dans l’histoire*, ii, 408–420.

<sup>163</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 319.

<sup>164</sup> H. de Lubac, *Aspects of Buddhism*, *La rencontre du Bouddhisme*, and *Amida*.

<sup>165</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 19–20 and 364–5.

<sup>166</sup> See “Schéma génétique des publications de Henry de Lubac au sujet du surnaturel,” in idem, *Surnaturel*, xiii–xvi.

twentieth century.<sup>167</sup> De Lubac reports that at his Jesuit Scholasticate he had been urged “to verify whether the doctrine of St. Thomas regarding this important point [the idea of pure nature] was indeed that claimed by the Thomist school around the sixteenth century, codified in the seventeenth, and asserted with greater emphasis than ever in the twentieth.”<sup>168</sup> Obediently, he thoroughly investigated the genesis of the separation between “pure nature” and the supernatural and showed that it was essential to modern Neoscholasticism. Equally, however, he demonstrated the separation both to have been absent from Augustine and Aquinas and to derive from Scotus. In a later continuation of these studies, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, de Lubac defended the Jesuit theology of Suárez and Molina against the charge of having authored “the theory that sees human nature ‘as a closed and sufficient whole’,” and judged instead that “Cajetan is, if not quite the first initiator of it, at least its patron and leading authority.”<sup>169</sup> Dupré, with no institutional loyalties at stake, distributes the blame between Dominicans and Jesuits: “the man who developed the conception of the two orders into a full-fledged theology” was Cajetan, “Suárez gave the theory its definitive form.”<sup>170</sup>

In the Preface of *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, de Lubac describes his book as “one among an already long series of ‘tedious commentaries on the natural but impractical desire to see God according to St. Thomas’.”<sup>171</sup> He went on to assert that “For sixty years now” the positive idea he wishes to bring into relief “has been gaining ground again” against the modern dualist or separatist thesis:

The old tradition, which we are coming to explore more deeply, shows it [the positive idea] up with great clarity. However, it is yet again in danger of being eclipsed; fresh assaults are being made upon it from two directions. On the one hand, though the dualist—or, perhaps better, separatist—thesis has finished its course, it may be only just beginning to bear its bitterest fruit...in the sphere of practical action...[W]ishing to protect the supernatural from any contamination, people had in fact exiled it altogether...leaving the field free to be taken over by secularism...Christians...seek to find a harmony with things based on an idea of nature which might be acceptable to a deist or an atheist. The last word in Christian progress and the entry into adulthood would then appear to consist in a total secularization which would expel God not merely from the life of society, but from culture and even from personal relationships.<sup>172</sup>

In describing the second direction from which the fresh assaults are launched, summed up “under the generic title of ‘doctrines of immanence’,” de Lubac takes up the essential Blondelian theme. He judged:

It is chiefly a question of “historical” immanentism, concentration completely upon history, and envisaging the end of its development as a “universal reconciliation”

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<sup>167</sup> L. Dupré in H. de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (2000), ix; J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 3 agrees.

<sup>168</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 34–5.

<sup>169</sup> H. de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 144–145.

<sup>170</sup> de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (2000), xiii.

<sup>171</sup> de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxxiii.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxv.

which, both in itself and in the means needed to achieve it, would exclude everything supernatural...[T]his immanentism...easily develops a dialectic of transcendence actually within the human being...[F]ar from rejecting Christianity, it claims at last to fulfill perfectly the hopes awakened by Christ in men's hearts....<sup>173</sup>

The Greek Fathers were retrieved as part of overcoming this logic impelling immanentism discovered within Western Christianity. Among them the Christian way was not tightly departmentalised in the modern Western fashion; Latin rigidities, rationalistic confidence, and narrowness had not supplanted spiritual movement; a deductive theology had not been separated from Scriptural meditation.<sup>174</sup> Because the scientific divisions made by Thomism were associated with its Aristotelianism, Platonism was generally seen to involve the desired integration of philosophy with theology so that both become parts of a mystical itinerarium. Among many Catholic intellectuals who accepted and developed these criticisms of the Latin tradition, there would come to be a reaction against Thomism, but, de Lubac himself was at least as much interested in a return to a true understanding of St. Thomas and Augustine as he was in widening the mentality of the church and the resources available to it. In this desire to use historical studies to retrieve authentic pre-modern understandings, he was working alongside Dominicans like Yves Cardinal Congar (1904-1995) and Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990), and the laïc historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson (1884-1978). Near the end of his life, de Lubac published a revealingly annotated gathering of letters he had received from Gilson between 1956 and 1975 which disclosed both the closeness he felt to Gilson's work devoted to rescuing Aquinas from the Neothomists and his own attachment to the Angelic Doctor.<sup>175</sup> Étienne Fouilloux expresses what was at issue in Patristic *ressourcement*:

For a Roman Catholic theology buttressed on its interpretation, as normative as it was frozen, of the Thomist school, the Patristic movement was able to be disquieting, even subversive, insofar as, manifesting the coherence of theologies nearer to the origins of Christianity, it relativized the synthesis constructed by the Angelic Doctor and justified the doctrinal pluralism at the heart of a Church which, since the Modernist Crisis, no longer tolerated it. All the more as these theologies, moulded in rumination on the Bible, had avoided the rupture...between thought and prayer, doctrine and mysticism, theology and holiness. Having been assured for decades by the Magisterium of being the sole rational approach to the truth, late Scholasticism could only denounce such a competitor, in which it suspected a return to Neoplatonic smoke in contrast to the Aristotelian "science" baptised...by Aquinas, even indeed a refusal to exercise intelligence with respect to faith, a subjective or subjectivist anti-intellectualism.<sup>176</sup>

In the 1940s and 1950s, both the Jesuits and the Dominicans were persecuted by the Roman doctrinal authorities because their new way of understanding and retrieving the intellectual and spiritual history of the Church were rightly understood to threaten Scholastic

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Fouilloux, *Une Église*, 182–7.

<sup>175</sup> H. de Lubac, *Letters of Étienne Gilson*.

<sup>176</sup> É. Fouilloux, *La collection*, 223–4.

Neo-Thomism. Gilson, like the other laïc master, Blondel, escaped, but the priests were forbidden to teach—although they later became heroes for and experts at Vatican II, and, as we have seen, some were even made cardinals in its wake.<sup>177</sup> One cumulative result of such work was an understanding of the Neoplatonic sources and character of the thought of Thomas Aquinas himself and, it is in virtue of this new understanding of Thomas' thought that, after the death of Neoscholastic Thomism, it comes again to be of interest.<sup>178</sup> This Neoplatonic approach to Thomas breaks down the difference between the two directions Bréhier described twentieth-century religious philosophy as taking when it affirms a transcendence. The possibility of such a *rapprochement* was hidden to Neoscholastic Thomism—what Stanislas Breton calls the “Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy.”

Henri de Lubac tells us about his philosophical formation at a Jesuit house of study: “In philosophy, on Jersey, Saint Augustine and especially Saint Thomas constituted my basic nourishment; numerous *excursus* had led me through Plotinus (about whom I did a rather overly enthusiastic paper...). I had worked a bit on Bergson and Hamelin, read Blondel...and Maine de Biran...”<sup>179</sup> He was especially attached to Aquinas:

When I left Jersey (I was then 27 years old), where a Suarezian spirit still reigned, I had been put down severely as a Thomist (of a Thomism, it is true, revitalized by Maréchal and Rousselot). At that time, this was called “not holding the doctrines of the Society.” I have never renounced that fundamental orientation, I even believe that I have worked (with varying degrees of success) to lead minds back to the authentic Saint Thomas, as a master considered ever-current. As to the “Thomism” of our century, I have too often found in it a system that is too rigid and yet at the same time not faithful enough to the Doctor it claims as its authority.<sup>180</sup>

This applied equally to his approach to Augustine. John Milbank comments:

The distinct Aristotelian moment in Aquinas remains [for de Lubac] subordinate to an Augustinianism blended with Procleanism (mediated by Dionysius and the Arabs). De Lubac explicitly endorses mid-century readings of Aquinas that stress the neoplatonic and Augustinian dimension, while at the same time his *Augustine* is more humanist and ‘Thomistic’ than that of the previous run of French tradition.<sup>181</sup>

As the other side of such a return to sources, as a way of exploring the consequences of the dualisms and oppositions in modern religious and secular culture, as well as breaking them down, both de Lubac and Daniélou endeavoured to understand and explain the phenomena of atheism and secularization, ranging widely in their explorations.<sup>182</sup> Something

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<sup>177</sup> On the character of the work and the persecutions, see de Lubac, *At the Service*, 60–96 and G. Alberigo, et al. *Une école de théologie*.

<sup>178</sup> See J.-M. Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, W.J Hankey, “Aquinas’ doctrine of God,” idem, “From Metaphysics to History,” and idem, “Denys and Aquinas.”

<sup>179</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 65.

<sup>180</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 144. See his “Examination of Theological Conscience March 6, 1947,” written at the request of his Superiors, *At the Service*, 269–70.

<sup>181</sup> Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 19.

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, H. de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, idem, *The un-Marxian Socialist*, idem, *Athéisme et sens de l’homme*. Evidently rather different in content if not in context is J. Daniélou, *Dialogues avec Les Marxists*,

of what motivated them is expressed in Daniélou's Foreword to his little book on *Prayer as a Political Problem*, presenting the question the book addressed:

What will make the existence of a Christian people possible in the civilization of tomorrow? The religious problem is a mass problem....At the mass level religion and civilization depend very much on one another. There is no true civilization which is not religious; nor, on the other hand, can there be a religion of the masses which is not supported by civilization....But how are society and religion to be joined without either making religion a tool of the secular power or the secular power a tool of religion?<sup>183</sup>

Given the interplay between the Augustinian tradition and German Idealism in the French turn to Neoplatonism, we must also mention de Lubac's study of both in this connection.

His writings on "the supernatural" had as their aims both to trace the history of its naturalization in Western theology and philosophy and also to find how "the faith perhaps legitimately used the universal reason, without which the supernatural order would be naturalised, and the natural order extinguished."<sup>184</sup> This legitimate rationality he associated in the past with Greek Patristic Platonism, and with Latin thought before Scotus. It included Renaissance figures like Pico della Mirandola—a favourite of French Neoplatonic scholars, to whom de Lubac devoted his last book and who, along with Aquinas, remains with the ontological Neoplatonic tradition.<sup>185</sup> In the present there was Blondel. Because the problem of the relation of the natural and the supernatural is in Western theology a question of natural desire, Blondel's "co-adaptation between human will, natural desire, and the Christian supernatural" is de Lubac's point of departure and return.<sup>186</sup>

In contrast to this legitimate reason, de Lubac finds that the anthropologised theology of Feuerbach, which involves everything to which he is opposed (anti-Christology, the inversion of the *kenosis*, etc.), is the result of the Hegelian Christology, itself realizing certain tendencies implicit in Western theology which became dominant in both Baroque Scholasticism and modern philosophy.<sup>187</sup> This diagnosis is shared in a general way by many others we shall encounter in this essay, being expressed most radically by Jean Trouillard. Trouillard does not, however, surpass the forcefulness of de Lubac's language about totalitarian humanism, which Olivier Boulnois describes as "truly more violent than that of Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*."<sup>188</sup> We cannot understand the coherence of de Lubac's intellectual project unless we are clear that for him contemporary atheism is positive and attractive because it realises something in the Western development of Christianity. In the Preface to his *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* he writes:

*Les Existentialistes, Les Protestants, Les Juifs, L'Hindouisme* which also attempts to open dialogue with the intellectual life current in postwar France.

<sup>183</sup> J. Daniélou, *Prayer as a Political Problem*, 7.

<sup>184</sup> Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac": 195 quoting de Lubac, *Théologies d'occasion*, 104–5. Tilliette's article gives a good summary of de Lubac's relation to Blondel.

<sup>185</sup> H. de Lubac, *Pic de la Mirandole*, for other studies see A.-J. Festugière, "Studia Mirandulana," idem, *La philosophie de l'amour de Marsile Ficin*, Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, 41–59, and Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 50–55.

<sup>186</sup> Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac," 195.

<sup>187</sup> For considerations of de Lubac's understanding of Hegel, see O. Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme": 208, J.-Y. Lacoste, "Le désir et l'inevitable," and B. Pinchard, "Sujet théologique."

<sup>188</sup> Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme": 207.

Beneath the numerous surface-currents which carry contemporary thought in every direction, it seems possible to detect...a sort of immense drift; through the action of a large proportion of its foremost thinkers, the peoples of the West are denying their Christian past and turning away from God. This is not the everyday type of atheism which crops up in all ages and is of no particular significance; nor is it the purely critical atheism...manifestly incapable of replacing what it destroys—its only function being to hollow out a channel for that other atheism which is my real subject. Contemporary atheism is increasingly positive, organic, constructive. Combining a mystical immanentism with a clear perception of the human trend...<sup>189</sup>

At the same time that de Lubac was publishing his studies of modern atheism, he produced the first version of a matching positive work, *Connaissance de Dieu* (1945) which reappeared under the same title in 1948 and again in 1956, this time as *Sur les chemins de Dieu*. It was eventually translated as *The Discovery of God*. Reflecting on the book which has a chapter on “The Ineffable God,” he gives us his views on negative theology, telling us that the purpose of his treatment was:

to remedy...a deficiency of classical Thomism: for the latter, the necessary movement of negative theology creates a danger of agnosticism...so I wanted to base this same movement on a more fundamental positive exigency, there at the beginning and constantly recurring, by which I sought to define the human spirit in its relation to God. This intuitive, or more precisely proleptic and dynamic...element, well founded in tradition, was diametrically opposed to the extrinsic and restrictive rationalism of the whole modern Thomistic school; it seems more important to me today than ever to stress this, at a time when an undue inflation of “negative theology” risks opening the way not only to agnosticism but to atheism.<sup>190</sup>

We shall not be surprised to discover that, in an accompanying note at this point in his memoirs, de Lubac refers the reader to Claude Bruaire.

Of those involved with “Sources chrétiennes” Daniélou made special studies of the relations between pagan myths and Christian mysteries and between Platonism and mystical theology. His works find paganism and Christianity complementary, but paganism only desires what Christianity attains. Such a contrast will not satisfy the more radical spirit of Jean Trouillard. Neither will Trouillard be content with de Lubac’s division between Augustine and Augustinianism—a contrast which aims to prevent the deformities of Latin “separated theology” being blamed on the great Western Church Father—, nor with Daniélou’s decidedly *Christian* Platonism.<sup>191</sup> With Jean Trouillard we have the judgment that the Hegelian dialectic by which the human and divine pass into one another has its source in Augustine. In his and Henry Duméry’s following of Blondel, there is a deeper and more explicit turn to Neoplatonism and to henology as against Augustine’s God as *idipsū esse*.

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<sup>189</sup> De Lubac, *The Drama*, vii.

<sup>190</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 80–81.

<sup>191</sup> See, for example, J. Daniélou, *Myth and Mystery*; idem, *From Shadows to Reality*; idem, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*; idem, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*.

However, before passing to Trouillard and Duméry, we must cast an eye on de Lubac's contribution to the debate about Christian philosophy because it leaves us with what is common to the Jesuit followers of Blondel in distinction from the more radical French Neoplatonists.

De Lubac published his "On Christian Philosophy: Reflections in the wake of Debate" in 1936 giving primary attention to the positions of Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), and Maurice Blondel, setting out the logical relations between the positions, and indicating his own stance. The positions are presented as complementary:

I tried to show, without "concordism," that these three positions did not contradict each other but were responding to three different situations engendering three different problems. For Maritain, there was no Christian philosophy, properly speaking, but rather the Christian who philosophized received from his faith extrinsic confirmations for his rational reflection. According to Gilson, who was more attentive to history, Christian revelation was, through one whole part of itself, the generator of reason, and consequently there could be a philosophy drawing its origin from Christianity, but it ceased to be Christian in order to become rational at the moment when it became truly a philosophy...<sup>192</sup>

While one might agree that "such irenicism" has the tendency "to mask the real nature of divergences" between the philosophical Augustinianism of Blondel, on the one hand, and the historicist Thomism of Gilson, on the other,<sup>193</sup> de Lubac clearly sides with Blondel insofar as he maintains that the other positions depend logically on Blondel's. Thus, his own position seems substantially to be that of the Philosopher of Aix. Blondel, by his account, "established a genuinely intrinsic rapport between rational speculation and supernatural revelation, without for all that, opening to philosophy the mysterious content of this revelation."<sup>194</sup> For Blondel, who rejected the expression "Christian philosophy," in order to speak of "Catholic philosophy,"<sup>195</sup> the incommensurability between reason and revelation is essential and sets an endless task for philosophy: "philosophy was not yet Christian since it was hollowing out the empty space that Christian revelation was to fill."<sup>196</sup> De Lubac unites Blondel and Rousselot in a "Renaissance of the reason" full of paradoxes:

Intellectual life, in effect, does not stop itself at this ultimate step, of which M. Blondel has made so penetrating an analysis, where reason abdicates—rationally—its autonomy, in a recognised powerlessness to achieve by herself the work which she is not able to avoid willing. She dies only to be reborn, and the heteronomy which she accepts restores her to herself more than she has ever been. *Deus, interior intimo meo* [Augustine]. Then truly begins for her the phase of "intellect." *Renaissance of reason:*

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<sup>192</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 24.

<sup>193</sup> H. Donneauud, "Étienne Gilson et Maurice Blondel": 514.

<sup>194</sup> de Lubac, "Sur la philosophie chrétienne," 131. There is a full account of the article by Trethowan in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics*, 106–109.

<sup>195</sup> Duméry, *Faith and Reflection*, 126–142 has remarks on the relation of philosophy and religion in Blondel and at 141 treats the significance of "Catholic philosophy."

<sup>196</sup> de Lubac, *At the Service*, 24.

such was precisely the principal theme of the work on Christian faith which Father Pierre Rousselot was in the course of writing when war broke out in 1914.<sup>197</sup>

This may be taken as an essentially Neoplatonic solution with the soul rising through the various kinds and levels of understanding as it moves more and more into a union in which philosophy as its means surpasses itself.<sup>198</sup> John Milbank judges that de Lubac produces “a new sort of ontology—indeed, in a sense a ‘non-ontology’—articulated *between* the discourses of philosophy and theology, fracturing their respective autonomies, but tying them loosely and firmly together.”<sup>199</sup> However, ultimately, the Platonism of de Lubac and Blondel is intellectualist, ontological, as opposed to henological, and Augustinian. We are on the way beyond this.

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<sup>197</sup> de Lubac, “Sur la philosophie chrétienne,” 144–145. Rousselot’s philosophical works are being republished in translation, see P. Rousselot, *Intelligence: sense of being, faculty of God* and *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*.

<sup>198</sup> See J.-M. Narbonne, “EPEKEINA THS GNWSEWS” and G. Catapano, *Epékeina tês philosophias*.

<sup>199</sup> Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 5.

FROM BLONDEL TO TROUILLARD AND DUMÉRY: FROM AUGUSTINIAN ONTOLOGY TO  
PROCLEAN HENOLOGY

With Jean Trouillard (1907-1984) we arrive at Neoplatonism developed within an anti-metaphysical and essentially postmodern position. Trouillard's Proclean henology 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 shaped in part by Martin Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics.<sup>200</sup> The movement out of Neothomism comes easily to the followers of Blondel's integrated itinerarium but getting beyond Augustine is more difficult.

Trouillard encountered the work of Blondel in 1929 when at the age of twenty-two he was studying theology. It offered "a method of thought which justifies the conspiracy immanent in spirit with all the orders of reality and with their transordinal principle..."<sup>201</sup> Trouillard turned to Plotinus when teaching at the Sulpician seminary in Bourges between 1939 and 1956. Although Blondel was not a Neoplatonist in the way that Trouillard himself became, Combès is right to consider that Trouillard's consecration of "fifteen years of his life to Plotinus does not at all signify a rupture with his Blondelian formation...but more a deepening for him of the notion and of the reality of spiritual immanence."<sup>202</sup> Trouillard himself tells us "I had indeed chosen to study Plotinus because I felt complicit in several of what I took to be his positions." However, it rapidly became evident to him that "the principal theses of the Alexandrine" were "quite different" from those which he had first attributed to him under the influence of Blondel.<sup>203</sup>

Blondel, searching for the grounds of action, had found it most particularly in the "unconditioned condition." The principle, which "having been laid claim to at the end of the action, must already be found at its beginning." "Such an interior motion transcends all temporal development, because it is this itself which is at issue" and, on this foundation, he is able to show that "reason, even in its effort to close itself to the supernatural, necessarily postulates it."<sup>204</sup> When he approached Plotinus from within a Blondelian perspective, Trouillard was dumbfounded to discover "a pagan philosopher who posited at the root of mind an implicit union with an ineffable source."<sup>205</sup> Combès explains:

The scheme of immanence, in accord with which Blondel would go searching for a supernatural transcendence, had already been anticipated in Plotinus, *mutatis mutandis*, in another context. Plotinus spoke of a "touching," of an "ineffable contact," the "un-thought," because it is "prior to thought," anterior to the birth of the mind...Proclus needed to employ the term "pre-essential" in order to suggest the power of the one, prior to and immanent in the origin of being, of life, of mind, of soul, of nature.<sup>206</sup>

It was the Plotinian language of the "ineffable contact," the grounding in what is unthinkable because prior to both *noesis* and *esse*, which attracted Trouillard.

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<sup>200</sup> See S. Breton, "Sur la difficulté d'être thomiste aujourd'hui," 333–46.

<sup>201</sup> Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui," 355.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> J. Trouillard, *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus*, 2.

<sup>204</sup> Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui," 355.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 355–6.

A ground prior to thought and being seemed to provide the right solution to the problem occupying all the followers of Blondel we have mentioned. On the one hand, they perceived a destructive modern secularization of Christianity. On the other hand, that secularization appeared to be a necessary development of Western Christianity. Neoscholastic metaphysics would loosen no knots. Thomism, with its separation of the philosophy and theology, and its account of the relations of natural and supernatural coordinate with this separation, did not belong to the solution of the problem but to its intensification.<sup>207</sup> De Lubac had shown that the Western tradition had come to regard the supernatural as another nature superadded to the first. It was inevitable that in such a scheme nature would retrieve what had been alienated and so make itself total. The Plotinian location of the transcendent ground of nature in what was beyond representation, grasp, manipulation and retrieval seemed to provide a way out.<sup>208</sup> However, to find this exit something more deeply and decisively determinative of the character of Western Christendom and its dilemmas than Thomism would have to be questioned. The Augustinian tradition, the very heart of Latin Christianity, must be interrogated.

It is not surprising, then, that, in an important article by Trouillard on Blondel written in 1960, one finds sharply expressed the problematic governing the turn by French Neoplatonic theology both from Augustine and from Idealism. As the character of his intervention in the debate about Christian philosophy showed, Blondel's refusal of theology and philosophy as separated sciences belonged to his profoundly Augustinian spirituality and way of thinking. As Tilliette puts it: "...the Blondelian dialectic is saturated with Anselmian and Augustinian (Bonaventurian) contributions."<sup>209</sup> Nor was Blondel Augustinian only in his spiritual and dialectical style; Augustinian onto-theology was at the center of his reasoning.<sup>210</sup> Trouillard comments on Blondel: "He will think that the Trinity gives him the right to detach the circular movement of mind from the realm of the finite and to sublimate it in the Absolute." He goes on to quote a profoundly Augustinian passage from *Action* speaking both of "the absolute adequation" of being, knowing, and acting in God and also of how this belongs to the structure of all subjectivity, so that "The Trinity is the ontological argument transported into the absolute; there this proof is no longer a proof, but the truth itself and the life of being."<sup>211</sup>

Trouillard's first response to this is a warning about the dangers of Augustine's trinitarian speculations. In his view, this line of thought, characteristically Western, was not able to protect the divine transcendence adequately because it remained within the Plotinian-Porphyrrian tradition of the exegesis of the *Parmenides* as opposed to the more radical division of the First Principle from *Nous* in the tradition which moves within paganism from Iamblichus to Damascius. In seeking to found self-reflexive subjectivity in the divine, the Augustinian tradition projects the finite unto the infinite. Trouillard writes about the passage he has quoted from Blondel:

Lines as seductive as the Trinitarian speculations of Saint Augustine. The danger of both the one and the other is to claim to justify the divine Trinity by some of the

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<sup>207</sup> Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme": 209–22.

<sup>208</sup> Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui," 356.

<sup>209</sup> Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac": 194.

<sup>210</sup> See C. Bruaire, "Dialectique de *L'Action* et preuve ontologique."

<sup>211</sup> J. Trouillard, "Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel": 23.

attributes or some of the functions which were identified and then to pass beyond these into the divine simplicity. This is also to 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 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>212</sup>

Henry Duméry takes this criticism of Blondel and Augustine to heart; it, and its consequences, are repeated again and again in his writings. He too warns against psychological constructions of the Trinity, which he finds both in the ancient and the modern theologians, and their absolutising of finite distinctions.

Nonetheless, in the passage he had quoted from *Action*, Trouillard found something he could affirm from Blondel's trinitarian speculations, "the collegiality of spirit and primordial rôle of relation in active thinking." This living interconnection of intelligences is also found in Plotinus: "intersubjectivity is not the accidental encounter of spirits which have already been constituted within their closed interiority, it stems from the very structure of minds which posit each other in a kind of circumincession."<sup>213</sup> From there he moves to Proclus, and from Proclus we are brought to reflect on another feature of Blondel's thought: the power of negation, the indeterminate and absence. Trouillard affirms that:

The point which Blondel and the Platonic tradition have in common, is the infinity of absence which all presence implies. More exactly the positivity and efficacy of this absence. A mental intention defines itself as much by what it excludes as by that which it posits.<sup>214</sup>

At this point Trouillard's henology comes into view:

If then the normative dominates presence and absence both, if it commands both possession and privation, the name *Être* seems badly chosen to designate it. The normative is *une hyperontologie*. The term *One* would be equally inappropriate if we understood it as an attribute. An infinite norm has only characteristics attributed to it as a result of the ways in which it functions. It is *être* inasmuch as it produces what derives from it, but it also imposes on them "*la distance*." It is *unity* in the sense that it rules the many, but it is equally the source of the multiplicity and variety of what is.<sup>215</sup>

Thus Trouillard draws the reader to a concluding quotation from Proclus on the foundational transcendence of the One and then to a summary remark on Blondel.

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*: 24.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*: 27

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*: 28.

Trouillard thinks he has shown Blondel to have the principles of “an original ontology, which is not a version of Aristotle’s nor a simple reprise of the meditations of Augustine.”<sup>216</sup> It is not exactly Neoplatonist either. Joseph Combès has examined Trouillard’s treatments of Blondel and judges that Trouillard had not concluded that “Blondel was a Neoplatonist without knowing it.” Too many differences separate his thought from Neoplatonism, differences which Combès observes: “have not been left outside the logic of the thought of Jean Trouillard who, in his intellectual development has recognised them and integrated them as such, while at the same time holding up to view the key points of *rapprochement*.”<sup>217</sup>

Along the same lines, Jean-Luc Marion detaches himself from Augustine’s theological ontology to which Blondel had been drawn. Marion finds Augustine’s interpretation of Exodus 3.14 to be at the root of the naming of God as *idipsum esse* and judges that “Augustinian thought... finds itself... explicitly taken up according to the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics.”<sup>218</sup> He refuses, however, to follow Trouillard or Duméry into a Neoplatonic henology: “I have never been very convinced by the demonstration: to pass from Being to the One, this remains within metaphysics by the simple conversion of the transcendentals. An insufficient evasion!”<sup>219</sup> Nonetheless, he locates a corrective to Western onto-theology in the same place where Trouillard and Duméry find it. Marion attempts a theology without ontology in a retrieval of the Pseudo-Denys as outlined in his first book *The Idol and Distance*.<sup>220</sup> In fact, he adopts from Denys what the Areopagite owes to Proclus and Damascius. However, having refused metaphysics, from his earliest to his most recent publications Marion denies that Denys’ position—or his own—is a Neoplatonism. Inspired by Lévinas to look to the autonomy of the ethical, one may say that it is the Neoplatonic First Principle named as the Good rather than as the One which governs his thought.

However, Denys is not the subject of Marion’s reflections in considering *Action*. Rather he attends to Blondel’s consideration of the will, not only as Blondel directs a polemic against Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but also as the infinity of the will is converted to charity in the Christian tradition leading from Augustine to Bernard of Clairvaux. Thus, Marion’s attempt “to shoot for God according to his most theological name – charity,”<sup>221</sup> and to move “hors-texte,” transcending the historical conditions of philosophy, is also Augustinian. Augustine’s voluntarism attracts him and, like Trouillard, he finds in Blondel “the conversion of the will,” or charity, by which he turns to God without metaphysics.<sup>222</sup> His article on Blondel touches on the central theme of *The Idol and Distance* because Marion recognises that Blondel is also concerned to find how will transcends “all its objects as so many idols.”<sup>223</sup> Trouillard, Duméry, and Marion meet, in fact, because in charity a Neoplatonic move to the One - Good beyond being, and to the will as free beyond the determinations of the *noetic*, are united. The French Canadian scholar of Neoplatonism (and

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Combès, “Néoplatonisme aujourd’hui,” 356.

<sup>218</sup> J.-L. Marion, *God Without Being*, 215, associating himself with a treatment of Augustine’s doctrine of God by J.S. O’Leary.

<sup>219</sup> D. Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*, ii, *Entretiens* 210–27 at 216.

<sup>220</sup> On his move to Denys see Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas,” 150ff.; idem, “Self-knowledge and God”: 93–8 for his understanding of Augustine.

<sup>221</sup> Marion, *God without being*, xxi; see idem, “The Idea of God,” i, 270–2.

<sup>222</sup> J.-L. Marion, “La conversion.”

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*: 38.

great admirer of Jean Trouillard), George Leroux, reminds us of the Plotinian origins of the notion of a undetermined free good will in his edition, translation and commentary on *Ennead* 6.8, the treatise “*On the Liberty and Will of the One*.”<sup>224</sup>

When considering “The Current Relevance of Neoplatonism,” Stanislas Breton speaks of: “three states or three phases of Neoplatonism: the intuitive stage, the logico-formal stage, aporetic stage.”<sup>225</sup> Elsewhere he uses the same kind of Neoplatonic logic to connect the forms of Christianity. Breton tells us that he “rethinks ecumenism in terms of a group of metaphysical operations”:

In this schema, the Catholic tradition privileged the operation of transitivity and transformation, functioning as a process of historical realism bound to the preservation of Revelation in the temporal world. The Protestant Reform privileged the operation of a critical conversion (turning around) which returned to the fundamental origins of Christianity. And thirdly, the Orthodox church of oriental Christianity privileged the operation of “manence” (*Esse-in*) or indwelling. I argued that all three movements—of historical transformation, critical return and spiritual dwelling are essential to the Christian reality, ensuring that it remains transitive and intransitive, transcendent and immanent.<sup>226</sup>

In his view, the same kind of logic operates also both in ancient Neoplatonism and in its French retrieval: “To each of these epithets corresponds a figure who illustrates it: Plotinus the intuitive, Proclus the logician, Damascius the aporetic.” He proposes these stages “as a law of development in which the essence of Neoplatonism unfolds...a quasi-group of operations...an operation of identity, a transitive operation or processive, an inverse or conversive operation.” For him and for his Neoplatonic companions, this philosophy most truly embodies the critical spirit. Damascius is its culmination: “Damascius the intrepid, when he turned on Neoplatonism in order to test its aporia, incarnates the inverse operation, reflexive and critical.”<sup>227</sup> In consequence of its henological reference to the One-Nonbeing of the *Parmenides*, Neoplatonism “is constantly inspired by a self-criticism.”<sup>228</sup> To this ancient triad of persons and stages a modern one corresponds:

Plotinus illustrates the operation of the remaining—intuition which makes nothing; Proclus was the man of the discursive procession, in its systematic rigour; Damascius, as for him, by a return, as much critical as it was conversive, in respect to the two first thinkers, incarnates the concluding operation of the cycle. By a distant analogy, I found, in some way, in the work of Trouillard the Plotinian nuance, in that of Duméry, the philosopher of religion, the drive, simultaneously expansive and rigorous, of the Proclean discourse; in the translation with commentary of Combès, the critical force of the original text of Damascius.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>224</sup> G. Leroux (éd), Plotin, *Traité sur la liberté et la volonté de l'Un* [Ennéade VI, 8 (39)], on which see below.

<sup>225</sup> S. Breton, “Actualité du néoplatonisme”: 110–111.

<sup>226</sup> S. Breton in “Being, God and the Poetics of Relation,” 142–143.

<sup>227</sup> Breton, “Actualité du néoplatonisme”: 110–111.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*: 123.

<sup>229</sup> Breton, *De Rome à Paris* 153.

Essential to this self-critical development, whether ancient or contemporary, is the shift to henology which is also a shift away from Blondel. Duméry, who spent so long engaged with Blondel, made this move in a decisive way. Occupied with the same struggle against atheistic humanism, Duméry judged, together with Trouillard, that the spiritual freedom for humans which Blondel sought could not be secured in Augustinian ontology or psychology but only in an Absolute which was beyond being. The need to move to henology—and the possibility of using Husserl (modified) to reach it—was worked out in a book completed while Duméry was affiliated with the CNRS: *The Problem of God in the Philosophy of Religion*.

A distance between the One and being is essential to the freedom of the Absolute.<sup>230</sup> Duméry makes this point vis-à-vis Hegel and Bréhier. As to Hegel, he writes:

M. Bréhier has compared Hegel and Plotinus. We are sent back then to the interpretation of Plotinus....One thing is sure: Plotinus only permitted the necessity of the inferior expressions to apply to the sole finite mind; the One remains transcendent to the intelligences....From an error in respect to this would we not arrive at the error which Hegel frequently commits of confusing the realm of finite spirits and the inalienable absoluteness of their Principle? He wished also that the law of exodus apply to God himself. This is to misconceive his transcendence gravely. Only the human spirit has a strict need to engage itself in history....Hegelianism comes back then to submitting God to the demands of man.<sup>231</sup>

Bréhier is also mistaken about the absolute: “Bréhier seems to believe that if there is a springing forth of the essences from the One; emanationism and determinism are bound up together. One must respond...that, from the point of view of henology, if the One is transcendent in respect to Being, it equally transcends the necessity of Being which results from it.”<sup>232</sup>

Duméry is not aiming in the end to make a scholarly point, but a philosophical and theological one, only a God which is beyond determinations can ground human freedom:

That man is the creator of values, what would be more normal than this if one recognises that he is free? Not only does this assertion not at all menace the presence of God, but it requires it: this is what Sartre forgets....If God is no longer the site of determinations, he remains the root of liberty, the source of all productivity: when he puts the human into existence, he creates a creator. In this way, one catches a glimpse of the possibility of tearing away humanism from atheism, better, of reconciling liberty and the requirements of the absolute, man and God.<sup>233</sup>

With these contemporaries again in mind, Duméry writes: “henology, reopens the [way towards God] and dismantles atheist humanism. Owing to it, in effect, human creativity finds itself reintroduced by right in a theistic context.”<sup>234</sup> He specifies:

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<sup>230</sup> For an interpretation of Plotinus which makes again the differentiations made by Trouillard and Duméry, in explicit dependence on them see F. Tazzolio, *Du lien de l'un*; B. Collette, *Dialectique et Hénologie chez Plotin* uses Trouillard for the same purposes.

<sup>231</sup> H. Duméry, *Regards*, 58.

<sup>232</sup> H. Duméry, *Philosophie de la religion*, 32, note 2.

<sup>233</sup> Duméry, *Regards*, 11–12.

<sup>234</sup> Duméry, *Philosophie de la religion*, 71, note 1.

In henology, there is no pure possibility in God, since the One remains above any determinations. Nevertheless, the One being trans-ordinal, the procession is gratuitous in respect to its principle, there is an effusion of superabundance, without there being an automatic, *natural*, communication between the One and the derived terms, there is not even any *participation* in the sense of an ontology. The divine liberty is still preserved, without recourse to a choice between possibilities.<sup>235</sup>

Freeing God from the chain of causes, even when causation is understood through participation, is necessary for transcendence in the divine and creativity in the finite:

The relation of God to the created cannot be defined by an ontological transmission, be it total or partial. Being, in fact, need not submit to transfer and does not reside in God; it appears only at the level of the created and is found contemporary with the multiple, the finite, and the imperfect. ... This reveals the One's mode of productivity and also the necessity for the immediately inferior term (the intelligible) to confer being on itself. The One cannot give derived spirituality, of any sort whatever, something of what he is, because he has nothing and is not. The One can only give it the radical aptitude to give being to itself. In this sense, the One creates by rendering self-position possible and participation impossible. To take the other side, if God were called *Being*, and not the *One*, procession would once again be ontological derivation, thus participation.<sup>236</sup>

There must be a "setting right" of analogy because the differences between beings (even between God as a being and other beings) are only "gradual and graduated":

It could simply be said that *ontology* has *henology* as its contrary, defining them as follows: the first holds that the inferior borrows a part of what it is from the superior; the second holds that the inferior receives from the superior the means to be what the superior is not. In the one, there is communication; in the other, there is literally position of self-position.<sup>237</sup>

Duméry attributes to Trouillard the recognition of the profound significance of the auto-constitution of what is below the One.<sup>238</sup>

Providing the proper ground to the liberty and creativity of the finite requires a full criticism of anthropomorphism; neither Augustine, who descended "to the level of psychologism,"<sup>239</sup> nor Hegel, nor Husserl, nor Blondel reach this. Hegel does not identify essence and being and keeps "logic above anthropology." Still, Duméry agrees with de Lubac and Trouillard that his divine-human dialectic reduces God: "one does not know if, for Hegel, it is God who needs humans in order to speak his absolute discourse or if it is man, who, swelling with pride, tries his hand at reconstructing the divine knowledge."<sup>240</sup>

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 243–244, note 3.

<sup>236</sup> Duméry, *The Problem of God*, 87.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>238</sup> See H. Duméry, "Proclus et la puissance de produire."

<sup>239</sup> Duméry, *Philosophie de la religion*, 219.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 44, note 4.

With henology this conceiving of God is unnecessary: “There are no determinations *pre-posed* in the trans-ordinal God; he has no need to conceive in order to perform. Thus the philosopher need not seek the ‘divine plan,’ still less the psychology, the secret intentions, or the ulterior motives of the Creator....From God to the intelligible there is no transmission of essences, but only derivation of energy....”<sup>241</sup>

Duméry’s philosophy of religion depends in many aspects of its method on Husserl; in this dependence, Duméry establishes a characteristic of much else which will succeed him in our history. We might say that Husserl comes to play the role played earlier by Maine de Biran. God as the One is the object of a fourth, henological, reduction—we note that Marion will also add donation to the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger.<sup>242</sup> Plotinus suggests this fourth reduction to Duméry:

After having reduced everything to the transcendental, it remains to reduce that, to disengage the One beyond all determination: a fourth and supreme reduction that can be called *henological*. Thus, thanks to a single deductive intention, close to what Plotinus does in *Enneads*, V, I, 8, we pass successively from the *multiple* (sensations and significations) to the *one and multiple* (the *Cogito*), and from the one and multiple to the *One* (or God).<sup>243</sup>

However, it is not only by suggesting this fourth reduction, that Plotinus does better than Husserl:

The anthropologists who draw their inspiration from Husserl have an equal concern with differentiating consciousness. But the vocabulary which they use is not always as rigorous as one might wish. We prefer the precision of the Plotinian hierarchy: imaginative thought or thought prior to logic, reasoning or discursive thought, pure or contemplative thought; at the origin of mind, contact with the One, or ecstasy. All these levels are gathered together in one single judgment.<sup>244</sup>

In a remarkable statement which reflects the same connection between contemporary immanentist atheism and Augustine made by Trouillard, Duméry notes the problems implicit in what Augustine did with his Plotinian sources. Equally, together with Trouillard, he points to the Christian successors of Plotinus in the Iamblichian tradition as offering a corrective to dangers in an Augustinian unification of psychology and trinitarian theology. In considering the construction of the doctrine of the Trinity, he asserts that although the historian has points to make, the critical philosopher “has also his own word to say”:

He will note, for example, that psychologism risks destroying this metaphysical construction (psychological trinitaries are not of the same order). He will also point out, we believe, that to give equal weight to the Trinitarian schema and the

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<sup>241</sup> Duméry, *The Problem of God*, 94.

<sup>242</sup> J.-L. Marion, *Being Given*, which stands at the conclusion of work spanning decades; on Husserl, see P.-J. About, “Husserl. lecteur de Plotin.”

<sup>243</sup> Duméry, *The Problem of God*, 52, note 15.

<sup>244</sup> Duméry, *Philosophie de la religion*, 92, note 1

transordinal character of God is to confuse transcendence itself with its modes of apprehension. Neither St. Augustine nor Blondel entirely avoided this confusion. With Scotus Eriugena, and under the inspiration of the Pseudo-Dionysius, it will be necessary to repeat that God is more than Unity and more than Trinity. In no case can he be circumscribed by the intentionality which seeks to grasp him.<sup>245</sup>

In considering what unites and divides Blondel, Trouillard, Duméry, and Marion we have moved too quickly. Between Bergson, Bréhier and Blondel, on the one hand, and Trouillard, Combès, Duméry, Breton and Marion, on the other, there is a considerable history and to some of that we must now attend.

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<sup>245</sup> Duméry, *Faith and Reflection*, 175, note 15 translating *Philosophie de la religion*, 69, note 1.

## FROM BRÉHIER TO FESTUGIÈRE: PLATO BECOMES A MYSTIC

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. An essential reason for this is that 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. The positive present interest in Neoplatonism depends on a reversal of this judgment. In the last third of the 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 Heidegger.<sup>246</sup> 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, indeed, would not and could not make, an exception for Thomas in his history of onto-theology.<sup>247</sup> Neoplatonism, in contrast, especially the Proclean and Dionysian variety, and medieval thought so far as it is thus Neoplatonic, is conceived as a 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.<sup>248</sup> A Dominican, Father 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 been that the Philosopher, identified by the Fathers as a veritable font of heresy, could become instead one foundation of Aquinas' thought.<sup>249</sup> However, after a Thomistic beginning, Festugière ended up teaching and publishing primarily about Plato, pagan religion, and Neoplatonism, concentrating on their mystical aspects. In 1944, the year after he was named Director of Studies of the Chair in "Hellenistic Religions and the End of Paganism" at the École Pratiques des Hautes Études, he started publishing an edition of *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*—which appeared in the series *Études bibliques* after having been rejected by *La collection Guillaume Budé*.<sup>250</sup> The work is essential to the Iamblichan - Proclean tradition in Neoplatonism. In 1945 he began another four-volume collection of texts and translations, the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The *Corpus* involved a collaboration with a close friend, Arthur Darby Nock (1902-1963)—Nock established the text and Festugière commented and translated. Nock was an Englishman who, after many humiliations at Cambridge, had fled to Harvard where he was visited both by Festugière and

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<sup>246</sup> This summarizes the argument of W.J. Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas," and "Denys and Aquinas."

<sup>247</sup> See de Lubac, *Letters of Étienne Gilson*, 32 (for Gilson's assimilation of Aquinas and Heidegger); Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 146–7 and idem, "From Metaphysics to History": 184–6.

<sup>248</sup> See H.-D. Saffrey (éd.), *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière*, which contains a bibliography of Festugière's works, xvii–xxxiv.

<sup>249</sup> D.T. Runia, "Festugière Revisited": 1–2 and 26.

<sup>250</sup> Saffrey, "Portrait," x. On the history of the chair, see P. Vignaux (éd.), *Problèmes et Méthodes*, 147–51.

by a friend of both of them, the Irish Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, Eric Robertson Dodds (1893-1979).<sup>251</sup>

Although an agnostic, Dodds shared Festugière's personal interest in Neoplatonism and the spiritual world—Hilary Armstrong notes that he had “a lifelong interest in occult or supernormal phenomena, to which his attitude was by no means crudely rationalist or altogether unsympathetic.”<sup>252</sup> His autobiography relates instances of revelatory dreams which he takes very seriously, and represents societies, his own life, and the lives of others as governed at least in part by a daemon. He concludes his autobiography by telling the reader that “At rare moments in my story an obscure being whom I call my daemon emerges upon the stage and assumes command.”<sup>253</sup> His successor as Regius Professor at Oxford, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, judges that that Dodds at first “studied Neoplatonism...with the enthusiasm of a believer in its doctrines.”<sup>254</sup> As we shall see, the evidence that he was personally attached to the thought of Plotinus at least is strong. Dodds shared with Festugière and Bréhier a deep concern about the fate of reason and freedom in Western civilization.<sup>255</sup> He survived with difficulty Oxford's incomprehension of his groundbreaking work on Proclus and we can suppose that the friendship of the French scholars with common interests was significant to him.<sup>256</sup>

With Festugière, there was nothing of Bréhier's positivism, or of the atheism or agnosticism of Bréhier and Dodds. Father Festugière's life was a constant engagement in a deeply troubled religious quest. He studied the forms of the Hellenic search for personal salvation, seeking in the spiritual forms he encountered there answers to his own questions. 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 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>257</sup>

A striking exhibition of his character appears in his “Rapport” for his Chair in “Religions of Ancient Greece”—which from 1952-1961 was fused with the Chair in “Hellenistic Religions and the End of Paganism”—for 1961-1962. After complaining that the French are now totally denuded of intellectual curiosity, and that, in consequence, his students are foreign and cannot teach in France, he concludes that he will have no successor. Speaking of himself in the third person, he goes on “to declare and deplore” that:

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<sup>251</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Missing Persons*, 93 and 172.

<sup>252</sup> A.H. Armstrong, “Iamblichus and Egypt,” 186.

<sup>253</sup> Dodds, *Missing Persons*, 194–5; see W.J. Hankey, “Re-evaluating E.R. Dodds’.”

<sup>254</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts*, 288.

<sup>255</sup> For Festugière, see his *Freedom and Civilization Among the Greeks*. He advocates a learning from history which unifies what Classical and Hellenistic philosophy can teach with Christianity and *Romanitas*.

<sup>256</sup> On the reasons for his cold reception at Oxford, see Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts*, 289–90 and R.B. Todd, “A Note on Wayne J. Hankey's review.”

<sup>257</sup> Saffrey, “Portrait,” vii and xii.

the period of Antiquity of the greatest importance for the religious formation of Europe is totally neglected [in France]: that period when religion became universal, when the individual aspired to new bonds with his god, when he searched for the Unknown God, when this God becomes known to him as the Christian *kyrios*. He declares, as very recent demands made on him prove, that this period, and its problems, continue to be of the highest interest to the learned in other countries. He declares and deplures, that in France itself his teaching, for twenty years, has been in vain.<sup>258</sup>

In reflections written 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>259</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>260</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>261</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>262</sup>

When Festugière comes to what he calls reflective piety, the first of whom he speaks is Plato. Of his doctrine of the Good beyond thought and being in the *Republic* and that of the *VIIth 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>263</sup>

<sup>258</sup> A.J.M. Festugière “Rapport sur l’exercice, Religions de la Grèce ancienne,” (1961-62), 81–2.

<sup>259</sup> A.J.M. Festugière, *Du Christianisme*, 275.

<sup>260</sup> A.J. Festugière, *Epicurus and his Gods*, vii.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Festugière, *Personal Religion*, vii.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Festugière thus identifies the origin of the “Undefinable God,” the “Ineffable God,” in Plato:

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>264</sup>

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

However, despite his love of Platonic mysticism, Festugière was not attracted by all the religious phenomena of late Antiquity. *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* 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 in an Age of Anxiety*, Dodds quoted him: “As Festugière has rightly said ‘misery and mysticism are related facts’.”<sup>265</sup> Although Hadot’s own attitude to later Neoplatonism is profoundly ambiguous (contrast his “I do not like Iamblichus and Proclus” with his article on “The End of Paganism”),<sup>266</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 somewhat 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>267</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>268</sup> Only with Trouillard, Duméry, Combès, and Saffrey, a positive appreciation appeared of Iamblichus and of those who followed him into a revealed pagan religion with a philosophically justified cult and theurgy counterbalancing and contesting Christianity.

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 “for making Plato appear to be a mystic, and for seeking to find, as Plotinus had, the foundation of the hierarchy in an intuition of pure being (the Good or the One), which the author does

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>265</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 100.

<sup>266</sup> Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, 71; idem, “La Fin du paganisme.”

<sup>267</sup> P. Hadot’s memorial “André Jean Festugière (1898-1982),” 34. Another criticism of Festugière’s approach to late antique religion came from J.-P. Vernant, “Les Sciences religieuses,” 85–6

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

not hesitate to consider as an authentic mystical experience.”<sup>269</sup> Thus, in other words, Festugière erred by treating the Plotinian reading of Plato as correct both in method and content. Festugière reduced to a unity an opposition Bréhier wanted to preserve: “the duality between the mystical Plato and the intellectual.”<sup>270</sup> 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, he moved freely back and forth between Plato and late Hellenistic philosophy, theology and religious life.

Especially problematic for Bréhier is, significantly, Festugière’s sympathy for the Plotinian interpretation of the *Parmenides* and “the radical distinction which he placed between the One of the first hypothesis...and the One of the second hypothesis” in the interest of “Platonic mysticism.”<sup>271</sup> Trouillard and those who will be occupied with the problems posed by Heidegger’s criticism of onto-theology will affirm and develop this radical distinction so that being is not primary. It is significant, however, that the interpretation emerges first in a renewed religious interest in the Platonic tradition. This return to the religious side of Neoplatonism continues and largely determines what aspects of the Christian religion are promoted in opposition to the theoretical or philosophical side of Neoplatonism. In fact, Postmodern Neoplatonism magnifies the “duality between the mystical Plato and intellectual Plato” because it makes possible separating revelation and ontology as Heidegger demands.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> É. Bréhier, “Platonisme et néoplatonisme: A propos d’un livre du P. Festugière,” 56. Festugière’s *thèse de doctorat ès lettres*, was published as *Contemplation et vie contemplative chez Platon*.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 64; see Hadot’s “Mémorial,” 32.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 61–62.

<sup>272</sup> See W.J. Hankey, “*Theoria versus Poesis*”; J. Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 53–62; G. Bennington and J. Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 44, 55–56, 114–143; Marion, *God Without Being*, 53–107; idem, *The Idol and Distance*, 139–195; L. Bouyer, *Mysterion*, 230 ff.

## THE SCHOLAR PRIESTS

Festugière's movement from Thomas Aquinas to Neoplatonic scholarship was repeated with his student and biographer, Henri-Dominique 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>273</sup> This work was to have been a beginning of a map of the Proclean influence in Western theology and an indication of the consequences for theology of that influence.<sup>274</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 also the key to its future.<sup>275</sup> When his work on the *Expositio* was complete, Saffrey went to Oxford where he became Dodds' only doctoral student working on Neoplatonism.<sup>276</sup> Between 1954 and 1961 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),<sup>277</sup> 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;<sup>278</sup> A.-J. Festugière, by his admirable translations of the commentaries of Proclus on the *Timaeus* and the *Republic* of Plato,<sup>279</sup> has opened the way to a better understanding of the doctrines of Proclus and of Neoplatonism in general.<sup>280</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>281</sup> By studies of the objective connections between Proclus and the Pseudo-Denys, Saffrey assisted those who undertook to show how Neoplatonism was present within Latin mediaeval thought.<sup>282</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. In the Inaugural Lecture of the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies in 1995, Saffrey outlined the

<sup>273</sup> Saffrey (éd.), Thomas d'Aquin, *Super Librum de Causis Expositio*.

<sup>274</sup> Articles showing his initial and continuing interest in Aquinas are gathered at the beginning of H.-D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur la tradition platonicienne au Moyen Âge* and in idem, *L'Héritage des anciens au Moyen Âge*.

<sup>275</sup> Saffrey (éd.), Proclus. *Lecteur et interprète des anciens*.

<sup>276</sup> R. B. Todd, "His own sideshow": 147, note 47.

<sup>277</sup> See Saffrey, "Leendert Gerritt Westerink."

<sup>278</sup> Dodds (ed.), Proclus, *Elements of Theology*.

<sup>279</sup> Festugière (trans.) Proclus, *Commentaire sur le Timée*, idem, Proclus. *Commentaire sur la République*.

<sup>280</sup> Saffrey (éd.) Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, vi, vii–viii.

<sup>281</sup> Dodds, *The Elements*, xxvi.

<sup>282</sup> The last of a series of articles is "Le lien le plus objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus"; his conclusions about Denys are summarized in H.-D. Saffrey, "Theology as science," 337–9.

elaboration of the *religio mentis* in Proclus. With him Plato assumed a new role, one which had profound consequences. He had become:

as Proclus said, “the guide to the true mysteries and the hierophant of complete and unmoving apparitions.” The immediate consequence of this development is the birth of a new type of theology. In effect, deriving the sources of theology from the rational *opus* of a philosopher resulted in bringing into the light a “scientific theology” distinguishing itself from all other forms of theology by being exhaustive, by the coherence and order of its presentation....With the same stroke, the true spiritual life comes to consist in reading Plato, and in particular, the *Parmenides*, the theological dialogue *par excellence*. Because the negations of the first hypothesis, according to the Neoplatonic reading, sing “a theological hymn in honour of the One”, from now on, reading the *Parmenides* becomes a religious act, and real ritual purification is the practice of the philosophical virtues, which thus are made the true religious service. Celebrating the divine is entirely intellectual, it is the *religio mentis*.<sup>283</sup>

Saffrey sums up the role of later Neoplatonism in general and of 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 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>284</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>285</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.”

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<sup>283</sup> Saffrey, “Theology as science,” 336–7.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

...That is why...the spirituality of Proclus heralds the spirit of mediaeval philosophy.<sup>286</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 attempted to bring the philosophers into concord by a return to the *Prisca Theologia*. Further still, Pico della Mirandola and his disciples... will compose *De Concordia mundi totius* and *De perenni philosophia*, two themes tied to the Italian Renaissance which would enable them to inscribe in works of art their hope and their cult of perfect Concord.<sup>287</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>288</sup>

The result of this and other scholarship was not only that Neoplatonism was developed as a alternative to Thomism but also that a Neoplatonic Thomas became possible. Significantly Saffrey dedicated his “Theology as science” “In memory of E.R. Dodds and M.-D. Chenu”—one a Neoplatonic and the other a medieval scholar, one associated with the best twentieth-century work on Proclus, the other persecuted by the authorities of the Catholic Church for efforts to place the thought of Aquinas in its historical context. The Neoplatonising of medieval scholasticism which will be carried out by Pierre Hadot, the disciples of Festugière, and others will not only transform the understanding of medieval philosophy, theology, and spirituality, be important in the response to Heidegger, but also it will be crucial to how the medieval forms are placed in post-modern philosophy and theology.

The Jesuit Édouard des Places (1900-2000) may be compared to Festugière for the range and volume of his work. He passed easily from studies of Greek poetry, religion, and Plato to Patristic and Neoplatonic studies and clearly had a profound sense for the continuities not only within the Hellenic tradition but between it and its Christian succession. Both characteristics of his work are perhaps best seen in his study of the kinship between god and man and which begins with Homer, passes by way of the Neoplatonists—where Iamblichus and theurgy are prominent—, and concludes with the Christian Fathers.<sup>289</sup> In 1966, he published an edition and translation of Iamblichus, *Les mystères d'Égypte*. In 1971

<sup>286</sup> H.-D. Saffrey, “From Iamblichus to Proclus and Damascius,” 264. See idem “The Piety and Prayers of Ordinary Men and Women in Late Antiquity.”

<sup>287</sup> H.-D. Saffrey, “Accorder entre elles les traditions,” 49–50.

<sup>288</sup> Segonds, “Liminaire,” xix–xxi. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, “Revealed Religion,” 753.

<sup>289</sup> É. des Places, *Syngeneia*. For an incomplete bibliography, see the collection of his articles in idem, *Études platoniciennes*; xi–xix; for additional bibliography, see S. Gersh (ed.), *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, ix–xii.

and 1989, the same publisher—Les Belles Lettres—brought out his Greek text and French translation of the *Oracles Chaldaïques* and of the *Protrepticus* of Iamblichus. His life spanned the entire century and united the work of Festugière and Dodds with that of Trouillard and Breton. His edition of Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* starts with praise of Festugière's *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*. Jean Trouillard revised and corrected the des Places edition of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and the contribution of des Places to the Trouillard Festschrift not only traces what the Pseudo-Denys owed to the *Oracles*, but also pays tribute to the profundity of Trouillard's philosophical analysis as well as using that of Breton.<sup>290</sup> In consequence, between this Jesuit and the Dominicans, the picture of the oracular and theurgic aspects of Neoplatonic spirituality in Late Antiquity was filled out and the ground was laid for the kind of understanding of the Christian Fathers and Aquinas which Blondel and de Lubac sought.

Aquinas was not the only medieval who benefited from the deepened study and re-evaluation of the later Neoplatonists. It does not belong to this history to trace the reworking of medieval thought from within a Neoplatonic perspective, but the study of Eriugena should be mentioned, primarily because this most Neoplatonic of Christians became a model to some for what Christian theology might again become. Among French scholars, the work of a Canon of Chartres, Directeur de recherche at the CNRS, and Professor at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies at Toronto, Édouard Jeuneau (born in 1925), is pre-eminent. Brian Stock writes of him: "there is no one else who has made so important a contribution to *both* Greek and Latin Platonism *and* to ninth and twelfth-century Platonism in our time."<sup>291</sup> Author of a history of medieval philosophy, numerous editions, and studies, he is crowning his career with the publication of new edition of the text of the *Periphyseon* which gives the reader access to the history of the writing and of the transmission of the first total Christian Neoplatonic system in Latin.<sup>292</sup> Jeuneau's study of Eriugena's sources makes clear that he had no direct access to non-Christian texts. Nonetheless, in a study of "The Neoplatonic Themes of *Processio* and *Reditus* in Eriugena," dedicated "To the memory of Jean Trouillard," Jeuneau brings out how radically Eriugena had assimilated the Proclean ideas which attracted Trouillard and Duméry so much. In virtue of these, Eriugena proposed the idea of God's self-creation in the creation. Jeuneau writes:

according to Jean Trouillard the major discrepancy between the Judeo-Christian concept of creation and the Neoplatonic notion of procession lies in this. In the Neoplatonic procession "every spirit and every soul bestows on itself all its levels of reality including its proper and final determination."<sup>293</sup> This is not the case in the Christian doctrine of creation, in which the creative power is the privilege of God alone. Eriugena is the sole Christian thinker to have dared to speak of a *Nature which is created and does create*. Jean Trouillard praised him for that: "Christian theologies allowed themselves to be overtaken by Neoplatonic teaching; they have been extremely reserved towards the transmission of the creative power ... Besides

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<sup>290</sup> É. des Places (éd.), *Vie de Pythagore*, 9, idem, "Les *Oracles Chaldaïques* et Denys L'Aréopagite," 291.

<sup>291</sup> Brian Stock, Preface, H.J. Westra (ed.), *From Athens to Chartres*, xiv; the volume contains a list of Jeuneau's publications.

<sup>292</sup> See É. Jeuneau, *La philosophie médiévale*, que sais-je? (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963); idem, *The Autograph of Eriugena*, idem, Iohannes Scottus seu Eriugena, *Periphyseon*; there is a collection of essays, idem, *Études Érigéniennes*.

<sup>293</sup> J. Trouillard, "Procession néoplatonicienne," 11: "Chaque esprit et chaque âme se confère à lui-même tous ses niveaux de réalité jusqu'à sa propre et ultime détermination."

Eriugena no Christian doctor may be found who compensates for this deficiency and who rejoins Neoplatonism on that very point.”<sup>294</sup>

Jeuneau will not go so far in his sympathy with Neoplatonism as did Trouillard and he questions whether Eriugena’s notion is Proclean, but Jeuneau recognises the invitation it gives “to a new approach to this crucial problem.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> É. Jeuneau, “The Neoplatonic Themes”: 18–19; see also idem, “Le Thème du retour.”

<sup>295</sup> This approach has been developed by W. Beierwaltes, *Eriugena*, 364.

## THE ENGLISH: PLOTINIAN MYSTICISM OR PROCLEAN THEURGY?

There is, of course, an English Neoplatonic scholarship which was important for the French developments, as Festugière's cooperation with A.D. Nock and Saffrey's testimony to E.R. Dodds have already made evident.<sup>296</sup> Besides being the pioneer of Proclean studies in the twentieth century, Dodds was the encouraging friend of Festugière and a teacher of Saffrey. This English Neoplatonic scholarship can involve philosophical judgments moving in the same direction as French developments, as A.H. Armstrong's (1909-1997) insistence on negative theology and his growing appreciation for post-Plotinian Neoplatonism after he came under the influence of Jean Trouillard show.

Dodds' 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"—a circumstance to which we may compare Festugière's publication of *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* with *Études bibliques*.<sup>297</sup> He had had his proposal for a Loeb edition of Plotinus rejected.<sup>298</sup> In 1937, after Dodds had published his edition of the *Elements* and has become Regius Professor at Oxford, he is 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 was then working. Having already turned down in 1936 Paul Henry's invitation to collaborate with him, Dodds now refuses the Loeb Trustees and recommends A.H. Armstrong instead, who began his translations in the 1950s.<sup>299</sup> In any case, although the introduction to *Select Passages* is clearly the work of an enthusiast, it expresses judgments which will remain largely unchanged throughout his work and reflects the degree to which the views of English and French Neoplatonic scholars moved together.

In the introduction to *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>300</sup>

For him, Plotinus is "a thinker of first-rate speculative ability." Dodds quotes an unnamed "recent critic" who calls him "the greatest individual thinker between Aristotle and Descartes." Plotinus:

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

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<sup>296</sup> Among Dodd's publications on Neoplatonism, besides the edition of the *Elements of Theology*, and his article "The *Parmenides* of Plato," most notable is *Select Passages Illustrating Neoplatonism*; for bibliography see R.B. Todd, "E.R. Dodds: a bibliography," and idem, "E.R. Dodds: Bibliographical Addenda."

<sup>297</sup> Dodds, *Missing Persons*, 75; and see 60.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> Todd, "His own sideshow": 158.

<sup>300</sup> Dodds, *Select Passages*, 9.

attained its mature expression in response to the demand of the new religious consciousness.<sup>301</sup>

Dodds decides that there is a decline in later Neoplatonism associated with “outward ritual”; but maintains 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>302</sup> Thus he can judge that “the miraculous has no rôle” in the philosophy of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus.<sup>303</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>304</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>305</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>306</sup> However, by this time, Dodds has connected Iamblichus and the *De Mysteriis* and recognised the degree to which Iamblichus influenced Proclus.<sup>307</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*, namely, that we do not manipulate the gods but cooperate in their activity.<sup>308</sup> In the introduction to the *Elements*, he opines that “In the matter of superstitious respect for theurgy there seems little to choose between” Proclus and Iamblichus.<sup>309</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...”<sup>310</sup> Nonetheless, his editorial hands remained unstained because “all direct reference either to personal mysticism or to theurgy is absent from the *Elements*.”<sup>311</sup> Indeed, “its fundamental weakness” is of the opposite kind; it lies “in the assumption that the structure of the cosmos exactly reproduces the structure of Greek logic.”<sup>312</sup>

As compared with *Select Passages*, the elevation of Plotinus at the expense of everyone else from the first century on has been carried far 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

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<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>306</sup> Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, xxvi.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi–xx.

<sup>308</sup> Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 291.

<sup>309</sup> Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, xxii.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv.

beyond their power.”<sup>313</sup> The *Enneads* are no longer “the starting-point of Neoplatonism but its intellectual culmination.”<sup>314</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>315</sup> When we soak 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>316</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>317</sup> In *The Greeks and the Irrational*, delivered as lectures in California 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>318</sup> In his last book of Classical scholarship, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Dodds concludes that “Plotinus emerges in the end as the upholder of Hellenic rationalism.”<sup>319</sup>

The analysis of mystical union in Plotinus set out in the important article of 1928 is also sustained throughout his studies. There he decided that: “The Plotinian ecstasy...is achieved by a sustained intellectual effort.”<sup>320</sup> In *The Greeks and the Irrational*, he judges that: “The Plotinian *unio mystica*...is attained, not by any ritual of evocation or performances of prescribed acts, but by an inward discipline of mind which involves no compulsive element and has nothing whatever to do with magic.”<sup>321</sup> In *Pagan and Christian*, we have the same intellectualism: “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>322</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. Stephen MacKenna’s translation of the *Enneads* is praised for “the deep religious feeling which gives warmth and dignity to the style.”<sup>323</sup> However, the religion Dodds embraces is strictly and exclusively a *religio mentis*, “severely intellectual,” without ritual or sacrament. Ultimately, as he recognised at least in part, his is the perspective of a secularised Irish Protestant.<sup>324</sup>

As with Dodds, Festugière and Trouillard, Armstrong’s relation to Neoplatonism was deeply implicated in his personal intellectual, spiritual, and religious quests.<sup>325</sup>

<sup>313</sup> Dodds, “The *Parmenides* of Plato”: 140.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*:142.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> E.R. Dodds, “Plato and the Irrational,” 118.

<sup>318</sup> E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 265, note 78.

<sup>319</sup> Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 26.

<sup>320</sup> Dodds, “The *Parmenides* of Plato”: 142.

<sup>321</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 286. For a convincing refutation of Dodds, Armstrong, Festugière, and others of a like mind on this, see Z. Mazur, “Unio Magica,” Parts I and II.

<sup>322</sup> Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 26.

<sup>323</sup> E.R. Dodds, “Foreword,” xiii.

<sup>324</sup> Dodds, *Missing Persons*, 79.

<sup>325</sup> For Armstrong’s intellectual and spiritual biography, see J. Bergman, “The Contemporary Christian Platonism of A.H. Armstrong.”

Armstrong's final position differed from that of Dodds, though they were originally closer than they came to be. The earliest of Armstrong's articles reprinted in *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, "Plotinus and India" (1936), is a defense of the position of Dodds and strongly critical of Bréhier's *The Philosophy of Plotinus*. As Armstrong correctly represents him, Bréhier used the influence of the *Upanishads* to explain the mysticism of Plotinus in which "the distinction between subject and object becomes meaningless" and "the self and the One and Infinite Reality are one and the same." For Bréhier, according to Armstrong, Plotinus is "the founder of modern European Idealism, or, perhaps more accurately, Pantheism, ... the spiritual ancestor of Spinoza and Hegel."<sup>326</sup> Following Dodds, Armstrong rejects both Bréhier's characterization of Plotinian mysticism and his hypothesis as to its origin. He represents Plotinus as through and through the continuator of the tradition of Greek rationality, even in respect to his mysticism.

In common with Bréhier, Dodds valued in Plotinus what remained of Greek philosophical reason before what he characterised as the decline to anxiety and irrationality, which seemed to him to dominate the later Neoplatonists. As with Festugière, for Dodds, the dominant anxiety and irrationality among the post-Plotinian philosophers manifested themselves in endless quests for mediation by means of a ceaseless multiplication of conceptual entities and religious rites. Armstrong understood that Dodds "disliked" the Proclus whom he expounded so successfully.<sup>327</sup> In his early writings Armstrong partakes in all these negative evaluations of later 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>328</sup> For Armstrong the systems of the successors were abstract conceptual reflections parasitic on what Plotinus had actually known. His first strong presentation of the apophatic Plotinus, "The Escape of the One: An Investigation of Some Possibilities of Apophatic Theology Imperfectly Realised in the West," was not delivered until 1971. 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>329</sup> and again in "Iamblichus and Egypt," (1987) where Trouillard appears as a leader in the revaluation 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, 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>330</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus and India," 22.

<sup>327</sup> Armstrong, "Iamblichus and Egypt," 180.

<sup>328</sup> E.R. Dodds, "Numenius and Ammonius," 22–23.

<sup>329</sup> Armstrong, "The Hidden and Open in Hellenic Thought," 101–106.

<sup>330</sup> A.H. Armstrong, "Negative Theology, Myth and Incarnation," 47.

The revaluation of theurgy was, however, more difficult for Armstrong and the English. Since the Very Reverend William Ralph Inge (1860-1954), Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, English Neoplatonism has not been clerical, and Inge's Neoplatonism was Plotinian, Christian, Augustinian, and intellectual.<sup>331</sup> The English have until very recently preferred Plotinus to his successors.<sup>332</sup> Armstrong was strongly anti-clerical. Nonetheless, 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>333</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>334</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 practice of the Yogas."<sup>335</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>336</sup>

As he testified, it was to Trouillard, Saffrey, and Hadot, that Armstrong owed much in 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 "a certain common affective tonality" characterising Christians and pagans in the period. 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 an eminently positive phenomenon: 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

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<sup>331</sup> See W.R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*; idem, *The Platonic Tradition in English Thought*; idem, *Christian Mysticism* and R.B. Harris, "The Neoplatonism of Dean Inge."

<sup>332</sup> For the shift see H.J. Blumental & E.G. Clark, "Introduction: Iamblichus in 1990," 1-4.

<sup>333</sup> Armstrong, "Iamblichus and Egypt," 186.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 188. See A.H. Armstrong, "The Divine Enhancement of Earthly Beauties," 50.

<sup>336</sup> A.H. Armstrong, "Some Advantages of Polytheism" and idem, "Plotinus and Christianity," 122-30.

importance to the responsibility of the moral conscience and to 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>337</sup>

Such a re-evaluation was certainly more than 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>338</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.

It is not until very recently, and explicitly under the influence of French philosophers and theologians, in a movement which calls itself “Radical Orthodoxy,” that the English have combined Neoplatonism and postmodern thought.<sup>339</sup> Indeed Radical Orthodoxy presents this unification as fundamental to its construction, and more and more explicitly identifies itself not only with a retrieval of a Neoplatonic metaphysics of participation but with a particular tradition, namely, a Christianised following of the “theurgic liturgical turn” associated with Iamblichus and Proclus.<sup>340</sup>

Radical Orthodoxy was founded within the Divinity School at Cambridge University and has moved out from there. The founding father is John Milbank and his *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason* published in 1991 provides the account of modernity upon which what follows depends. In this work, Milbank argued that theology must no longer allow itself to be positioned from outside by philosophy and by secular thought generally. He endeavoured to persuade theologians to get over their “false humility” in the face of modern secular reason whose challenge, he announces, “is at an end, for it is seen that modernity was itself made in terms of metaphysics, and of a ‘religion.’” He claims that postmodernism has freed Christian theology from having to “measure up to...standards of scientific truth and normative rationality.”<sup>341</sup>

Writing the article on “Postmodernité” in the *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, Milbank describes the “Cambridge school,” out of which Radical Orthodoxy grew. It consisted in Rowan Williams, Milbank’s erstwhile teacher and mentor, and now the Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of the Anglican Communion, Nicholas Lash, the then Norris Hulse Professor of Philosophical Theology at Cambridge, John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Gerard Loughlin. He tells us that they “integrate themes borrowed from the French nihilists as well as from philosophers.” These philosophers are “a certain number of French phenomenologists (J.-L. Marion, J.-L. Chrétien, P. Ricœur, M. Henry),” —the very ones identified by Dominique Janicaud as belonging to the theological turn in phenomenology.

<sup>337</sup> Hadot, “La fin du paganisme,” 346–47.

<sup>338</sup> Armstrong, “Iamblichus and Egypt,” 181 and 184.

<sup>339</sup> For a collective work of the school see J. Milbank, C. Pickstock and G. Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy, A New Theology*. For a critical treatment of their mixing of Neoplatonism and postmodernity, see W.J. Hankey, “Philosophical Religion and the Neoplatonic Turn to the Subject.”

<sup>340</sup> J. Milbank, “Foreword,” in James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 17; see idem, *Theology and Social Theory*; idem, “Intensities,” 497, note 142; idem, *Being Reconciled*, x.

<sup>341</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1 & 260.

According to Milbank these phenomenologists follow Heidegger in admitting the “the end of metaphysics,” but mount “a theological criticism of his theory of being, and implicitly or not, of the thought of Derrida.” They are represented as trying to avoid “the nihilism of *la différance*,” which Milbank associates pre-eminently with Derrida. Graham Ward is described as attempting “to reconcile theology and orthodox Christology with the Derridean *différance*.”<sup>342</sup> Milbank himself fashioned what he called in an article “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism.”

Initially, Radical Orthodoxy was centred at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, where Milbank and Ward were Fellows until 1999. Milbank left Cambridge to become Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of Virginia, and is now Research Professor for Religion, Politics, and Ethics at the University of Nottingham. Ward has moved on to become Professor of Contextual Theology at the University of Manchester. The youngest of them, Catherine Pickstock, whose *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, is an important contribution to the programme, remains at Cambridge, where she is a Senior Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion in the Faculty of Divinity and Fellow of Emmanuel College.

The Radical Orthodox analysis of our situation and the solution to it will remind us of much in Bergson, “the French spiritualism,” and of what Jacob Schmutz identifies as “an unspoken but rampant neo-Augustinianism in twentieth-century French philosophy.”<sup>343</sup> The key to everything is an analysis of modernity, an opposition to it and the metaphysics it invented, and a conviction that we are postmodern. Modernity is reduced to a series of “bastard dualisms”: to *theoria* versus *poiēsis*, substance versus *praxis*, the spatial versus the temporal, closed objectifying subjectivity versus self-transcendent openness, philosophy as metaphysics versus theology, secular humanism versus divinity, the immanent versus the transcendent, isolated individualism versus community, mind versus body, etcetera.<sup>344</sup> In a postmodern overcoming of modernity, Radical Orthodoxy claims to retrieve pre-modern integrity in such a way as to gain for itself both sides of what it accuses modernity of opposing. Platonism undergoes a metamorphosis in which all its dualisms disappear.

This characterisation of modernity is at base Heideggerian and Nietzschean, although this basis is considerably modified, sometimes even to the point of inversion. Milbank follows and criticises the French thinkers from whom his ideas derive, and especially Jean-Luc Marion, to the point where the dependence has become a polemical but parasitic misrepresentation.<sup>345</sup> The center of the common analysis for John Milbank is his 1995 judgment, when responding to Marion’s *God without Being*: “it is arguable that recent researches suggest that ‘modernity fulfills metaphysics’ should be radicalized as ‘modernity invented metaphysics’.”<sup>346</sup> By this common shift from Heidegger’s “modernity fulfills metaphysics” to “modernity invented metaphysics,” these two anti-metaphysical Christians use Heidegger’s analysis of the modern while attempting to save pre-modern theology. In making this historical judgment about the modern invention of metaphysics, Milbank is not only drawing on Marion’s work but also on Marion’s debt to French historians of

<sup>342</sup> J. Milbank, “Postmodernité,” 924–5.

<sup>343</sup> Schmutz, “Escaping the Aristotelian Bond”: 199.

<sup>344</sup> Milbank, Pickstock, Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy*, 2.

<sup>345</sup> See, for example, J. Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics” and “The Soul of Reciprocity,” parts I and II.

<sup>346</sup> Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics”: 328.

philosophy like Étienne Gilson. In fact, Milbank, in opposition to Marion, wishes to resuscitate Gilson's "Christian philosophy."<sup>347</sup>

For both Marion and Milbank, getting beyond secularizing modernity requires reducing or eliminating the autonomy of philosophy. It is in this context that Radical Orthodoxy retrieves a theurgic Neoplatonism. Plato is no longer the archetypal philosopher but instead inscribes reason within myth; philosophical *theoria* is overcome by liturgical *poiësis*. Catherine Pickstock celebrates Plato as leading "dialogue...into doxology, which for Plato is our principle [sic] human function and language's only possibility of restoration."<sup>348</sup> She interprets the Tridentine Latin Mass theurgically in order to set it against a modern division of subject and object which belongs to the self-closure of the subject. To open this objectified subject, it is essential that material things are numinous and be addressed as if personal.<sup>349</sup> Thus, Pickstock hopes to effect the "restoration of the subject," a "living subject," with "a substantive, though not completed identity," having "a definite but open identity."<sup>350</sup> This has been a clear central aim of the movement we have traced and it will be no less prominent at its end.

Following the French, these English Neoplatonists are moving away from the traditional English enthusiasm for Plotinus to Iamblichus and his successors. John Milbank confirms that I am correct in linking him and Pickstock with "the Dionysian legacy of theurgic neoplatonism."<sup>351</sup> However, the creation of a "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism" within English "Radical Orthodoxy" reminds us that the movement we are studying may either work to establish an alternative to a Porphyrian-Augustinian kataphatic onto-theology or, instead, may work to reinterpret Augustine in such a way as to draw him toward an apophatic Neoplatonism realised in charity and *poesis*. John Milbank takes the second course and refuses my "contrast of a Porphyrian Augustine and theurgic Dionysius." For him "Augustine also places the soul within the cosmos and in the *Confessions* finally realises his own self hood through losing it in cosmic liturgy."<sup>352</sup> This might remind us of what Marion picks up from Blondel and the Pseudo-Denys, but, in contrast, Milbank also wants to keep the ontology which Marion refuses.

The attempt to save ontology is made by the total reduction of philosophy to theology—which reduction is attributed to theurgic Neoplatonism—so that ontology replaces it. For Milbank, Marion's phenomenology retains too much of philosophy's autonomy to overcome metaphysics: "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics." Whereas Marion refuses the Neoplatonic One for the sake of the Good and charity, Radical Orthodoxy supposes that its theological ontology allows it both to have God as Being, and also to embrace enthusiastically the theurgic religion that went with strongly henological Platonism. Milbank's post-Modern Neoplatonism, refounded in Christian myth, consists in:

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<sup>347</sup> For J.-L. Marion see "Saint Thomas d'Aquin": 56, note 60; 58, note 63; see also 60, note 70, and idem, "L'instauration de la rupture." For his relation to Heidegger see Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*, ii, *Entretiens*, 210–27.

<sup>348</sup> Pickstock, *After Writing*, 43.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 195ff.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 199, 114, 118, 192, 211–2, 214.

<sup>351</sup> Milbank, "Intensities": 485.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*: 497, note 142.

notions...[which] remain essential for a Christian theological ontology: these are those of transcendence, participation, analogy, hierarchy, teleology (these two in modified forms) and the absolute reality of the ‘the Good’ in roughly the Platonic sense. The strategy, therefore, which the theologian should adopt, is that of showing that the critique of presence, substance, the idea, the subject, causality, thought-before-expression, and realist representation do not necessarily entail the critique of transcendence, participation, analogy, hierarchy, teleology and the Platonic Good, reinterpreted by Christianity as identical with Being.<sup>353</sup>

It is evident from what has been excluded that the restrictions placed on what can be accepted from ancient and medieval Neoplatonism derive from the Nietzschean, Heideggerian, and Derridean criticisms of metaphysics. In common with them Radical Orthodoxy seeks to deconstruct the Western subject.

Audaciously, the French philosophers on whom he is dependent for overcoming it are accused by Milbank of continuing the Cartesian and Kantian modern subject. For example, of Lévinas he writes: “The Kantian vision has today been radicalised by Lévinas...Lévinas...produces a bizarre inverted egoism, which conserves a mode of Cartesian dualism, and indeed perhaps accentuates it into a mode of manicheanism.”<sup>354</sup> Marion is also accused of continuing Cartesian dualism. Associating Marion and Michel Henry in the doctrine of subjective auto-affection, Milbank judges of Marion that his “new restored Descartes is a yet more solipsistic Descartes.”<sup>355</sup> Henry is also found to be guilty of manicheanism and of a “hyper-Cartesianism.”<sup>356</sup>

For Milbank, Derrida does serve to deconstruct the identity of the modern subject and its constitution of a matching rational object: “the reduction of being to the ‘object’ whose existence does not exceed the extent to which it is known by the subject.”<sup>357</sup> So Derrida’s essential strategy is employed, but his nihilism denounced.<sup>358</sup> Derrida is mingled with Eriugena. The old ontology has been replaced with a post-Derridean “logontic” in which the divine and human are interchangeable. Man creates his linguistic world so totally, that, as Milbank puts it: “man as an *original* creator” participates “in some measure in creation *ex nihilo*.”<sup>359</sup>

By way of his Christianised Platonic ontology of participation, Milbank grounds human *poiésis* theologically. He writes:

Participation can be extended also to language, history and culture: the whole realm of human making. Not only do being and knowledge participate in a God who is and comprehends; also human making participates in a God who is infinite poetic utterance: the second person of the Trinity. Thus when we contingently but authentically make things and reshape ourselves through time, we are not estranged

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<sup>353</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 295–6.

<sup>354</sup> Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity,” I: 341–2.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*: 356.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*: 360.

<sup>357</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing*, 70; see chapter 2, generally.

<sup>358</sup> On which see the stunningly polemical book by C. Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*.

<sup>359</sup> J. Milbank, “Pleonasm, Speech and Writing,” 79 and “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism”: §42.

from the eternal, but enter further into its recesses by what is for us the only possible route.<sup>360</sup>

The purpose of his theurgic Neoplatonism is to make *poiêsis* total. Milbank wrote recently that this “metaphysics of the participation of the poetic at once envisages all true poesis as liturgy, and at the same time must itself be contingent temporal performance as well as an expression of *theoria*.”<sup>361</sup> This theurgical *poiêsis*, explicitly associating itself with Iamblichan-Proclean Neoplatonism in order to unite the divine and the human, will remind us of Trouillard and Duméry, but Radical Orthodoxy regards itself as exempt from the philosophical consistency which their henology provided. There is almost nothing in the Radical Orthodox constructions which is not picked up in one way or another from French thinkers, but, after they have been “colonised,”<sup>362</sup> their positions are contemptuously dismissed. It always turns out that, in ways hidden to their authors but wrapped up in their continuing attachment to philosophy, they remain under the power of the very subjectivity they supposed themselves to be combating.

In accord with the fundamentals of the French developments we are tracing, the retrieval of Neoplatonism by Radical Orthodoxy serves to reduce the modern subject, which will be overcome by *praxis* and *poiêsis*. Not only contemporary French thinkers are colonised; ancient and medieval philosophers and theologians are also rehabilitated to become figures in the neo-Iamblichan Platonism it uses and transforms in order to accomplish this reduction. As we have seen, Augustine is reconciled to Iamblichus, so that union with the divine for both is by way of joining in the cosmic *poiêsis*. Aristotle has recently been recruited, as interpreted through Merleau-Ponty and corrected within Platonism—without noting that the corrections made to his positions are owed, in fact, to his contributions to Platonism! Flesh as self-sensing replaces soul, so that sensation need not be explained through any higher actuality. Along the same lines, motion replaces life in the Aristotelian definitions. Thus, in order to make sensed and sensing reciprocal, non-living objects have been eliminated. Touch is given an exaggerated priority and turns out to be the basis of human immortality. Along this hermeneutic road Milbank discovers the incarnational hidden truth of philosophy:

[P]hilosophy must return to an always secretly presupposed ontological depth...and in Aristotle also, the doctrine of flesh is a paradoxically spiritual or psychic doctrine: indeed more emphatically so....We are, as humans, immortal because more embodied, that is to say, as touching more comprehensively and with more intensity.<sup>363</sup>

When will Radical Orthodoxy discover Maine de Biran!? Paul Janz finds its appeal to “a secret, hidden, invisible depth of material things” to be an essentially gnostic obscurantism, which he believes characterises Radical Orthodoxy.<sup>364</sup> The hiddenness it discovers:

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<sup>360</sup> Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, ix.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>362</sup> J. Hanvey, “Conclusion,” 164.

<sup>363</sup> Milbank “The Soul of Reciprocity,” II: 492–4.

<sup>364</sup> P.D. Janz, “Radical Orthodoxy and the New Culture”: 399.

may not be understood in the more usual sense of “transcendent”, as something *supra*-natural...It must rather be taken...as something “subterranean” and “invisible” *within immanence*, which then in turn serves as a bridge of sorts to the transcendent, but which also, in virtue of its subterranean secrecy, requires special, intellectually “prophetic” insights to disclose.<sup>365</sup>

In common with Heidegger and together with Marion and Michael Henry, but more radically, for Radical Orthodoxy the First Principle and sensual life are immediately united, i.e. without the mediation of soul or mind.<sup>366</sup> All three thinkers may be represented as reducing autonomous and objectifying reason, identified with modernity, and replacing it with an incarnational Neoplatonism. However, only Milbank presents his project in these terms. It may be doubted whether Milbank’s own position is coherent, or that his representation and use of other philosophers is just to them, but no one is more determined than he to overcome the modern subject by means of what he regards as a Christian (and Augustinian) Neoplatonism.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*: 386–7.

<sup>366</sup> For a representation of this pattern in Heidegger, see Narbonne, *Hénologie, Ontologie et Ereignis*, 278–82.

<sup>367</sup> For a French judgment of the adequacy of Radical Orthodoxy’s account of the history of philosophy and of how it deals with Heidegger, see A. Pabst, “De la chrétienté à la modernité?”

## THE FRENCH PROBLEMATIC

The discussion of Augustine and Dionysius in the terms Milbank and Marion employ is a result of the mingling of scholarship with theological and philosophical reflection which characterises twentieth-century French Neoplatonism and we must consider this concatenation further. Despite the re-evaluation of theurgic Neoplatonism, Plotinian and Porphyrian study continued. The Belgium Jesuit Paul Henry (1906-1984) co-edited what is now the definitive edition of Plotinus. In addition, by pointing to what in Marius Victorinus mediated the connection between Plotinus and Augustine,<sup>368</sup> he established the context in which his student, Pierre Hadot, identified Porphyry as the missing link.<sup>369</sup> Hadot showed that an aspect of Plotinus' teaching about the activity of the One and its relation to *Nous* had been exploited by Porphyry and transmitted to Augustine either directly or through Marius Victorinus. In consequence, Augustine's Trinity could be seen as an extension of an alternative within the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides* of Plato. Porphyry's telescoping of the hypostases, against which Iamblichus and his successors reacted, might then be understood as the founding of the onto-theological tradition in which the First is understood in terms of being so that ontology will be absolute. Alternatively, the same doctrine might be taken as the foundation of an apophatic ontology, "a metaphysics of pure being." Hadot's research leaves us with the possibility of three opposed, or at least different, metaphysics emerging from Neoplatonism: 1) kataphatic ontology—traditionally associated with Augustine and Aquinas—, 2) apophatic ontology, "a metaphysics of pure being," or 3) henology.

In 1959 Hadot published a criticism of Heidegger's treatment of Platonism in the course of judging both that Heidegger is "the prophet of this end of Platonism, which is, at the same time, the end of a world" and that "one might be tempted to interpret the thought of Heidegger as a kind of Neoplatonism."<sup>370</sup> Nonetheless it is Pierre Aubenque who set up the question about the alternative metaphysics which might derive from Neoplatonism in the Heideggerian terms which have dominated French philosophy in the last third of twentieth century. Aubenque's "Plotinus and the Overcoming of Classical Greek Ontology," was delivered in 1969 to a colloque on Neoplatonism and published in 1971. He judges that: "The thought of Plotinus and, following it, Neoplatonism, are characterised...by two complementary theses, which take the opposite course to that of traditional ontology. The first is that *being [l'étant] is not what is there from the first, above being [l'étant], there is the One.*"<sup>371</sup> Aubenque goes on to outline what follows from the first thesis: "a negative henology, the always repeated indication of the necessity to pass beyond ontology."<sup>372</sup> He tells us that: "Plotinus has generally chosen the first way." Nonetheless, there is a second way:

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<sup>368</sup> See P. Henry, "The *Adversus Arium* of Marius Victorinus." For Henry's work and bibliography see Jean Pépin's memorial in *Revue des études augustiniennes*.

<sup>369</sup> See P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*. For a collection of the articles by which Hadot traced the history from Porphyry and Augustine to Western mediaeval ontologies see his *Plotin, Porphyre. Études Néoplatoniciennes*; for a very small part of the discussion see W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle, Being or Unity?":141–6; idem, *God in Himself*, 5–7; A. de Libera et C. Michon, *L'Être et l'Essence*, 29–36; D. Bradshaw, "Neoplatonic Origins of the Act of Being."

<sup>370</sup> Hadot, "Heidegger et Plotin": 539–41.

<sup>371</sup> Aubenque, "Plotin et le dépassement," 101. For a reflection on this article see G. Lafont, "Écouter Heidegger en théologien": 384, note 35. See also Aubenque's "Néoplatonisme et analogie de l'être."

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

In his criticism of Stoicism, he [Plotinus] seems nonetheless to suggest the possibility of an other way... This second way is that which another Neoplatonic tradition will follow, which P. Hadot recently believed himself able to trace back to Porphyry. It will consist of deepening the notion of being, rather than “overcoming” it in favour of some kind of non-being, and, in particular, rising from the “on” [Greek] participle to the infinitive-being [*l'être-infinitif*], that is to say to the act of being [*être*], absolutely simple and undetermined, because it is the foundation of all determination.<sup>373</sup>

By either or by both of these ways, Plotinian thought might escape Heidegger's critique of onto-theology. Aubenque also suggests how Neoplatonism relates to a Derridean deconstruction of ontology:

“Fundamental Ontology” or “overcoming metaphysics”: this alternative, which the contemporary project of a “destruction” or better of a “deconstruction” of the pseudo-evidences of classical ontology confronts anew, finds its exact prefiguration in Neoplatonism.<sup>374</sup>

Recently Jean-Marc Narbonne examined both of these ways in detail—using Pico della Mirandola and Thomas Aquinas as exemplars of the second. He shows the inadequacies of the Heideggerian critique of Western Neoplatonism because “the Neoplatonic problematic itself is almost totally ignored by Heidegger.”<sup>375</sup> If the teaching of Aquinas and, indeed, the diversity of the metaphysics produced in the Middle Ages are considered within “the Neoplatonic problematic” in the wide sense now open to our view, exciting and paradoxical results emerge.

For example, when we have come to understand the origins, history, and character of “the metaphysics of pure being,” it becomes clear that the characteristics which Étienne Gilson used to set Aquinas' existential metaphysics of *esse* in opposition to Neoplatonism serve, in fact, to place his doctrine within a Neoplatonic tradition.<sup>376</sup> In the still wider understanding which the addition of all the Neoplatonic alternatives gives us, we can see with Jean-François Courtine “that Heidegger possessed a completely frozen and reductive notion of medieval metaphysics” and judge, in consequence, with Rudi Imbach “that Western metaphysics is a barbarous and bastard, but vigorous, child of a formidable interbreeding.”<sup>377</sup> Alain de Libera, with many others, has contributed to showing what Neoplatonism gave to this “formidable interbreeding” and judges:

By a certain type of subtle archaeology, liberated from the horizon of onto-theology, I believe, in any case, that it is possible to approach in a true historical way the plurality of medieval metaphysics, and at the same time it is possible also perhaps to

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<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>375</sup> Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, 19.

<sup>376</sup> P. Hadot, “Dieu comme acte d'être”; Hankey, “Aquinas' First Principle”; idem, *God In Himself*, 6; idem, “Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas,” 409–11; Armstrong, “Plotinus and Christianity,” 120–1.

<sup>377</sup> R. Imbach, “Heidegger et la philosophie médiévale”: 431 and 435; see J.-F. Courtine, “Métaphysique et Onto-théologie.”

throw a bridge between the metaphysics of yesterday and the metaphysics of today.<sup>378</sup>

Before leaving Hadot we must spend a moment on one other aspect of his extraordinarily diverse and fruitful work, namely, his many very careful studies of the mysticism of Plotinus. Ultimately, as we have seen already, he rejects Plotinian mysticism as possible for us and also separates himself from Jean Trouillard:

Mystical experience...no longer had a vital interest for me...and Neoplatonism appeared to me to be an untenable position...I had rapidly distanced myself from the attitude of Jean Trouillard, who professed in his books, and, moreover in his life, a kind of Neoplatonism. For him, Plotinus was always current and he reproached me for having written at the end of *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision* the sentence on the abyss which has opened up between Plotinus and ourselves.<sup>379</sup>

Nonetheless, his analyses have much in common with those of Trouillard: for Hadot, in Plotinian mysticism there is a loss of a self-possessed rational power; he writes that “Mystical experience is an irruption into the self-conscious awareness of reality of an activity of which the soul was unconscious.”<sup>380</sup> Again, he specifies that:

The mystical experience itself is a disruption of being which is of an entirely different order than the preparations which dispose us for it. Moreover, it does not suffice that we prepare ourselves for it. The experience is in effect a chance which is not given to everyone...<sup>381</sup>

The irruption in the consciousness “makes the consciousness explode in some way...one has the impression of belonging to another.”<sup>382</sup>

Hadot’s kind of description moves Jean-Marc Narbonne to ask if, in Neoplatonism, there is: “an abandoning of the territory proper to philosophy.” After conceding that Platonism generally is “a combination of science and revelation,” he concludes that “the Neoplatonists conceive philosophy as a servant, duty-bound in respect to a divine vision, which, at one and the same time, summons all her efforts and yet does not entirely depend on her. Plotinus is very clear about this.”<sup>383</sup> Philosophy cannot give the end for which she prepares us:

Philosophy in Neoplatonism ends in her own proper self-suppression, and must bow before a higher form of experience for which she prepares but for whose strangeness nothing can prepare her, because the One does not come in the way we expect it...<sup>384</sup>

<sup>378</sup> A. de Libera, “Genèse et structure des métaphysiques médiévales,” 181.

<sup>379</sup> Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, 137.

<sup>380</sup> Hadot (trans), Plotin, *Traité 9: VI, 9*, 43; see idem, Plotin, *Traité 38: VI, 7*.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>383</sup> J.-M. Narbonne, “*EPEÉKEINA THS GNWSEWS*,” 487.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 488, see also Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, 274–5.

Henry Duméry treats the mysticism of Plotinus in a way which takes into account what Hadot sees but draws it toward a relation between philosophy and religion which is opposed to Hadot's, and not only because it refuses to assimilate grace and chance:

Plotinus...dissociates mysticism from everything that is prayer or worship....He seeks salvation only through the mediation of the intellect, and yet he demands that the intellect declare itself dependent and insists that attaining the intelligible is only a stage, although an indispensable one, on the journey toward the One, toward ecstasy. And since the One is transcendent, the final ecstasy presupposes a grace. As Jean Trouillard observes, only those who link "the idea of grace to that of contingency" can dispute the fact that Plotinus professed a mysticism of divine gratuitousness and liberality. Once the transcendence of the One is admitted, the Plotinian ecstasy must be understood as a religious experience beyond the intelligible order. This amounts to understanding philosophy as an intermediary between two presences of the One to the spirit: the one a latent and unperceived presence, which constitutes the source of all spirituality; the other, a recognised and willed presence, which, in the dark night of language and meaning, of the senses and the understanding, consummates the marriage of intelligence with the Absolute.<sup>385</sup>

Returning from these considerations of Plotinus to the advance through the course of the twentieth century into later Neoplatonism, it is evident that those same elements found to be of interest in Plotinus by Hadot, were the ones which were found attractive by others in Iamblichus and his followers. The post-Plotinian Neoplatonists not only drew philosophy beyond itself into theology, but they also drew theology as theory beyond itself into a theurgic quest for union with the principle of thought above intellectual comprehension. A philosophy in which reason is dependent upon theology, and theology is grounded in spirituality dependent upon the elevation of the theurgist, has an obvious appeal to the clergy.<sup>386</sup> But, in the intellectual circumstances of the French Church in the second half of the twentieth century the appeal was connected with a necessity. By 1960, theologians were writing of *The Crisis of Reason in Contemporary Thought*.<sup>387</sup> Whether or not there was "a crisis of reason" outside philosophical and theological circles, it certainly was actual within them. Among philosophical theologians there was a reaction against what Stanislas Breton called Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy. Ultimately, this reaction can be summed up in the adoption by philosophical theologians of the Heideggerian critique of onto-theology and the consequent demand either for an Neoplatonic alternative to Thomism or a recasting of Thomas in Neoplatonic terms.<sup>388</sup>

Jean Trouillard had significantly developed Plotinian studies with his *La procession plotinienne* and his *La purification plotinienne*, both published in Paris by Presses Universitaires de France in 1955. For him, as for Festugière and Hadot, "Plotinus is above all a *mystic*."<sup>389</sup> 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 that his new theological structure

<sup>385</sup> H. Duméry, *Phenomenology and Religion*, 99.

<sup>386</sup> See Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 31, 152–154, 164.

<sup>387</sup> E. Barbotin (éd.), *La Crise de la raison dans la pensée contemporaine*.

<sup>388</sup> See Lafont, "Écouter Heidegger."

<sup>389</sup> J. Trouillard, "Raison et négation," 34.

really emerged—he published his translation, introduction, and notes to Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie* in 1965, *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus* in 1972 and *La mystagogie de Proclus* in 1982.<sup>390</sup> Trouillard was the first to undertake a philosophical and theological revolution by means of a re-evaluation of the relation of religion and reason, and of an apophatic henology together with an appreciation of the importance of the self-constituted in Proclus as a substitute for the Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy. 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. After noting “the well-known divergence,” between the rationalists Plotinus and Porphyry, on the one hand,” and “and Iamblichus, Syrianus, Nestorius, and Proclus, on the other, who give first place to the *Chaldaean Oracles* and theurgy,” he writes:

The important thing here is the repercussion of this difference in the system of Proclus as compared to the approach of the *Enneads*. Plotinus returns to the One through a severe negation, or, better, he gives way to a purifying motion which, springing out of the ecstasy hidden in each of us, detaches it first from the empirical world, and then from intellectual vision.... If Plotinus ultimately saves nature and the forms, he keeps them at a two-fold distance. He goes to the divinity by night. Proclus shows rather a will for transfiguration. Without doubt his universe is arranged on horizontal planes like that of Plotinus, but it is also 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. These chains tend to absorb the hierarchical ordering of the levels and to link them all directly to the One.... The sensible is thus susceptible to a transposition and a purification which announces and perhaps prepares for the intelligible expanse of the Cartesians.... A stone is itself able to participate in the divine power to purify. To tell the truth, this primacy of theurgy which disconcerts reason is again a form of night and accentuates the mystery. But it also reveals the concern for integration and continuity which in Proclus reminds one of Leibniz.<sup>391</sup>

The subsequent philosophical heirs of the Neoplatonic revival in France will all choose this Proclean way as opposed to the Plotinian approach as the two are represented by Trouillard.

In *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus*, Trouillard outlines what drew him to Proclus, despite prejudices against him, after his studies of Plotinus:

What overcame these prejudices was my reading of the *Commentary on Euclid*. Its prologue explained what Father Breton has since called “the self-moving character of imaginative space” or the circuit by which the soul itself forms itself in projecting the mathematical reasons.<sup>392</sup>

After he has traced other steps which changed his view of Proclus, Trouillard concludes:

<sup>390</sup> For an incomplete (and not perfectly accurate) bibliography, see Trouillard, *Néoplatonisme, mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, 313–316; Combès, “Néoplatonisme aujourd’hui,” supplies a list of subsequent work. Trouillard gives a brief sketch of his move from Plotinus to Proclus together with a comparison of Neoplatonic procession and Judeo-Christian creation in *L'Un et l'Âme*, 1–8.

<sup>391</sup> Trouillard (trans.), Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, 23–25.

<sup>392</sup> Trouillard, *L'Un et l'Âme*, 3.

Finally, translating the *Elements of Theology*...made me encounter the “self-constituting” character of all authentic being and made it clear that in a monadological perspective the entire procession is intrinsic to each psycho-noetic subject.<sup>393</sup>

Once Proclus is properly understood, the Neoplatonic doctrines of transcendence and of the soul must be reconceived. Trouillard sets these in contrast to “the Judaeo-Christian transcendence, which received in the Middle Ages a re-enforcement from the abrupt Aristotelian transcendence”:

Neoplatonic transcendence is not an absence, but an excess of presence, since it is for each spirit its interior home of liberation. It is less an end than a point of departure, less a superior term than a prior state, never participated, always communicated. It is only exterior to us inasmuch as we are exterior to ourselves...Since the soul is not only the term of the internal procession, but also the spontaneous recapitulation of the entire procession, from the One to matter, we are able to resume everything... in a single formula...:“The soul is the perfect mediation because it is the plenitude of negations...It is in this that it is self-moving.”<sup>394</sup>

It is impossible to read these words without thinking of the repetition of similar doctrines in the philosophies of Jean-Luc Marion and of Michel Henry—whatever their own sources for these doctrines were or wherever they supposed that they had found them. As Édouard Jeuneau perceived, Trouillard found them repeated in Eriugena.

For Trouillard the most attractive Christian system is that of Eriugena—who is for him “perhaps more Neoplatonist than Judaeo-Christian”<sup>395</sup>—rather than that of Thomas Aquinas and he has inspired a new translation and commentary on the *Periphyseon*.<sup>396</sup> For Eriugena according to Trouillard:

God does not know himself. And the reason for this ignorance, is that God is nothing...God...remains...inaccessible to all thought and is communicable only as motion. Therefore we distinguish in God so to speak two levels: that of the Deity, which is an irremediably obscure centre, and that of God the Creator, who by the rays which he projects makes himself known through his creatures...Our spirit is in itself a silent spontaneity and, nonetheless, manifests itself to the outside and to itself by signs and figures...Because it is in the image of God our mind is nothingness, and this is why it expresses the totality of the universe. Becoming the meanings which it emits, it creates itself in them, and nevertheless however refuses to define itself by its own creations.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–8.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>396</sup> F. Bertin (trans.), Érigène, *De la Division de la Nature*.

<sup>397</sup> J. Trouillard, “Érigène et la naissance du sens,” 268 & 272.

In consequence, the good is the name least unjustified but, as opposed to Aquinas, all names are improper and human perception is necessary to the creation of the cosmos.<sup>398</sup>

We will recollect that in his “Actualité du néoplatonisme,” Stanislas Breton locates the third and last phase of the Neoplatonic self-criticism in “Damascius the aporetic” and finds reproduced “in the translation with commentary of Combès, the critical force of the original text of Damascius.”<sup>399</sup> The principal contributions of Joseph Combès to the Neoplatonic revival are his translations and studies found in Damascius, *Traité des premiers principes*, Damascius, *Commentaire du Parménide de Platon*, and in his collected *Études néoplatoniciennes*.<sup>400</sup> His article for the Trouillard festschrift, “The Aporetic Theology of Damascius,” gives a succinct view of the place of Damascius in Neoplatonism and of how Combès understood the endless *autocritique*. In it Combès writes of Damascius:

His thought proves to be indispensable for clarifying the history of Neoplatonism which fulfilled itself and reflects upon itself in him, because Damascius...does not cease to interrogate his predecessors with a rare acuity and depth. His thought is aporetic, in this sense that he exposes everything taken to be obvious as always hiding an even greater obscurity under the clarity, and he pushes this process to infinity. Also Damascius gives himself up to a stubborn deconstruction of every givenness...Few philosophers have pushed the criticism of language so far...Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to understand by this that Damascius aims to dissolve the sacred deposit, received from Plato according to the exegesis of Plotinus, namely that the first hypothesis of the *Parménides* indicates the one absolutely free from being situated, the unique principle of all, such that no predicate can be expressed of it...The association of the terms theology and aporetic is not contradictory...The theology of Damascius wants to be aporetic in order to radicalise the apophatism inherent in it, and to shelter the deposit from all discourse, even that discourse which seems to refuse discourse, but which employs it again in saying that the unique principle of all surpasses all understanding, because by perfection it is transcendent and superior to all... Aporeticism will consist therefore in recognising that the negation of the highest perfections and even of transcendence, in respect to the principle, is demanded at a still higher degree, because these are only “our own conventions in respect to it.”...Solely silence acknowledges, following upon the awareness that the two necessities, criticism and mysticism, are only able to have, when something so ineffable is being dealt with, the same height, and that they come together in it.<sup>401</sup>

It is surely not an accident that Combès, following Aubenque, writes of a “déconstruction.” The debates between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion over speech, negative theology, and mysticism reproduce the concerns of Damascius; it is hard to believe that they are more exigent than he was.

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<sup>398</sup> For his complete reflection on the alternative models see Trouillard, “Procession néoplatonicienne.”

<sup>399</sup> Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 153.

<sup>400</sup> See J. Combès (éd.), Damascius, *Traité des premiers principes*; idem, Damascius, *Commentaire de Parménide de Platon*.

<sup>401</sup> J. Combès, “La théologie aporétique de Damascius,” 201–21.

The significance of the new “Neoplatonic radicalism” which completes itself in the work of Combès is summed up by Stanislas Breton:

What they [i.e. Trouillard, Duméry, Combès] inaugurated under the appearance of a return to the past was well and truly a new manner of seeing the world and of intervening in it, of practicing philosophy, of comprehending the givenness of religion, in its Christian form as well as in its mystical excess; then, and I hasten to add this, of connecting the aged West to its Far Eastern beyond.<sup>402</sup>

We will note the significance of the access to the Orient, the place of the dawn. The West not the East appeared to be at its eventide. No one was interested in celebrating Occidental rationalism.

Breton’s informal intellectual and religious autobiography, from which I have just quoted, is entitled *From Rome to Paris. Philosophical Itinerary*. His move—and that of French Catholicism—from Rome to Paris was a geographical transfer; he had for a period taught Marxism and Phenomenology at the Urbana in Rome, the missionary college of Propaganda Fide. Breton also represents it as a move from a Roman Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy to a Neoplatonic thinking and spirituality, and as a relocation to a Parisian Athens where he could be open to the thought of his lay compatriots. In France, Breton continued the work of “the Neoplatonic triad” in ways which exhibited both an extraordinarily imaginative understanding of the extent of the “new manner of seeing the world and of intervening in it, of practicing philosophy, of understanding the religious fact,” and also a remarkably wide actual engagement with French life.<sup>403</sup> The second may be indicated by the encounters of this Passionist priest with Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), Louis Althusser (1918-1990), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and his close friendship with Althusser. The connection of these friendships with his Neoplatonism, and it with his Christianity, may be indicated by the following from a recent interview:

I believe that the Christian doctrine of dispossession can be translated into modern “socio-political” terms as a critique of power. There is a certain correspondence between the mystical-neoplatonic critique of the Divine attributes—as an attempt to *possess* God in terms of ontological properties which would reduce His transcendence to the immanence of Being—and the Marxist critique of private property. Christianity and authentic Marxism share a common call to dispossession and a critical detachment from the prevailing order.<sup>404</sup>

The extent of his interests pursued over a long life (he was born in 1912) prevent summary, but a few persistent themes continued in his latest works will indicate where he pushed the Neoplatonic revival.

Breton’s autobiography gives a central place to his engagement with Aquinas and his work in developing both a Neoplatonic alternative to Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy and an interpretation of Thomas which recognises what is Neoplatonic in his thought. The

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<sup>402</sup> Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 154; see also, particularly, 164.

<sup>403</sup> For the place of Neoplatonism in his thought and work see also J. Porter, “Translator’s Introduction,” in S. Breton, *The Word and the Cross*, xii–xiv; idem, “Stanislas Breton’s Use of Neoplatonism.”

<sup>404</sup> Breton, “Being, God and the Poetics,” 136.

passage from the Aristotelian Thomism, which he associates with Rome, is not a passage away from Thomas. Breton tells us that he considers “Thomism to be the paleoancephalus of my philosophical formation”; his on-going writing indicates that his attraction to Aquinas continues.<sup>405</sup> Equally, there is early work on rational psychology which became a persistent occupation with Phenomenology.<sup>406</sup> The constant consideration of consciousness at the heart of the turn to Plotinus we have witnessed is connected in Breton with themes from Trouillard: the relation between the nothingness of the Principle, human freedom, self-creation, and mysticism. In this line he has recently produced a book centered in “the human project as the causality of the self by the self.”<sup>407</sup> There is a study of *Philosophie et mathématique chez Proclus* and of the doctrine of matter in Plotinus, *Matière et dispersion*. Breton reverts again and again to the Oriental religions, a reversion connected with his conviction about the end of the West.<sup>408</sup> It is foolhardy to try to reduce all these to one theme, but it seems to me that Breton’s modification, following Damascius, of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One into “Nothingness by excess” is at the heart of his thought.

Breton summarises his contribution to the Trouillard festschrift in terms of henology as *méontologie*: “This radical difficulty [of Being] is expressed by a double-sided *meontology* which is the real meaning of its *henology*. The progression is from being [*l’étant*] to Being [*l’être*], and from Being to beyond Being.”<sup>409</sup> In considering matter and dispersion, he writes of Neoplatonism: “in a philosophy of this kind, the thought of nothingness has an unparalleled importance. Nothingness by excess, nothingness by defect are inseparable.”<sup>410</sup> In a contribution to a colloque on Denys, he writes of “the horror of emptiness” and the possibility of calming it by the Buddhist “sunyata” and a Neoplatonic “Nothingness by excess” and goes on to consider “how to distinguish “nothingness by excess” from “nothingness by defect”:

The difference does not consist in a content but in the direction of the movements.... The unity [of the One] is not something readymade in us. It is the fruit of a long ascent, and of a victory over dispersion.... The ascent [of the soul] collects what the descent ceaselessly risks breaking up. The One-in-us confers the energy for this ascent. Beyond all constraint, it is the permissive space in which it is up to each one to mark out his road, and, by this, to be the cause of himself. Negative theology is not an ontology. It is not a matter for the disciplines of knowledge. At the peak of its functioning, it is only the reminiscence of a bringing forth of being [*ontogénie*], itself possible on the sole condition of an openness to the motion of the “nothingness by excess” which dwells in us.... Would it be, effectively, a beyond in respect to being and in respect to the God of the religions?<sup>411</sup>

Inherent in the logic of Breton’s move from Rome to Paris and of the “beyond in respect to the God of the religions,” and one of the consequences of the Second Vatican

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<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. See idem, “Sur la difficulté d’être thomiste aujourd’hui”; idem, *Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, and idem, “Textes de Saint-Thomas.”

<sup>406</sup> Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 66–72.

<sup>407</sup> S. Breton, *Causalité et projet*, 1.

<sup>408</sup> Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 204–13; idem, *Causalité et projet*, 187–95; idem, *Philosophie et mystique*, 111–41.

<sup>409</sup> S. Breton, “Difficile néoplatonisme,” 322.

<sup>410</sup> Breton, *Matière et dispersion*, 189.

<sup>411</sup> S. Breton, “Sens et Portée de la Théologie Négative,” 642–3.

Council, was an end to the domination of the clergy in philosophy and theology. For a priesthood which understands itself theurgically, but through a new communal liturgy, containing theology and philosophy within the priesthood would be inappropriate. As a result the last figures at which we shall look in this history are laïcs, most of them teaching philosophy in the university.

## BACK TO THE LAITY AND UNIVERSITY PHILOSOPHY

Jean-Luc Marion (born in 1946) both teaches philosophy at the Sorbonne and in North America—specialising in Descartes and in Phenomenology—and is a leading Catholic theologian, holding a chair in religion and theology at the University of Chicago. The context of Marion’s postmodern turn to Neoplatonism is defined more by Lévinas<sup>412</sup> than by Heidegger, and as indicated above, he gets beyond ontology not by henology but by a leap *hors-texte* to the Good or charity. His use of the Pseudo-Denys in this leap requires the mention of another of the priest scholars who recuperated Neoplatonism in this century, René Roques (born in 1917).

“M. l’abbé R. Roques” is listed as an *Auditeur assidus* of Festugière when the latter was teaching Aristotle’s *De Caelo* in the Fifth Section, Religious Sciences, of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1948-49 and continued to study under him for the next decade.<sup>413</sup> While still attached to the CNRS, Roques published his *L’Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys*, which Henry Duméry recognised as marking “a true renewal of Dionysian studies.”<sup>414</sup> In 1960, Roques joined Paul Vignaux (1904-1987), who had been appointed as Gilson’s successor in 1934 when Gilson moved to the Collège de France, teaching the history of medieval theology in the Fifth Section and staying until 1985 when he was succeeded by Alain de Libera (born in 1948). Roques chiefly taught Anselm, Eriugena, and above all the Pseudo-Denys.<sup>415</sup>

In the 1960s the École Pratique des Hautes Études was central to the positive turn toward Neoplatonism among Patristic scholars, medievalists, and philosophers. In the Fourth Section, “Historical and Philosophical Sciences,” there were Pierre Courcelle (1912-1980) in “Littérature Latine d’époque chrétienne” and Jean Pépin (born in 1924) in “Textes et Doctrines de la fin de l’Antiquité.”<sup>416</sup> Many of Pépin students crossed the vestibule of Staircase E to the Fifth Section. In the year that Roques was appointed, Trouillard and the Assumptionist priest Goulven Madec—who went on to study the philosophical sources of Augustine, publishing important studies of Augustine’s Platonism—joined Saffrey among the auditors of Festugière. “M. l’abbé Édouard Jauneau,” joined the class in 1963-1964. By 1968 Jean-Luc Marion was attending Pierre Hadot’s lectures on Latin Patristics and in Roques’ class Jean Trouillard was delivering a “Conférence libre” on “Proclus et Érigène: Quelques aspects de la théorie de l’âme.”<sup>417</sup> Father Édouard-Henri Wéber, o.p. whose work on Aquinas, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, and Eckhart is important for understanding Latin Neoplatonism, was studying with Roques and Hadot.<sup>418</sup> Along this same road, we find Alain Segonds, a student of Festugière, and Alain de Libera, the heir to Roques’ chair. De Libera’s prodigious output includes work on the history of the interchanges between Peripatetic and Neoplatonic philosophy in late Antiquity and on Arab and Latin thought in the Middle Ages,

<sup>412</sup> On the relation of Lévinas to Neoplatonism, see Jean-Marc Narbonne’s essay in this volume.

<sup>413</sup> A.-J.M. Festugière, “Rapport sur l’exercice, Religions hellénistiques et fin du paganisme,” (1948-49).

<sup>414</sup> See also R. Roques, *Structures théologique de la Gnose à Richard de Saint-Victor*; Duméry, *Regards*, 37.

<sup>415</sup> See P. Vignaux, (éd.) *Problèmes et Méthodes*, 231-238.

<sup>416</sup> From 1968, Chargé de conférences in “Textes et doctrines de la fin de l’antiquité” in the EPHE section IV. For bibliography see Goulet-Cazé, Madec, O’Brien, (éds), *SOFIHS MAIHTORES Chercheurs de sagesse. Hommage à Jean Pépin*, ixx–xxxiv.

<sup>417</sup> See Roques, “Rapport sur l’exercice, Doctrines et méthodes du haut Moyen Âge,” (1968-69).

<sup>418</sup> For texts which brought history to bear on contemporary philosophical, theological, and religious questions, see É. Wéber et al. *Maître Eckhart à Paris* and the contribution of Wéber to A. de Libera, (éd.) “*Celui qui est*.”

as well as studies of Rhenish Neoplatonic spirituality.<sup>419</sup> As indicated above, together with Wéber, Rudi Imbach, and others, de Libera has contributed to showing that the Heideggerian onto-theological horizon is not a useful framework in which to place medieval philosophy. There is evidently a close connection between the historical and philological work of the École Pratique and the CNRS, on the one hand, and the reflections of philosophers and theologians, on the other. Often at the Sorbonne they share the same edifice even if they are not always in the same foundation.

The interpretation of Denys by Roques strongly influenced Marion. Duméry writes:

M. Roques shows precisely that Denys only received Neoplatonism inasmuch as he was able to adapt it to the inviolable structures of the Old and New Testaments. He was not a Platonist who would arrive at Christianity as an added extra; he was a Christian who, without sacrificing any of the demands of his faith, made Platonism serve as a cultural tool to express what he believes and practices. This pure and loyal intention shines forth, for M. Roques, in the fact that Denys constantly preserves the transcendence of God, at the same time that he safeguards the historic Incarnation and the institutional church. Denys' Platonism does not render his Christianity suspect; it grafts itself upon it and remains subordinate to it.<sup>420</sup>

Despite subsequent scholarship which makes Roques' representation of the relation between Platonism and Christianity in Denys questionable, Marion continues it. He also continues a judgment of Denys which is not questioned. Duméry formulates that assessment like this: "Christian practice, elevation towards God, awakening to oneself, and transformation of the self are all of a piece. And this is, without a doubt, the best part of Denys' work, what in it will never be outdated."<sup>421</sup> This unification is the end most commonly sought by those reviving Neoplatonism in the twentieth century.

By 1972-1973 Marion was making his own contribution to Roques' class. In that academic year, the seminar considered a paper by Jean Trouillard on "Intelligible Light according to Plato" and one by Marion on "Distance and Praise: From the Concept of the Requisite (*aitia*) to the Trinitarian Status of Theological Language according to Denys the Mystic."<sup>422</sup> We are not far from *The Idol and Distance* (1977) where the section on Denys is entitled "The Distance of the Requisite and the Discourse of Praise: Denys."

In *The Idol and Distance* the religious and apophatic side of Neoplatonism provides a way around Heidegger's naming of the idols of Western ontology. Marion radicalizes Denys' mystical theology, while opposing it to Neoplatonic theory in a way we do not find in Denys himself. He does this by treating "One" or the "Good" as "intelligible names" for the Principle in Neoplatonism, which is, as we have seen, a problematic understanding. Marion writes of the Dionysian *Mystical Theology*:

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<sup>419</sup> See for example his *La querelle des universaux*; idem, *La mystique rhénane*; idem, *Eckhart, Suso, Tauler*. On what is at issue in looking at mediaeval philosophy in terms of Neoplatonism, see A. de Muralt, *Néoplatonisme et aristotélisme dans la métaphysique médiévale*.

<sup>420</sup> Duméry, *Regards*, 38.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>422</sup> See Roques, "Rapport sur l'exercice, Doctrines et méthodes du haut Moyen Âge," (1972-73), 395. Marion's "Distance et louange" appeared in *Résurrection*.

Ascent coincides with the negation of attributes. It is necessary to note that the denials bear just as easily on the names taken from the sensible (corporeal, figurable, measurable, variable, etc.), as on the intelligible names themselves, including the most conventional within Neoplatonism: “neither One, nor Unity, nor Divinity, nor Goodness.” The most appropriate name is found, therefore, no more in the Plotinian One than in the grossest sensible idol. Thus the negative way plays a double role: first, in denying of God that which obviously cannot be affirmed of him (the names drawn from the sensible, which are infinitely removed and unsuitable), it eliminates the first idolatry. Next, and above all, it denies of God that which it seems it might legitimately affirm of him (the names drawn from the intelligible).<sup>423</sup>

In addition, Marion puts the apophatic “distance” he finds in Denys against the objectifications of ontological metaphysics and objectifying subjectivity. For Marion, this is what Denys’ requirement that “divine things be understood divinely” demands:

As a censure and as a condition, distance requires one to think the doubly unthinkable according to excess (supremacy over beings in general) and according to lack (withdrawal as insistence, without being). Thus one cannot dismiss the duty to (attempt to) think distance by invoking theoretical impossibilities. One cannot, in order to disqualify the discourse of distance, invoke the impossibility in which an entire side of linguistic science finds itself of maintaining a relation to the referent: for distance bears upon a nonreferent whose indubitable resistance presupposes a withdrawal, that is, in common terms, an absence. In other words, radically prohibiting that one hold God as an object, or as a supreme being, distance escapes the ultimate avatar of the language of an object—the closure of discourse, and the disappearance of the referent.<sup>424</sup>

In fact, no Neoplatonist would allow the One to be an object, a subject of predicates, or an intelligible predicate, and—not alone among the Neoplatonists—Damascius, whose teaching is almost certainly known by Denys, places the absolutely First beyond the One. In general, Marion misunderstands the Neoplatonists by supposing that they reach no higher than the theoretical and that transcendence for them is only the abstraction produced by negation.

Thus, as I have noted above, Marion does not see his work as part of the Neoplatonic revival but, on the contrary, moving further than Roques, he associates himself with Denys in that understanding of the pseudo-Areopagite which conceives him as executing a radical Christian subversion of Platonic philosophy. Thus his Christian theological transcendence of the historical conditions of philosophy in shooting “for God according to his most theological name - charity” is also Augustinian. The separation of theology from philosophy is crucial to Marion’s project but is philosophically determined by his relation to Heidegger.<sup>425</sup> Be that as it may, Marion’s own intentions do not prevent his position from actually occurring within the contemporary appropriation of Neoplatonism as a solution to problems philosophy perceived in modern subjectivity. In fact, Marion, as

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<sup>423</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 146.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>425</sup> See Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas,” 150–63 and “*Theoria versus Poiesis*”: 388–97.

much as Milbank, gives both Augustine and Aquinas a Neoplatonic interpretation in order to accommodate their metaphysics of *esse* to a post-Heideggerian world.

Moving to an emphasis on will and charity in Augustine is not to move against Plotinus, for whom we are related to the One through “Intellect in love,” as István Perczel has recently reminded us.<sup>426</sup> In *The Idol and Distance*, and in the French original of *God Without Being*, Marion placed the teaching of Aquinas within onto-theology because he made *esse* the first of God’s names. However, in the “Preface to the English Edition” of *God Without Being*, and in “Saint Thomas Aquinas and onto-theo-logy,” as well as later works, the teaching of Thomas is defended against this very charge:

Even if Dionysius (or some other) understood the question of God on the basis of Being, this simple fact would not be enough to establish that he is inscribed within onto-theo-logy. That is, as we have tried to show in the privileged case of Thomas Aquinas, if an onto-theo-logy wants to attain conceptual rigor and not remain at the level of a polemical caricature, it requires first a concept of being, next a univocal application of this concept to God and creatures, and finally the submission of both to foundation by principle and/or cause. If these conditions are not met, if in contrast Being remains an inconceivable *esse*, without analogy, indeed *penitus incognitum*, then the mere fact that Being comes up is not enough to establish an onto-theo-logy.<sup>427</sup>

According to Marion, there is for Aquinas an irreducible difference between metaphysics and sacred doctrine which allows Aquinas “to think Being by the unknowability of God.”<sup>428</sup> In fact, the doctrine of Aquinas has been Neoplatonised by Marion so that it has become a kind of theo-onto-logy. God is before being which he gives even to himself. Marion shifts Aquinas toward Denys, and both of them toward their Neoplatonic sources. Werner Beierwaltes has exhibited the Neoplatonic logic operating in the relation between unity and being in the theology of Denys. At its pinnacle Denys’ trinitarian theology operates in the movement between the One-nonbeing and the One-Being of the Neoplatonic commentary on the *Parmenides* of Plato.<sup>429</sup> While correct as against even more fideistic accounts, Marion’s approach is incomplete, especially as compared to Narbonne’s criticism of Heidegger on onto-theology in *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, because it amounts in the end to a separation of the religious relation to God from the philosophical in a way that Aquinas, together with the later Neoplatonists, would not allow. A historically accurate explanation of the unknowability of the divine *esse* for Aquinas certainly requires a more forthright embrace of its Neoplatonic determination.

In his “In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of It,” Marion gives us his most extended consideration of Denys and of Neoplatonism since his initial treatments of these in *The Idol and Difference*. Almost thirty years lie between his first work on Denys and this most recent, yet many of his fundamental concerns, judgments, and positions seem to be much

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<sup>426</sup> See I. Perczel, “L’‘intellect amoureux’,” which opposes an Hegelian and Augustinian intellectualist interpretation of Plotinus and extends Trouillard and Hadot.

<sup>427</sup> Marion, “In the Name,” 30–1.

<sup>428</sup> Marion, “Saint Thomas et l’onto-théo-logie”: 65 note 82; see also 33 note 2; for Marion’s shift or “recantation” here, see G. Prouvost, “La tension irrésolue.” For later treatments of Aquinas, see Marion, “The Idea of God,” 265–7.

<sup>429</sup> W. Beierwaltes, “Unity and Trinity in Dionysius”: 3–9; Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas,” 165–73.

the same. *The Idol and Difference* is concerned with the question of whether all theology is assimilated to onto-theology and with the “surprising *coup de force*” by which “negative theology” “finds itself...reintegrated within onto-theology.” In it Marion regards Derrida’s *différance* as leading “us further forward, certainly not in the way of an answer, but in the seriousness of the question.”<sup>430</sup> “In the Name” is occupied with these same matters, confronting them through staging an encounter between “the two questions of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ and of ‘negative theology’.”<sup>431</sup> Derrida’s treatment of the two questions is now central and is critically surveyed. His objections to negative theology are blamed for their “crudeness.”<sup>432</sup> Marion characterises Derrida’s aim as:

to stigmatize “negative theology’s” persistence in making affirmations about God (in particular the affirmation of existence)—while denying that it does so—and thereby to point out its failure to think God outside of presence and to free itself from the “metaphysics of presence.”<sup>433</sup>

By a third way, “de-nomination,” beyond affirmation and negation, Marion finds the solution he seeks:

De-nomination, therefore, does not end up in a “metaphysics of presence” that does not call itself as such. Rather, it ends up as a *pragmatic theology of absence*—where the name is given as having no name, not as giving the essence, and having nothing but this absence to make manifest; a theology where hearing happens....But if essence and presence, and therefore *a fortiori* ground and the concept of being, are missing from this name, one can no longer speak of onto-theo-logy or of metaphysics or even of a “Greek” horizon.<sup>434</sup>

As in *The Idol and Distance*, Marion has attempted to get around the reintegration of negative theology into onto-theology by continuing to present Denys and his Christian predecessors and successors as engaged in mystical theology, prayer, and praise. These Marion sets against Neoplatonism, characterised as belonging on the side of metaphysics and the rejected “Greek horizon.” Marion represents Neoplatonism as if it were no more than a form of philosophical *theoria*, and as if its treatment of the First Principle consisted in a mere substitution of the One or of the Good for Being—a representation consistent with his judgment on the relation of henology and ontology. Having pointed to the priority of Good over Being for Denys, Marion opposes the Areopagite to the Neoplatonists:

It is not enough simply to declare the horizon of Being to be overstepped by goodness if one wants to think this transgression. What must be understood by goodness? In contrast to the Neo-platonists who overcome Being only for the sake of coming unto the One and would pass beyond the One only in order to retrieve it, Dionysius not only does not privilege the one which he paradoxically places in the

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<sup>430</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 231–2.

<sup>431</sup> Marion, “In the Name,” 20.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>433</sup> Marion, “In the Name” (2002), 132.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

last position of the divine names; he also does not accord any essential privilege to goodness—while nonetheless still granting it the title “most revered of names.”<sup>435</sup>

According to Marion, because Dionysius, in contrast to the Neoplatonists, subordinates negative theology to mystical theology, he chooses a third way beyond affirmation or negation, “de-nomination”:

With the third way, not only is it no longer a matter of saying (or denying) something about something, it is also no longer a matter of saying or unsaying, but of referring to the One who is no longer touched by nomination, a matter no longer of saying the referent, but of pragmatically referring the speaker to the inaccessible Referent. It is solely a matter of de-nominating.<sup>436</sup>

Marion advises us that we cannot ignore “the fact that the work of the Greek Fathers consisted precisely in freeing the Christian theological concepts from the Greek (and perhaps metaphysical) horizon where they first arose.”<sup>437</sup>

Marion’s account of Derrida’s objections is gathered in a series of questions which begin:

To what extent does the negation undertaken in Christian theology not just re-establish in the *via eminentiae* what the apophysis seemed to have disqualified? In particular, wouldn’t the divine eminence serve to protect, validate, and maintain the real attribution to God of Being, essence, thought, etc.—in short all the founding concepts of metaphysics—simply at the ever-so-low price of a hyperbolic passage (by means of *hyper* and its substitutes)?<sup>438</sup>

Crucial to Marion’s response to these questions is his identification of the problem inherent in apophatic negation, an aporia continuing even when the names belong to prayer and praise:

Supposing that praise attributes a name to a possible God, one should conclude that it does not name him properly or essentially, nor that it names him in presence, but that it marks his absence, anonymity, and withdrawal—exactly as every name dissimulates every individual, whom it merely indicates without ever manifesting. In this sense, praise in mystical theology would in the case of divine proper names only reproduce an aporia that is already unavoidable in the proper names of the finite world.<sup>439</sup>

In contrast to affirmation or negation of this kind, Marion grounds the “de-nomination” of Christian mystical theology in a God who is praised as nameless by excess. He turns to “the

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<sup>435</sup> Marion, “In the Name,” 31–32; see 23, note 11; 31–32; idem, *The Idol and Distance*, 146 & 173.

<sup>436</sup> Marion, “In the Name” (2002), 142.

<sup>437</sup> Marion, “In the Name,” 37.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

third way as saturated phenomenon” “where mystical theology is accomplished” to answer Derrida:

In this third way, no predication or naming any longer appears possible, as in the second way [apophasis], but now this is so for the opposite reason: not because the giving intuition would be lacking (in which case one could certainly make a favorable comparison between “negative theology” and atheism or establish a rivalry between it and deconstruction) but because the excess of intuition overcomes, submerges, exceeds, in short saturates, the measure of each and every concept.<sup>440</sup>

Whether Marion succeeds in getting around Derrida, or indeed whether they come to an agreement, we need not decide here.<sup>441</sup> Nor is it part of our purpose to judge whether Marion has characterised Denys’ relation to Neoplatonism correctly—whether for example his analyses of the place of the One or the Good in Denys’ theology illuminate or obscure. However, it is a necessary part of our consideration to point to a characterisation of Neoplatonism within the contemporary French retrieval which is the very opposite of Marion’s, and, as a result, we note that precisely what he ascribes to Denys in contradistinction from the pagan Neoplatonists is also understood by others, who have attended carefully and at length to their teaching, as their proper doctrine.

Contemporary French Neoplatonic scholarship—beginning with Bréhier’s seminal but marginal “L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec,” but becoming central with Trouillard, Duméry, Combès, and Breton—demonstrates both that for the Neoplatonists the One is nothing and never properly nameable because of its inconceivable fullness, and also that Damascius has anticipated the criticisms of negative theology by both Derrida and Marion as well as their criticisms of Neoplatonism. In his *La mystagogie de Proclus*, commenting on the “aporia” with which Damascius leaves us, Jean Trouillard writes:

This aporia is invaluable because it discloses the risk which in a permanent way Neoplatonism runs just much as does all negative theology. To use language as a defect in the purity of silence can result in our making of silence a counter-expression, of night a secret, and of nothingness a mysterious substance. One inevitably slides into this if one does not practice an incessant purification. Without it, the One, the Good, or Non-Being would become attributes which will be preferred to Being or to Thought because they would be judged more comprehensive. But this will be still a certain way of totalising the intelligible and sublimating it.<sup>442</sup>

With the Neoplatonists, as with Denys and Marion, the solution is a mystical theology: “Ultimately the Neoplatonists thought that this antinomy, insurmountable in the intelligible order, was surmounted at the same time that it was recognised by the fact that the centre of

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<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 40; see idem, *In Excess*.

<sup>441</sup> See “Derrida’s Response to Jean-Luc Marion,” in *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, 42–47. On Derrida’s relation to Neoplatonism, see Eric Perl, “Signifying Nothing: Being as Sign in Neoplatonism and Derrida.”

<sup>442</sup> J. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 94.

the soul, because of her mystical communion with the Ineffable, is shut up neither in language nor in the intelligible.”<sup>443</sup> The “mystical communion” leads to “a mystagogy.”

Marion was not, however, the only phenomenologist to take a theological turn and to associate it with a Christian Neoplatonist.<sup>444</sup> We find in Michel Henry crucial elements of what has been with us throughout much of the history of the Neoplatonic retrieval we have traced and his particular approach works out what Trouillard found essential to the Neoplatonists: “that the centre of the soul, because of her mystical communion with the Ineffable, is shut up neither in language nor in the intelligible.”<sup>445</sup>

Henry starts where our history (and Jean-Luc Marion) began, the view that “philosophy, at least in its traditional form” is finished. In his *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, he writes of Freud:

Psychoanalysis is not a beginning but an end, the end of the long history of Western thought, of its inability to grasp the only important thing, and thus its inevitable decomposition. Freud is an heir, a belated heir. We must rid ourselves not just of Freud but of that more weighty and distant heritage. The presuppositions that guided, or rather misled, classical philosophy—which Freud unwittingly and unwillingly reaped and brought to fruition—must be questioned.... It is... important to bring to light the unthought ground from which this doctrine proceeds, for it determined nearly everything that came before Freud and will, if we don’t take care, determine everything that may come after. When did the concept of the unconscious make its appearance in modern thought? *Simultaneously with and as the exact consequence of the concept of consciousness.*<sup>446</sup>

Together with this rejection of modern metaphysics in its Cartesian origins, there goes for Henry (1) an endeavour to find the transcendent within immanence. (2) This quest is undertaken by way of an examination of consciousness which avoids abstraction from life and the sensuous, because “a body is subjective and is the ego itself,”—the doctrine Henry ascribes to Maine de Biran. Thus there is “a material phenomenology.”<sup>447</sup> (3) He engages Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, and (4) unifies philosophy and religion with one another and with life. (5) God is the Unknown God. Finally, (6) what we have encountered more than once, Henry undertakes a positive engagement with Marx and locates atheism within rather than outside our philosophical and religious tradition.<sup>448</sup>

Henry’s approach complements that of Marion.<sup>449</sup> He turned not to Denys, but to Eckhart—although recognising Denys and Proclus as crucial sources for what attracts him to Eckhart—a move which it was inevitable that someone among the French Christian

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<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>444</sup> On the turn see D. Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn.”* Subsequently Janicaud added another volume to this controversy: *Phenomenology Wide Open.*

<sup>445</sup> For his bibliography see *Continental Philosophy Review* 32:3 (1999): 367–77.

<sup>446</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 1–2; here, as in the other quotations from Henry, the italics are in his text.

<sup>447</sup> Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 11; see Lemoine, “Affectivité et auto-affectation.”

<sup>448</sup> M. Henry, *Marx*; idem, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 429; idem, *I Am the Truth*, 237–47.

<sup>449</sup> For a recognition by Marion of the Henry’s work on the auto-affectivity of the subject despite their differences, see Marion, *Being Given*, 231 and 366, n. 86.

Neoplatonists concerned with the structure of consciousness would take.<sup>450</sup> Whereas Marion aims to prevent the reduction of the source of knowledge to the conditions of the subject, Henry wants to protect the affectivity of the subject against objectification and his analysis is of its internal structure. He does this by unifying the soul with the ontological structure of the absolute. Henry writes that according to Eckhart:

[I]t is the absolute who, in the accomplishment of his task, constitutes the essence of the soul, the essence which as such is not different from this work, or as Eckhart says, from the operation of God. “When God made man,” he declares, “he put into the soul his equal, his acting, everlasting masterpiece. It was so great a work that it could not be otherwise than the soul and *the soul could not be otherwise than the work of God.*” The identity here affirmed between the essence of the soul and the operation of God must be understood in its radical meaning. For the operation with which the soul is identified in its essence in no way adds, as would a creation strictly speaking, to the original and ultimate Being of God himself; it in no way constitutes anything extrinsic in relation to him but is rather identified with his own foundation.<sup>451</sup>

There is another difference between Marion and Henry which this quotation makes apparent. In contrast to Henry, Marion wants to keep philosophy and theology strictly apart. While his contribution to phenomenology is to add to it a theory of donation, there must be no move from within phenomenology to a transcendent Giver. Reaching a transcendent Giver would require phenomenology to become metaphysics. Marion writes:

When I say that reduced givenness does not demand any giver for its given, I am *not* insinuating that it lays claim to a transcendent giver; when I say that the phenomenology of givenness by definition passes beyond metaphysics, I do *not* say between the lines that this phenomenology restores metaphysics; and finally when I oppose the gifted to transcendental subjectivity, I am *not* suggesting that the “subject” is reborn in givenness.<sup>452</sup>

By becoming metaphysics, phenomenology would destroy itself by undertaking a theological enterprise beyond its power. These statements are primarily a defense against Janicaud’s charge that his work is implicated in a “theological turn” given to phenomenology, but seem to be directed against Henry as well.

While ultimately unifying philosophy and revelation, Henry understands Marion’s refusals in terms of a proper post-Heideggerian determination not “to submit God to the priority of Being,” and judges that “this is what justifies the problematic of Jean-Luc Marion. For one can well say ‘God is,’ but as Being itself is subordinated to the givenness of appearing, the meaning of God is decided only in the latter.”<sup>453</sup> Against Heidegger, in the archetypal Neoplatonic move, Henry subordinates Being to the unknown:

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<sup>450</sup> M. Henry, “La signification ontologique de la critique de la connaissance chez Eckhart”; idem, “Speech and Religion,” 223ff. See N. Depraz, “Seeking a phenomenological metaphysics”; S. Laoureux, “De ‘L’essence de la manifestation””; and S. Breton, *Deux Mystiques de l’excès*.

<sup>451</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 309–10.

<sup>452</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 5; see 367, note 90.

<sup>453</sup> Henry, “Speech and Religion,” 228.

One must therefore reverse Heidegger's propositions, according to which "the experience of God and of his manifestedness, to the extent that the latter can indeed meet man, flashes in the dimension of Being"; "the sacred...comes into the light of appearing only when Being has been clarified beforehand." For it is only when this light of appearing is extinguished, outside the clearing of Being, that access to the Immemorial is possible—in Oblivion. The Oblivion that passes beyond all memory belonging to thought, and thus all conceivable Memory, gives us access to the Immemorial.<sup>454</sup>

Thus, Henry, who turned to Eckhart through the mediation of Heidegger, has found in Eckhart a way around Heidegger.<sup>455</sup> Through Eckhart ("it is certainly from him that Henry claims most explicitly to draw inspiration for the elaboration of his fundamental concepts"<sup>456</sup>) he constructs a metaphysical phenomenology and has also found a way to unite philosophy and religion.

Comparing Henry with Lévinas, Dominique Janicaud tells us that with Henry's *The Essence of Manifestation*: "phenomenology is delimited and practiced as a radical return to the foundation of experience, with no other appeal than to its internal structure."<sup>457</sup> The foundation is discovered in the auto-affectivity of the self where we find true Christianity: phenomenology "no longer remains entangled in the question of knowing how and why phenomenology can give an account of the 'phenomena' of divine Revelation, but rather it affirms from the start, and in an 'apodictic' fashion, that an authentic phenomenology cannot have any other object than the divine Life experiencing itself in its Ipseity and in this self-affection, giving birth to Christ and to men as his 'Sons'."<sup>458</sup> Janicaud puts the character of auto-affectation in *The Essence of Manifestation* thus:

its [thinking's] first condition is a receptivity every going-beyond toward a horizon supposes. "Immanence is the original mode according to which is accomplished the revelation of transcendence itself and hence the original essence of revelation." Henry integrates the Husserlian *epoché* and the Heideggerian ontological difference into what he claims to be a more fundamental return to the things themselves, that of manifestation as revelation. The rest of the work will explain this as autoaffectation: the essence of manifestation reveals itself in affectivity, not that of an individual subject, derisively subjective, but of revelation itself, absolute in its inner experience.<sup>459</sup>

The self must then be in immediate union with the absolute and is only by that union.

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<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 229, quoting Heidegger "Seminar at Zurich" also cited by Marion, *God without Being*, 61 and *Questions III*; see, for the same rejection of Heidegger, Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 157.

<sup>455</sup> On the Heideggerian mediation, see Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn,"* 70 & 76.

<sup>456</sup> Laoureux, "De 'L'essence de la manifestation'": 220.

<sup>457</sup> Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn,"* 70.

<sup>458</sup> R. Bernet, "Christianity and philosophy": 325; see Henry, *I am the Truth* and *Incarnation*, and E. Falque, "Michel Henry Théologien" which examines *I am the Truth* as "a veritable Summa of Theology" in the light of Blondel's questions.

<sup>459</sup> Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn,"* 72 quoting Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 227 (as translated by Etkorn).

Despite rejecting “Hegelian monism which he reduces to an objectivism of consciousness,”<sup>460</sup> Henry turns to the young Hegel, where he finds:

the immanence of absolute spirit to its phenomenal manifestations. But with one fine difference, which is capital: divine immanence escapes not only representation, but knowledge [*savoir*]. If affectivity is the essence of life, life must be felt, must allow itself to be penetrated by its radical passivity. And we must give ourselves over to a doubly paradoxical experience respecting knowledge and the universality of life. Knowledge terminates in nonknowledge.... [Life] by force of being exalted, ... finds itself isolated. “That which has the experience of self, that which enjoys itself and is nothing other than this pure enjoyment of itself, than this pure experience of self, is life. Solitude is the essence of life.”<sup>461</sup>

Henry turns to Eckhart as against Hegel to find in non-knowing a more profound unification of the absolute and the human than Hegel constructs.

In a reasoning we have witnessed already repeatedly, for Henry, because the God of Eckhart is beyond all representation, He is also at the heart of the self. Of the unity of the divine and human in non-knowing—a doctrine we have already found with Trouillard in Eriugena—Henry tells us:

Because reality takes form and is constituted in the absence of knowledge, the union with reality, with absolute Being, also takes form and is instituted in this absence... The absence of knowledge is not merely contemporaneous with union, it is its condition. Union with reality is, nevertheless, nothing other than its revelation. The possibility of revelation resides in non-knowing. “*No man can see God except he be blind, nor know him except through ignorance, nor understand him except through folly.*”<sup>462</sup>

The elements of Henry’s use of Eckhart come together in his interpretation of a passage from the German sermons to which he refers repeatedly:

Thus life is begotten, carried out, undergone as a singular Self, as this Self that I myself am. Life autoaffects itself as myself. If with Eckhart, one calls life “God,” then one will say with him: “God is begotten as myself.” But this Self begotten in Life, holding the singularity of its Self only from ipseity and holding its ipseity only from the eternal autoaffection of life, bears the latter in it, inasmuch as it is borne by it and arrives in each instant in life only through it. Thus life communicates itself to each of the Sons by penetrating him as a whole, such that there is nothing in him that would not be living, and moreover nothing—inasmuch as its Self arrives only in the autoaffection of life itself—that would not concern in itself this eternal essence of life. “God gives birth to me as himself.”<sup>463</sup>

On Henry’s use of Eckhart, Janicaud comments:

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<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–75.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, quoting Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 285 (as translated by Etzkorn).

<sup>462</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 437, quoting Eckhart.

<sup>463</sup> Henry, “Speech and Religion,” 223; both quotations are from Eckhart, *Sermon 6*, 187.

The fundamental point of anchorage Henry justly retained from Eckhart's teaching is the immanence to our soul of divine revelation, an immanence that is so intimate that the essence of the soul merges with that of God. This profound unity is the uncreated tie that Eckhart names "Godhead" and in which all representation must be stripped, even that of God as substance or person. The exclusion of all relation of transcendence within the divine life opened to us goes together, thus, with a moment of atheism. . . . Eckhart gestures toward the nonvisage of the affective essence of reality. He makes us understand, and make our own, that the invisible "determines the essence of immanence and constitutes it."<sup>464</sup>

Sébastien Laoureux has also made an examination of the fidelity of Henry to Eckhart and finds problems with Henry's use of him. These derive: first, from difficulties in how Eckhart fits within Neoplatonism, second, from aspects of Henry's overall interpretation of Eckhart, and, third, from Henry's interpretation of the fundamental notions which Henry plucks from the texts of Eckhart. Laoureux lists "different strong formulae from Meister Eckhart" which find a place in the work of Henry.<sup>465</sup> He judges that:

One finds throughout these formulae a fine expression of the Absolute as immanence—without any mediation, or alterity. One finds there equally, and above all, the identification of the ego with this Absolute. . . . One is able to speak, in effect, of an alignment of the characteristics of the ego with the characteristics of the divine ego. . . . The soul identifies herself then with the very core of God. Or better, soul and God are only one and the same foundation, one and the same ground. All mediation, all alterity, all difference have been eliminated.<sup>466</sup>

Despite the problems, which are real, Laoureux finds, both on a first impression, and in an ultimate analysis: "an agreement between the text of Eckhart and the interpretation which Henry gives it, one which emerges equally from the reading the texts receive from the commentators on the master of Rhenish spirituality."<sup>467</sup>

We are again not only, as in Bergson, with a mystical union where the encompassing category is life so as to prevent the fraudulent objectifications of reason, but also with a Christian Neoplatonism which depends on the radical difference of the Absolute and *Nous*. This difference allows God to be both the external source of knowledge beyond reduction to objective conception and also the internal constitution of the subject so that it does not succumb to its own self-objectification. The Principle is altogether beyond grasp and representation, and therefore metaphysics is impossible, but it is also the immediacy of my life, and therefore experience is the life of Divinity. Theology is beyond philosophy become phenomenology, but also there is no separation of the visible and the invisible: "There is no opposition between the visible and the invisible, between two forms of reality. Within

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<sup>464</sup> Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn,"* 76–77, quoting *The Essence of Manifestation*, 441.

<sup>465</sup> Laoureux, "De 'L'essence de la manifestation'": 231.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*: 232–3.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*: 234.

Christianity nothing is opposed to reality, and there is nothing other than life.”<sup>468</sup> In virtue of the indetermination of the Absolute we are at both sides simultaneously.

It is difficult to see where we could move beyond this point without giving some content to the Absolute. If we must move further, the difference of the One and *Nous*, on which the history we have traced depends, needs to be reconsidered and that consideration must not be pre-determined by what Heidegger will allow.

Having reached this conclusion to phenomenological and Catholic theological Neoplatonism in France we are ready to bring this essay to an end with Neoplatonic scholars whose relation to the ancient texts is not so determined by the logic of a contemporary philosophical movement and by the needs of Catholic theology.

The first of these is the successor of Pierre Hadot in the Fifth Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Philippe Hoffmann, whose interests are equally philological, historical, and philosophical. He has held Hadot’s chair in “Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce hellénistique et de la fin de l’Antiquité” since 1986 and was a student of his predecessor and of Marie-Claire Galpérine. Equally, however, Hoffmann worked under Jean Irigoin (1920-2006), Professor of Greek in the Fourth Section and in the Collège de France and Hoffmann continues his approach to texts. That way of treating the history of texts is one particularly suited to Neoplatonic studies and matches approaches of Hadot which Hoffmann also finds helpful.

For Irigoin the whole history of a text with all the circumstances of its transmission are of interest: “The tradition of a work is the process at the end of which it has arrived in our hands, it is at the same time the influence which it has exercised through the course of the centuries in the most diverse milieux.” There are two directions in the study of the textual tradition. One goes backward in search of unity looking for:

the archetype, in the absence of the original autograph, or the presumed ancestor. In the opposite direction, the study of the tradition is close to the constitution of a descending genealogy: one searches to discover, following the march of time, all the witnesses of a text or the descendents of an individual.<sup>469</sup>

For those working with Platonic texts, at one and the same time attempting to establish solid critical texts and also trying to understand the Neoplatonists’ transforming reception of their sources and authorities, working in these two directions is necessary. Hoffmann has used this bipolarity to place himself inside Neoplatonism.<sup>470</sup> Another requisite of such an interiority comes from Pierre Hadot. Hadot has pointed to the fact that the misunderstandings which constitute such a large part of the history of philosophy are in fact creative.<sup>471</sup> Hoffmann refers to the importance of this idea in his writing and teaching.<sup>472</sup>

Beyond his work with the transmission, presentation, and reception of texts, Hoffmann’s activity falls into three main groups. First there is his own central work: the study of the interpretation and transformations of the *Categories* of Aristotle within

<sup>468</sup> Henry, *I am the Truth*, 238. This is written in opposition to Hegel.

<sup>469</sup> J. Irigoin, *Chaire de Tradition et critiques des textes grecs*, 19.

<sup>470</sup> See the title of what he assembled for the 1998 defence of his *Habilitation à diriger des recherches* “Recherches sur la tradition matérielle et doctrinale des textes philosophiques de la fin de l’Antiquité.”

<sup>471</sup> See P. Hadot, “Philosophy, Exegesis, and Creative Mistakes.”

<sup>472</sup> See for example, P. Hoffmann, “La fonction de prologues exégétiques,” 210 and idem, “Rapport sur l’exercice, Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce,” (1996-97), 303.

Neoplatonism, a task which demands a subtle sense for the difference between sources and results, extensive knowledge of the history of philosophy, and a understanding of its most abstract logic. This is work for someone willing to labour patiently on the inside, not demanding to carry off early fruits for some external purpose. Nonetheless, it matches Alain de Libera's work on the history of the universal.<sup>473</sup> Then there are Hoffmann's continuations of Festugière's work on religion and of Hadot's presentation of philosophy as way of life. With regard to religion one might note his study of the Neoplatonic notion of "happiness [*bonheur*]"<sup>474</sup> and, remarkably, of "the religious implications of Neoplatonic logic."<sup>475</sup> Finally, together with Dominic J. O'Meara, Hoffmann has extended Hadot's interest by a needed exploration of how Greek Neoplatonism dealt with political life.<sup>476</sup>

The last decade has witnessed an outburst of scholarly, philosophical, and theological publishing in French centered on Neoplatonism, involving both a continuation of the personal philosophical, theological, and spiritual searches of the past century and also the more disinterested philological and historical approach of Hoffmann. Some of it involves the completion of long drawn out scholarly projects, of which the *Platonic Theology* of Saffrey and Westerink is the most notable example. By far the greater part involves young scholars. An indication of the magnitude of this productivity is the existence of at least three series of translations or editions, translations, and commentaries of the *Enneads* directed by Pierre Hadot, Jean Pépin, Luc Brisson, and Jean-François Pradeau, working either individually or jointly; another issuing from Québec is in preparation. A further indication is the many studies of the thought of Plotinus motivated by various interests, as well as studies of features of the work of later Neoplatonists. To list all of the authors or works would turn our essay into a bibliography, but, in addition to those just named, we may mention organisers or directors of series and collections like Lambros Coulobaritsis, Monique Dixsaut, Michel Fattal, Jean-François Mattéi, and note that this Francophone activity extends beyond the Hexagon to Switzerland, Belgium, and Québec, as the editorial activity of J.-M. Narbonne and the work of D.J. O'Meara show. Readers who consult the bibliography which terminates this essay will find reason to believe that the study of the Neoplatonic tradition in the "Francophonie" is well established and flourishing.

The French Canadian Neoplatonic scholars with whom I conclude are philosophers and historians of philosophy. Like Hoffmann their Neoplatonism does not serve pre-established philosophical, theological, or religious demands. Nonetheless, while the liberty of spirit which belongs to Canadian Neoplatonic studies cannot be doubted, the move to them is not undetermined. They develop out of a revolutionary dissolution accomplished in our time of a unique unification of philosophy, theology, and religion in the social and political life of Québec. Neoplatonism allows liberation from, nostalgia for, and another way of conceiving what Neothomism once united intellectually for Catholic French Canada.

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<sup>473</sup> See P. Hoffmann, "Rapport sur l'exercice, Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce," (1992-93), 242 and A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux*.

<sup>474</sup> P. Hoffmann, "Rapport sur l'exercice, Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce," (1996-97), 303-9.

<sup>475</sup> P. Hoffmann, "Rapport sur l'exercice, Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce," (1994-95), 267-70.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-64; P. Hoffmann, "Rapport sur l'exercice, Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce," (1995-96), 305-6; D. J. O'Meara, "Aspects of Political Philosophy in Iamblichus," and idem, *Platonopolis*.

## A FRENCH CANADIAN CONCLUSION

Montréal has been associated with the study of the Platonic tradition for the last half-century owing to the residence there of a pioneer in that study, Raymond Klibansky (1905-2005). Born in Paris, he studied and worked in Germany, before fleeing the Nazis. After working in England, he accepted an appointment at McGill University in 1946, an institution with a Protestant foundation and by far the largest and most important Anglophone university in the Province of Québec. By this time Klibansky had already published a study of Proclus (1929); during the 1930s he had begun work on editions of Nicholas of Cusa and Maître Eckhart. In 1939 he published his *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* which outlined the task for subsequent scholarship on Latin Platonism.<sup>477</sup> In 1998 Klibansky was the subject of *Le Philosophe et la mémoire du siècle, Entretiens avec George Leroux*, a Neoplatonic scholar who has taught philosophy at the Université de Québec à Montréal since the foundation of the department there in 1969. In his Introduction, Leroux testifies not only to “the privilege” of being Klibansky’s student “at the end of the sixties at the Institut d’Études médiévales de l’Université de Montréal” but also his gratitude, after he had undertaken the study of Neoplatonism, because Klibansky had “positioned the principal beacons” “on the road which travels from Plotinus to Proclus, and from Maître Eckhart to Nicholas of Cusa.”<sup>478</sup>

Klibansky’s interest in Platonism shared nothing with the anti- or post- modernist motives of Neoplatonic study in the Hexagon. It was fundamentally as an historian that he studied the tradition of the interpretation of the *Parmenides*. In the library of the hospice Nicholas had founded in Cues, Klibansky discovered a guide to that history at its conclusion. In the margins of his copy of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides of Plato*, the fifteenth-century Cardinal had remarked: “how important is the notion of the transformation of the rational approach into a notion which recognises the limits of reason and the coincidences of contraries in the One, the supreme principle.”<sup>479</sup> Klibansky mixed interests in modern philosophy with his studies of ancient and medieval philosophy and looked for continuities as much as, or more than, for discontinuities.

His role in philosophy in Québec is indicated by his direction (with Josianne Boulad-Ayoub) of *La Pensée philosophique d’expression française au Canada*.<sup>480</sup> In it Klibansky describes the transformation of philosophy in Francophone Québec, a process of which he was a privileged mature outside observer.

Klibansky’s time in Québec began when the position of the Catholic Church in Québec was the opposite of its embattled position in profoundly laicised France, and he observed the so-called “Quiet Revolution.” During that “Revolution,” French Québec both developed a modern laicised society, which freed itself from ecclesiastical control, and also took charge of its economy, the commanding heights of which had until then been largely in the hands of Anglophones. The revolution had enormous consequences for French Canadian educational institutions—which well into the mid 1960s had been substantially in the hands of ecclesiastics—and for philosophy—which until then was dominated by a Neothomism largely taught by Catholic priests. As Klibansky puts it:

<sup>477</sup> R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition*.

<sup>478</sup> R. Klibansky, *Le Philosophe et la mémoire du siècle*, x; the work contains an incomplete bibliography of Klibansky’s writings.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>480</sup> R. Klibansky (éd.) *La Pensée philosophique d’expression française au Canada*.

At the time of my arrival in Canada in 1946, in the teaching of philosophy in the French language the Thomist tradition was omnipresent and omnipotent. Then, since the beginning of the sixties, philosophical thought of a French Canadian expression experienced such a sudden and accelerated development that it had few parallels elsewhere in the world, a renovation so much the more interesting because it covered a vast range of disciplines practically ignored until then...<sup>481</sup>

Another historian of Platonism, but this time of the Greek rather than of the Latin tradition, has also been the subject of recently published *Entretiens*. Luc Brisson not only observed but also lived through and participated in the “Quiet Revolution” and was profoundly affected personally and intellectually by it. His relation to Platonism was determined by this *itinerarium*.

Brisson was born in a small agricultural village in Québec in 1946, the year Klibansky arrived at McGill. Although never intending to be a priest, his primary, secondary, and university education was received in the ecclesiastically administered and staffed schools, seminaries, and universities of Québec.<sup>482</sup> His financial circumstances forced him to pretend to be seeking ordination to the priesthood and, although not a believer, to practice an extremely rigorous Catholicism in order to receive an education in institutions devoted to producing and developing religious vocations: “in order to produce from us the cadres of the Church.”<sup>483</sup> The forced “duplicity” was enormous; Brisson tells Louis-André Dorion: “I always say that the only means of survival was not to believe.”<sup>484</sup> At the end of the sixties he joined the general movement of Québec students to Paris where he undertook a thesis on the *Timaeus* of Plato. On its completion, through the support of Jean Pépin, who shared his interest in the ancient treatment of myth, Brisson was attached to the CNRS. Despite his wider philosophical interests, he says that “I can be defined as ‘an historian of philosophy’ whose domain of research is Plato and Platonism.”<sup>485</sup> His historical work includes several studies of Neoplatonism and currently he is directing one of the seemingly innumerable new French translations of Plotinus.<sup>486</sup> Nonetheless, he is attracted most strongly to Plato himself and Brisson has emphasised the differences within the Platonic tradition, moving in the other direction from that inaugurated in France by Festugière. As Leroux explains, Brisson:

has developed an interpretation of Platonic thought which is close to the standard interpretation proposed...by Harold Cherniss. This interpretation of Plato makes no concession at all to Neoplatonic elements, which would lead to a reduction of the radical character of Plato’s metaphysical dualism... [H]e insists on the difference which separates the fundamental ontological structure from all the successive

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<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>482</sup> L.-A. Dorion, *Entretiens avec Luc Brisson*, 11–75. The volume contains a “Bibliographie selective” of Brisson’s works.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 105; see 156–7.

<sup>486</sup> See L. Brisson, (trans.) Plotin, *Traité 1–6*; idem, Plotin, *Traité 7–21*; idem, Plotin, *Traité 22–26*; he contributed to Plotin, *Traité Sur les nombres (Ennéade VI 6 [34])*; Porphyre, *La vie de Plotin I & II*; Jamblique, *La vie de Pythagore*; he is the editor for a two volume treatment of Porphyre, *Sentences*.

hermeneutical derivations which have afflicted Platonism. In this structure, the place of the intelligible Forms is radically distinct from all the registers of ontology.<sup>487</sup>

Brisson's range and quantity of publications has been very large, but, as the titles of Louis-André Dorion's *Entretiens—To give reason to myth*—and of a recent English translation of one of his works, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, indicate, the relation of myth and reason has dominated.<sup>488</sup> The reasons for this domination and for Brisson's engagement with Plato are connected with his personal history and his passage through the old to the new Québec.

At home neither in Québec nor in France, Brisson feels himself to be a kind of Platonic "nomad." For him, as for Pierre Hadot, philosophy is "a spiritual exercise destined to transform the life of the individual who gives himself up to it."<sup>489</sup> His way of living Platonism was forged positively and negatively while practicing his "duplicity" in the seminary: "The sole conviction which has always animated me—and this is already very Platonic—is that the life which is worth living is not the life centered on material preoccupations, but a spiritual life, whatever that may be, in my case an intellectual life."<sup>490</sup> He re-enacted the Platonic criticism of religious myth and turned to philosophy in its place:

I had very early understood that religion is a spectacle, a stage play.... I had very simply a great clarity in respect to the illusion transmitted by society. I had a life imposed on me which I had not chosen. But it was a necessary route to gain freedom, such as I understood it, the freedom to live a spiritual life founded on intellectual work.<sup>491</sup>

In his passage from religion to philosophy, a journey already taken by more than one of his most influential Parisian teachers, Brisson identifies with Plato:

In order to provide a place for philosophy, Plato was a radical critic of the religion transmitted to his époque by the poets, but no one described better than he the religious experience of his contemporaries, the decisive influence of religion on them and even on philosophy. For my own part, even if I have rejected religion as my way of experiencing life, I have been fascinated by the obsessive and highly ritualized behaviour which it implies, and I have wished to understand why philosophy has always been closely connected in one way or another with religion.<sup>492</sup>

Attesting that his researches "have always been anchored in my personal experience," Brisson describes the question he is seeking to answer:

how does it happen that at one moment or another such and such an individual or such and such a group living in a community where a tradition imposes frameworks which permit this community to recognise itself, to define itself, how, I ask, is this

<sup>487</sup> G. Leroux, "La recherche en histoire de la philosophie ancienne," 124.

<sup>488</sup> L. Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths* and idem, *Plato the Myth Maker*.

<sup>489</sup> Brisson, in Dorion, *Entretiens avec Luc Brisson*, 180.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

individual or this group able to reject the tradition in the name of an intellectual necessity which we call, following Plato, philosophy?<sup>493</sup>

Brisson finds something universal in his own experience and journey which explains the renewed general interest in Plato. The disaffection both with institutional religion and with Marxism:

has left orphaned in respect to these easy reference points which constitute readymade answers those who ask themselves questions about the meaning of life. By the necessity of things we are forced to revert to our point of departure, that is to say, to the discussions which Plato situated in the streets of Athens, in the course of which Socrates oriented the search into virtue, that is to say, into the excellence of man, into beauty, that is to say, into what one should do, into the good, that is to say into that the possession of which permits us to reach happiness, and finally into happiness itself... Considered from this point of view and not only from the point of view of history, the past becomes present again, that is to say that Greek philosophy is relevant again and constitutes for the man of today a powerful transforming leaven.<sup>494</sup>

Looking at the present need of a basis for ethics in Canadian society, like Luc Brisson, Georges Leroux sees a necessity for philosophy demanded by the general turn away from religion. Leroux was a student of Raymond Klibansky at the Institut d'Études Médiévales de l'Université de Montréal, of Jean Pépin at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, of Pierre Hadot at the Collège de France, and a teacher of Jean-Marc Narbonne. With Narbonne he is now preparing a new edition of the *Enneads* for Les Belles Lettres. His interests range over the whole history of Platonism—and much wider—as his recent translation and commentary on the *Republic* reveals. Of his writing on Plotinus he tells us that “the work of Jean Trouillard imposed itself on me as a model.”<sup>495</sup> Of Hadot he writes: “Preoccupied with a spiritual approach to Neoplatonism, he introduced us to the German interpretation of Plotinus.”<sup>496</sup> Beierwaltes plays an important role in Leroux’s translation, introduction, and commentary on the *Traité sur la liberté et la volonté de l’Un, Ennéade VI.8* of Plotinus because, as with Hadot, “one will find...in all the work of Werner Beierwaltes a fundamental preoccupation with the connection of thought and mystical union.” The work of Beierwaltes is also crucial for Narbonne and doubtless had the same effect: for both of them Plotinus does not found a tradition which is subject to the Heideggerian critique.<sup>497</sup> In this volume, published in a series directed by Pépin, Leroux writes about the freedom of the One in terms which recall many of the questions, solutions, and figures we have encountered in our survey of French Neoplatonism.

In this Treatise of Plotinus, as it is represented by Professor Leroux, we find the freedom of the One which attracted French philosophers, theologians, and scholars to Neoplatonism for a century, i.e. because of its function as the unconditioned foundation of a

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<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 105–6.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–1.

<sup>495</sup> Leroux in Plotin, *Traité sur la liberté*, 27, note 8.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>497</sup> See W. Beierwaltes, “Postface à la traduction française” in *Platonisme et idéalisme*, 211–2, especially 214–9.

radical human freedom and of a subjectivity which is not bound up in rational objectivity. Equally, so far as we regard the doctrine found in the Treatise to be reproduced in the commentary on the *Parmenides* which Pierre Hadot ascribed to Porphyry, we would also discover in Plotinus a source for Marius Victorinus and Augustine. Thus, we would meet in *The Treatise on the Liberty and the Will of the One* not only the origins of a metaphysics of pure Being but also the definition of “the supreme Being as supreme will.”<sup>498</sup> Leroux judges that Plotinus “in a context...marked from the beginning by [Platonic] intellectualism, had recourse to the concept of will in order to constitute the metaphysics of the One.”<sup>499</sup> Although Leroux stresses the difference between Plotinus and some essential Augustinian and Christian notions, by his account Plotinus had an important effect on Christian theology enabling it:

to reform an exclusively contingent use of the concept of will and to determine it into a conception of liberty able to transcend all contingency. From this point of view, Treatise VI, 8, especially if one judges by its influence on Marius Victorinus, shows itself to be a metaphysical reflection of prodigious fecundity.<sup>500</sup>

The henological, intellectualist, and ontological aspects of this Treatise together with voluntaristic accounts of Augustine, give the alternatives between which philosophy and theology have moved in trying to refund or reorient Western subjectivity in the last two hundred years.

Leroux gives us further indications of its innovation and fecundity. In it, the One above being as absolute source is “hyper-will and hyper-Intellect.” Leroux tells us:

...we are thus placed in the presence of a primitive and originating core, the common ground both to predicating the will and to the conception of the One inherited from the *Parmenides* of Plato: the heart of the argument...is this absolute independence of the One, radical plenitude and sufficiency. While speaking about his subject of liberty, Plotinus does not base what he says in any prior tradition. He creates, so-to-speak, this significance of freedom as origin and foundation, as absolute, which will serve in the whole tradition of the metaphysics of subjectivity in order to think not only about God as subject but about the human subject as the site and gathering-place of a fundamental liberty.<sup>501</sup>

Nonetheless, for Leroux, Plotinus does not lead us to characteristically Christian notions of the subject or person. He writes that:

The Plotinian One cannot be identified with God the Creator and the first Person of the Christian Trinity, constituted as subjects within a thinking which naturally integrates the will. It is to the elaborations of Marius Victorinus and Saint Augustine that Christian theology owes a conception of will integrated within a doctrine of the

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<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, note 17.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 86; see idem, “Human Freedom in the Thought of Plotinus,” and J.-M. Narbonne, *La métaphysique de Plotin*, 28ff.

Trinity. This integration was possible only in virtue of a conception of the divine being as person, a conception absolutely unthinkable within the framework of Neoplatonism.<sup>502</sup>

In a footnote to this statement, Leroux makes an important remark: “Plotinus places the One above the categories of person and subject.” Ascribing these notions to Plotinus results from an error; it amounts “to having projected on to the Plotinian One, Romantic notions of subjectivity, especially notions derived from Schelling.” From the perspective of this Romantic subjectivity, we would reread “into Treatise VI, 8 the voluntarism of Marius Victorinus and of Augustine.”<sup>503</sup> According to Leroux, the Augustinian and Aristotelian accounts of subjectivity lead to Hegel and Schelling. In contrast, the Plotinian freedom of the One must not be confused with any of these developments. Leroux denies that the Plotinian concept has a history “which culminated in Schelling.” In consequence, he judges that it does not fall under “the Heideggerian criticism of subjectivity.”<sup>504</sup>

Thus we return to a questions about figures with which our history began: first Hegel and Schelling, and then Heidegger. Significantly, for Leroux, a Neoplatonism which comes to us via Schelling does fall under “the Heideggerian critique.” Having rejected an “idealist interpretation” of Plotinus, Leroux is not troubled by Heidegger. His student Jean-Marc Narbonne will take up the question of “the Heideggerian critique” with full force.

Jean-Marc Narbonne (born in 1957) is Professor in, and former Dean of, the Faculty of Philosophy at Université Laval. A student of Georges Leroux, Jean Pépin, Pierre Aubenque, Pierre Hadot, and Werner Beierwaltes, his thesis on *Ennead II, 4 (12)* was published in 1993 in a series directed by Pépin, and his annotated translation of *Treatise 25 (Ennead II, 5)* has appeared in a series directed by Hadot.<sup>505</sup> Most importantly Narbonne is greatly contributing to freeing French Neoplatonism from the horizon imposed by Heidegger’s history of metaphysics as onto-theology and has begun the reinterpretation of crucial doctrines which this freedom allows and requires. His work with Beierwaltes, who developed an account of the history of Platonism which sought to liberate it from Heidegger’s history, was crucial to this direction in Narbonne’s philosophical activity. That orientation is already indicated by the title, and is borne out by the contents, of his treatment of the philosophy of Plotinus, *La métaphysique de Plotin*, published in 1994. His book, consecrated to effecting this freedom, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)* to which I have referred several times already, was anticipated by an article published in 1999: “‘Henôsis’ et ‘Ereignis’: Remarques sur une interprétation heideggérienne de l’Un plotinien.”<sup>506</sup> In it, as a consequence of his critical stance in respect to Heidegger, Narbonne offers a corrective to the radically negative interpretation of the Plotinian henology whose origins and purposes we have been tracing.

Narbonne notes that for Trouillard, who worked within the framework defined by the Heideggerian criticism of metaphysics, in opposition to the language of being, the language of the One: “does not promise any science of God. It excludes it. It signifies a

<sup>502</sup> Leroux, in Plotin, *Traité sur la liberté*, 30.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, note 12.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>505</sup> J.-M. Narbonne, (éd.) Plotin, *Les deux matières [Ennéade II, 4 (12)]*; idem, (éd.) Plotin, *Traité 25 (II, 5)*.

<sup>506</sup> See also his “Aristote et la question de l’être”; idem, “Heidegger et le néoplatonisme”; idem, “EPEKEINA THS GNWSEWS.”

radically negative theology. It authorises only symbols and invocations.”<sup>507</sup> Narbonne qualifies this negativity and finds in Plotinus a metaphysical foundation:

The One is not for him [Plotinus] the indefinite engraved in the empty hollow by the finite forms, but the positively infinite; neither what is on the surface nor on the empty inside of something, rather it is the elusive and positive beyond of everything...The One obviously “is” in some way, but its mode of being, as simplicity and infinity, precisely exceeds everything we know and are ever able to hope to grasp of being...The [O]ne, falsely taken as an object, is in its very self an inobjectivable reality which, doubtless, we are able to experience and whose trace we are able to recognise in ourselves, but which we are never able to understand as such. The Plotinian henology...does not open the way to some absence or retraction of the foundation, but very much more to the representation of an absolute foundation, since the One is for him the infinite foundation of every possible finite reality.<sup>508</sup>

Narbonne concludes against Reiner Schürmann’s “Henology as the overcoming of Metaphysics,”<sup>509</sup> which proposes “an interpretation of the henology of Plotinus by way of the *Ereignis* of Heidegger,”<sup>510</sup> that: “[T]he metaphysics of Plotinus is incontestably a *negative theology*, i.e. a metaphysics of the foundation, and because of this it is an onto-theology. But the highest point of this onto-theology is neither a being [Greek “on”] nor a god...but an *apeiron*, an infinite which at one and the same time precedes, founds, and exceeds the finite.”<sup>511</sup>

Narbonne is challenging the dominant philosophical problematic within which the return to Neoplatonism has been situated for half a century and the characterisation of Neoplatonism intended as a solution inside this framework.

His *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis* is both a major individual accomplishment and the result of fifty years of engagement by philosophers, theologians, historians of philosophy and theology, and philologists with Heidegger’s criticism of metaphysics as onto-theology. So far as it is critical of Heidegger’s reductive shaping of the history, Narbonne follows the vector of the large majority of the communications at the *XXVII<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l’Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française. La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux* held at Université Laval in 1998, and a number of them are cited by him. His book stands not only on the work of Beierwaltes but also on that of French scholars who either presented Platonism and its history in order to show the defects of its Heideggerian representation or turned to Neoplatonism, having accepted Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics as onto-theology, in order to find an alternative way for western philosophy, theology, and religion. Narbonne’s book works from within a paradox: Heidegger’s *Seinsfrage* has undermined its own results by inspiring the study and retrieval of Neoplatonism while misrepresenting it and the history of philosophy to which it belongs. Ultimately what is learned about the history of philosophy in this retrieval is turned against Heidegger.

<sup>507</sup> Trouillard, “Un et être”: 190, quoted by Narbonne, “‘Henôsis’”: 120, note 1.

<sup>508</sup> Narbonne, “‘Henôsis’”: 120.

<sup>509</sup> R. Schürmann, “L’hénologie comme dépassement de la métaphysique.”

<sup>510</sup> Narbonne, “‘Henôsis’”: 108 quoting A. Charles-Saget.

<sup>511</sup> Narbonne, “‘Henôsis’”: 120–1.

As indicated above, Narbonne treats both henological Neoplatonism and the metaphysics of pure being. In addition, and crucially, he considers critically Heidegger's representation of the history of Western metaphysics as onto-theology, together with his *Ereignis*, as an alternative to the metaphysical tradition. Narbonne establishes that the purpose of the Neoplatonic refusal to predicate being of the One was to disconnect the First Principle from beings, so that it is not itself a universal being, defining intelligibility and rendering all which depends upon it graspable and manipulable. The One is not the thingliest of things, but precisely the opposite. To understand the transcendence of the One and Good through the transcendence of Plato's forms in respect to particulars, as Heidegger does, is simply to misrepresent both Plato and his followers. Narbonne writes about Heidegger's representation:

Rather than a pure and simple ignorance of the Neoplatonic tradition—in itself not very probable—one would be inclined to speak in his case [i.e. that of Heidegger]... both of a misunderstanding and of a banalisation of this current of thought. The beyond being of the Neoplatonists, the One freed from all the limitations of beings, located beyond thought and objectification..., in itself infinite and incomprehensible, all that, with Heidegger, is apparently reduced or brought back to a simple case of *Stufen des Seienden*, of degrees or stages of being, understood as a continuous series, without the decisive opening by the One in the direction of the infinite and the rupture of the totality of being which it introduces ever being recognised.<sup>512</sup>

There is a distorting Heideggerian hermeneutic in respect to Neoplatonism: “The henological differentiation of levels [the One beyond Being and beings], is thus systematically disguised as ontological differentiation [Being beyond beings], and the ontological differentiation is in its turn brought back to the ontic horizontality.”<sup>513</sup> This distortion casts doubt upon Heidegger's history of metaphysics as a whole and upon his criticism of it. For Narbonne, the great problem for henological Neoplatonism is to prevent the construal of the non-being of the One as non-subsistence, thus making it nothing, rather than no particular thing, and depriving it of separateness. Henology is driven from one paradox to another in order to prevent the One becoming a being without becoming nothing:

In what does the being of what transcends being consist? This is here a question...which does not admit in fact...or even in principle, any answer, either for Plotinus, or for Proclus; one is even able to maintain that this is not a question for either of them to the degree where it would bring one back to asking a question about the cause of the cause, in an infinite regression...This is why, [Proclus, *In Parm.*] “The One is that which is, beyond all else, the cause of all beings, but of it there is no cause.” It is on this account, as it seems, that the terms *hyperaxis* and *hypostasis* have been used in respect to the One, not to indicate that the first principle “is” properly speaking—because this would make it necessary for us to start the

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<sup>512</sup> Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, 195–6.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

ascent beyond being all over again—, but as that with which we can at best make do in order to indicate its non-non-existence without even ruling on its existence.<sup>514</sup>

The Neoplatonic language about the One is comparable to that used by Heidegger in trying to exhibit a universal ground which is not a foundational being:

The idea according to which *Seyn* is nothing insofar as it is not a being (*Nicht-Seiende*) is connected with a *locus classicus* of Neoplatonic literature. The “nothing of other things” of the Plotinian One reappears at once with Porphyry, for example, under the form of the *anousion* or the *proousion*, then anew frequently with Proclus, and following him in the later literature influenced by Neoplatonism, e.g. with Pseudo-Denys and John Scotus Eriugena, in order finally to be prolonged in German Idealism, as W. Beierwaltes notes in reference to Schelling as an example...<sup>515</sup>

Narbonne shows, however, that there is nothing arbitrary or irrational, and threatening to very existence of philosophy, in henology. The contrary is true for Heidegger.

Narbonne compares Neoplatonism and Heidegger but not to the advantage of Heidegger. While the First of henology is ineffable, because it is neither a being nor an object of intellection, the One is also subsistent, separate ground, universally present, active, and potent in all else. The One establishes difference within the other, as well as its difference from itself, and gives the cosmos being and order: “the Neoplatonic principle...transcribes itself (and understands itself) at the same time both as ‘one’ and ‘One’: ‘one’ as what is distributed in all things; ‘One’ as what is raised above other ‘ones’ because of its unsurpassable unity, in which all the others are grounded or come to be regulated.”<sup>516</sup> The *katholon-prôtologique* structure of metaphysics remains in henology:

The Neoplatonic One, neither Being, nor an existent, nor a thing, is not any the less given as the ultimate effective source of the totality of other things, even if it proves to be incomprehensible in itself. From this point to view, the Neoplatonic One is understood by the Neoplatonists as a principle, a that from which—even this ‘that’ is infinite and inobjectivable—the other things can occur. This *katholon-prôtologique* schema of thought...is found throughout the whole of Neoplatonism—just as it seems to me also to be essential to Western metaphysics....However, it is this *katholon-prôtologique* paradigm of thought, with which is naturally associated the idea of derivation, for which Heidegger wishes to substitute another idea.<sup>517</sup>

Heidegger’s substitution resembles the Neoplatonic schema, but ultimately it differs profoundly from it:

Everything happens then as if Heidegger would in a certain way link up to the Neoplatonic reflection on the ineffable beginning no longer from the differentiation of the levels of being but from the *Geschichtlichkeit des Seynes*, the ineffable no longer

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<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 160–1.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 244–5.

above beings and their structure but taken hold of in the very midst of that which takes figure and form as *Estre*; the *epékeina* no longer the terminus of a quest or like a summit elevated on the top of an edifice, but right from the start as the difference of Being and beings, as process, event, *Ereignis*; there where nothing any longer is determining order but only history... It appears to me thus that at the same time that he either is ignorant of or misconstrues the ruling intuition of Neoplatonism concerning the unknowable beyond, Heidegger brings us back to it, by way of a radically different route.<sup>518</sup>

Carrying his comparison further, Narbonne finds a good basis in Heidegger's texts to regard the *Ereignis* as brute fact, its play mere chance, a game without rules; it is the whirlwind or maelstrom:

However, what is thought here as *Ereignis* and moreover allows us, according to Heidegger, to overcome the forgetfulness of Being, is a thought which is not able to have any proper object as such and which cannot be accompanied by any construction... To the "play" where one is able to await something (*Erwarten*), Heidegger opposes and proposes in its place the "play" where the "player" has nothing as such to wait for (*Warten*) or to hope for... We reach with this in some way the zero degree of philosophy...<sup>519</sup>

Repeating the metaphysical gesture, because he is compelled by many of the same philosophical necessities, Heidegger does not do as well as his Neoplatonic predecessors:

If the *Ereignis* is a pure function as principle without proper subsistence, which consists uniquely in the effect which it "produces" or over which it "takes care," then one does not see from what point of view we could set out so that it could be said to operate as a decree on the other things, from which, in this hypothesis, it no longer rightly distinguishes itself. In the whole history of Western philosophy, we scarcely ever observe any such purely event-driven "principality," where the principle, deprived of a basis of its own, would reside in some way entirely in its effect: this is the *clinamen* of Epicurus.<sup>520</sup>

The "*clinamen*" in its Heideggerian form deprives philosophy of its condition and comes to a forgetting of being:

The discourse of Heidegger... in fact oscillates ceaselessly between brute facticity, a curtly assumed indeterminism (in sum the *clinamen*), and a metaphysics in a minor mode (*diminuendo*), a kind of parametaphysics together with a vague Messianism and an undefined eschatology. In these conditions, we cannot avoid asking ourselves if the resorption of all things into the engraved difference between Being and beings

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<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 255–7.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

does not produce, in the end, a forgetting of Being very much greater than that which it was supposed to remedy.<sup>521</sup>

Narbonne concludes with a comparison between the verticality of the Neoplatonic metaphysics and the *Sein* of the *Ereignis* as immediate horizontal ground. He points to the grave problems with the Heideggerian alternative.

This analysis is of the greatest importance for the history we have traced because the Neoplatonisms of the twentieth century have been characterised by a like horizontality. In attempting to overcome modern objectifying rationality, they too have endeavoured an immediate relation between an unknowable Absolute, on the one hand, and life, the sensuous, the corporeal and material experience, on the other. Narbonne's criticisms of Heidegger apply in considerable part to the neo-Neoplatonisms we have outlined in this history. His criticism of Heidegger invites yet another reinterpretation and retrieval of Neoplatonism. His comparison of Neoplatonism and Heidegger concludes as follows:

Despite a certain communality in the will to pass beyond objectification...we have ascertained that Neoplatonism is set out along an axis opposed to that of which Heidegger has an inkling. The Neoplatonic way is erected vertically; it is ordered upward along a mediation notably by way of soul and intellect...The Heideggerian horizontal approach is totally different...In place of the steps of reality he substitutes a pure process which begins from an event (the *Sein* as *Ereignis*), with which no mediated connection is permitted...To the Neoplatonic theme of the "beyond" (*epékeina*), it seems to me that he opposes the theme of the "on the contrary side," that is to say of that which happens without mediation, if not in opposition, at least as something done behind its back, and as a kind of crossing-over from everything else.<sup>522</sup>

The limitations Narbonne has placed on the criticisms by Heidegger of Neoplatonism and of the metaphysical tradition enable his retrieval of what may be called "a Neoplatonic metaphysics." To some degree this reverses much of the impetus which has governed the history we have traced. In advance of its engagement with Heidegger, the French retrieval of Neoplatonism belonged to a dissatisfaction with that at which Western metaphysics had arrived. This we found in authors like Bergson and Blondel. Heidegger will have much in common with what motivated this dissatisfaction. Later, Heidegger's criticism of Western metaphysics itself became the stimulus and the presupposition of the French retrieval of Neoplatonism, and also set the conditions which were placed generally on metaphysics in France. Ironically, as a result of the Heideggerian impulse, we have discovered that Neoplatonism, better studied and understood, escaped in a number of ways the objections raised by Heidegger against Western metaphysics. It revealed itself to be richer and more productive than was believed. Although Narbonne works with Neoplatonic metaphysical traditions recovered and reinterpreted within the Heideggerian presupposition and within the limits Heidegger set, he has now turned against these same presuppositions and limits. It remains for philosophy, then, to compare, in the way Narbonne has undertaken, the unsuspected resources of the Western metaphysics constructed in the

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<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 280–1.

Neoplatonic traditions with the very limited possibilities of the Heideggerian *Seinsfrage*, which seems at first a close neighbour to Neoplatonic henology, but reveals itself in the end to have a very different inspiration.

It is not to be doubted that the Heideggerian invasion of French thought was a vitally important factor in making Neoplatonism so important and fecund in twentieth-century French intellectual and spiritual life. As its hold inevitably diminishes those attached to the Neoplatonic traditions have every reason to be hopeful. The reversals we have traced give us reason to look for other renewals of philosophy, yet to come, through yet other retrievals of Neoplatonism.

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