

Editorial

In one form or another Platonism has been pretty nigh all pervasive. Its influence on later Judaism is evident not only in the writings of Philo, who wrote in Greek for a Jewish audience, but also in the Old Testament itself; notably in the Book of Wisdom. As has often been noticed some passages in the writings of St Paul resemble passages there. Although Christianity was a Jewish movement, Judaism was already Hellenised by Paul's time. And its expansion beyond Palestine relied on Greek, on its language and its concepts.

While Plotinus seems to have rejected some form of 'gnostic' dualism (*vit. Plot.* xvi), at the same time he rejected Christianity because of its fundamentally historical nature. Perhaps it could not have been otherwise given that in his system matter holds the lowest place and is furthest from the One (Rist 1977). Regardless of how the doctrine of the incarnation was gradually being set forth, as something far more than a mere theophany, at the heart of the synoptic Gospels was the teaching and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet even here, in the parables, connecting passages and the shorter sayings in the Gospels, we have literary productions rather than a simple unaltered transmission of the earlier Aramaic tradition; interpretations of the material which, as such, have justly been called the Targum of the Greek evangelists (Black 1957).

Despite the fact that Porphyry developed Plotinus' deeply intellectualistic mysticism specifically in opposition to Christianity, as early as Clement and Origen, who used Philo freely, we find a profound mingling of Platonic ideas with Christian thought (Van Den Hoek 1988). In the Plotinian system, as individual souls have their source in the World Soul ($\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$), which stands beneath the intelligible world of ideas ($\text{No}\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$), they have the possibility of living a spiritual life of which the highest form is contemplation. This demands a certain asceticism; a turning away from sensible things. Pagan and Christian forms of asceticism mostly have little to distinguish them but in its self-understanding in Christianity there is a subtle change. For although the soul is still envisaged in a movement 'upwards' it is being drawn towards the divine by grace. As a withdrawal the ascetic characteristic of the spiritual life focuses on recollection. This turning backwards in the present directs the way forward. *Memoria*, to use Augustine's term for an aspect of the mind, is a way of describing the history of the subject as unconscious.

As turning to the past is, in some way, analogous to the analytic act it is perhaps not surprising that many attempts have been made to trace back before Freud the ideas underlying psychoanalysis. Notwithstanding the fact that psychoanalysis' own self-understanding is radically fragmented, these efforts are not so much concerned with the thorny problem of Freud's 'sources' but with the notion of a living tradition. That is to say, it is concerned first of all with the language from which concepts emerge and to which they are inescapably tied, as it is spoken in the present (*après coup*). The very question implies that psychoanalysis in both its thinking and its practice is one of manifold forms of what in antiquity was referred to as the spiritual or philosophical life; a way of being in the world conceived as a journey, a 'way', before it was thought of as a method. The image goes back at least to Parmenides and can still be found in Plato (Coxon 1986). Central to it is the place of thinking and of making explicit that which is inexplicit and the way the inexplicit inexorably resists illumination or interpretation (Augustine). As such, this turning to the past within the present belongs to the history of ideas and especially to the history of philosophy and that of religion to which it is closely bound and often not distinct¹. As, no less, is the 'end of philosophy'.

¹ See e.g. Rohde. E. (1925). *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (trans) W. B. Hillis. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Although this is an approach from what are *prima facie* different standpoints, ‘different views of the landscape’ to use Wittgenstein’s idiom, different languages, it does have a bearing on what may count as Freud’s own invention and what a mere wandering off, albeit with significant detours, from already well-beaten tracks (*Holzwege*)².

Those who tackle this matter usually do so by considering particular concepts within the Freudian corpus and identifying the form they took in the past. Thus, Plato’s tripartite division of the soul in Book IV of the *Republic* and theory of recollection or recalling (*ἀνάμνησις*), a ‘retrieval’ which he distinguishes from *μνήμη* - which is not to have forgotten - and which is set out principally, though rather differently in *Meno* 80e-86c and *Phaedo* 72e -77a, can be cited to support such a prehistory³. Freud himself had to some extent encouraged the view that he stood firmly within the Platonist tradition by referring to ‘the divine Plato’ (SE XVIII: 91)⁴ and acknowledging a dependence on the *Symposium* for his notion of libido, a dialogue that Lacan reads carefully in Seminar VIII. The latter’s exposition draws out a number of original points and has spawned a host of secondary studies. But as Richard Askay pointed out in his masterful study, it is precisely where he failed to acknowledge any influence that Freud’s more significant dependence on Plato can be seen (Askay and Farquhar 2006 see esp. 64-71). This hints at the value of a more general exegetical approach. One which takes heed not only of borrowings and similarities but also of the drifts and dissimilarities. Plato himself, of course, had drawn on his predecessors for his theory of *ἀνάμνησις* which rests on the theory of Forms.

Levels of the self

We are reminded by Professor Hendrix of a dense philological study of over thirty pages from 1957 by Schwyzer, the learned co-editor of the *Enneads*, that deals with unconsciousness in Plotinus⁵. The question is part of the wider question about subjectivity in general which, of course, includes what is signified by consciousness and self-consciousness. As words or phrases expressing the idea of consciousness in early Greek literature are extremely rare, many scholars have considered that the idea was discovered by Aristotle (Kosman 1975; Hardie 1976⁶) whom Plotinus had read closely and critically. Plotinus’ reliance on and view of Aristotle’s *De anima* is therefore of considerable importance. Although opinions have varied on whether to see in Plotinus’ notion of unconsciousness a resemblance to some aspect of the Freudian concept⁷, or as some of the passages in the *Enneads* suggest, something closer to the collective unconscious of Jung or an entirely different notion⁸ it nevertheless fills an important

² Identifying such a background is not always intended as a complement. As Grünbaum put it, Freud ‘was certainly *not at all*, the first to postulate the existence of *some kinds or other of unconscious mental processes*’ (2005), reprinted in *The Freud Wars. An introduction to the philosophy of psychoanalysis* 109-37 (ed) L. Gomez (London: Routledge, 2005).

³ It reappears in *Phaedrus* 249b-c and *Tim.* 41e-42b.

⁴ Although in ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’ he suggests Empedocles was his predecessor (SE XXIII: 245-7), see: King, B. M. (2013). Freud’s Empedocles. The Future of a Dualism *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis: Ancient and Modern Stories of the Self* (eds) V. Zajko and E. O’Gorman. Oxford: OUP.

⁵ The paper was delivered at a colloquium held at the Fondation Hardt, Geneva 21 – 29 August 1957 and published some three years later.

⁶ Others have ascribed consciousness to Augustine who was much influenced by the thought of Plotinus; and others still that the notion was invented by Descartes.

⁷ Laplanche and Pontalis succinctly set out Freud’s two principal uses of *Unbewusste* with a third revision but fail to notice his astonishing naivety concerning consciousness.

⁸ The dates here as well as the positions of the main protagonists in the debate are worth noting: Drews, C. H. A. (1907). *Plotin und der Untergang der Antiken Weltanschauung* (Jena: Verlegt bei Eugen Diederichs); Arnou, R. (1921). *Désir de Dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin* 300-8 (Paris: Alcan) where he refutes Drews’ identification of the unconscious in Plotinus with Freud’s unconscious; Bréhier, E. (1928). *La Philosophie de Plotin* (Paris : Boivin); Puech (1938) says ‘l’action actuelle du moi apparent réduisant ou rejetant à l’inconscience le moi vrai’

gap in our understanding of how the complexity of consciousness was understood in Platonism prior to Augustine; what Hadot has called ‘levels of the self’ (*niveaux du moi*).

It seems to me that one of the important things to notice here is that Plotinus frequently uses the same terms in different ways. Sometimes this can be put down to the development of his thought. And here the non-chronological ordering of the *Enneads* by Porphyry keeps the reader on his toes. But development does not account for all the inconsistencies. In fact, the abundance of inconsistency has contributed greatly to the longevity of Plotinus by giving, as it were, a flexibility to concepts that they might not otherwise have had. In Armstrong’s view this accounted for his influence on Judaism, Islam and Christian theology not just of in Augustine, Bernard and the mystics but also in that of Aquinas (1967: 34 and note). For despite the turn to Aristotle, Thomas was, in a very real sense, a Platonist⁹. Such inconsistency of thought might also explain the appeal of Platonism among thinkers of the sixteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

Plotinus saw himself as a Platonist rather than as an original thinker (εἶναι τοὺς λόγους τοῦσδε μὴ καινοὺς μηδὲ νῦν; V.1.[10].8,11). First and foremost, as an exegete and interpreter. As someone expounding Plato and particularly drawing out doctrines that are already there even if not yet explicit (VI.2.[43].22). In this way working out meanings hidden beneath the surface of the text; things obscured in riddles but still Plato’s own (V.1.[42].8, 12). Nevertheless, Plotinus was a professional philosopher familiar with a multitude of other philosophers and followed his own highly original path in thinking, only subsequently appealing to the authority of Plato (Dodds 1960).

There is a similarity between Plotinus’ relationship to Plato and that of Lacan to Freud. Highly original in his thought, Lacan saw himself pre-eminently as an expounder of Freud, bringing out in his exegesis that which others had either failed to notice or distorted. Drawing it away from a body-mind conflict as Carveth puts it de-literalising Freud’s text is, perhaps, a demythologisation (Carveth 2018). As Plotinus considered himself a Platonist rather than a Neoplatonist, Lacan did not think himself Lacanian.

We might also reasonably see in Plotinus’ complex treatment of the work of the master a particular way reading and studying texts. As Lev Kenaan has shown, it is a tradition of commentary which survived in different forms (2019). We can see it in Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis in the early books of the *De Genesi ad Litteram* (see also *Conf.* XII. 24. See: Blanchard 1954; Cary 2000) and even, perhaps, in Freud’s use of Sophocles. Just conceivably it may be seen to endure in Lacan’s relationship to the Freudian text and in his view that psychoanalysis

Position spirituelle et signification de Plotin 35 *Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé*, Harder, R. (1956). *Plotins Schriften*. Band I. (Hamburg: F. Meiner); Schwyzer (published 1960 but the paper was given in 1957, op. cit. n. 5); Dodds, E. R. Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus *Journal of Roman Studies* 50: 5-7, (the paper was published in 1960 but given in 1959; Merlan, P. (1963). *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness. Problems of the Soul in the Neoaristotelian and Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff); Hadot, P. [1963] (1973). *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris : Études Augustiniennes); Dodds, E.R. (1965). *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: CUP); and more recently Smith, A. (1978). Unconsciousness and Quasiconsciousness in Plotinus *Phronesis* 23 (3): 292–301.

⁹ Aside from the fact that he eventually rejects its possibility, Brentano’s careful consideration of the unconscious took him back to Thomas. He concludes that Thomas does not consider all psychic acts objects of conscious awareness. This is significant not least because Freud knew Brentano personally and attended some of his lectures. Indeed, it is almost certain that it was through Brentano that he was introduced to Thomas and Aristotle. See: Krantz, S. (1990). Brentano on ‘Unconscious Consciousness’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (4): 745–53.

itself resembles an exegesis ('commenter', SIF: 87). Moreover, Lacan saw in Augustine's analysis of language in his treatise the *de Magistro* his own theory of signification which he thought present in Freud's method, though not expounded by him.

Of those predecessors closer to Freud, Schelling is particularly important. He had read Plato and was especially interested in his theory of reminiscence, also knew the works of Plotinus and Proclus through Ficino, as well as Meister Eckhart (Ffytche 2012: 106, 121, 233-4).

Forgetfulness of Being and the One

As Augustine's influence on subsequent theology in the West was so immense, we can detect, fairly easily, a broader Plotinian strand beyond Augustine to Meister Eckhart. From whence it may be seen in the thought of Heidegger whose influence is apparent on the early Lacan. Lacan mentions Plotinus from the mid-1950s on and by the 1970's is referring to psychoanalysis itself as an *henology*; a word he described as a neologism in Seminar XIX. Nobutomo (2018), misled perhaps by the notes to the English edition, thought Gilson had invented the word. This was because although the earliest use of the word prefixed with the letter 'h' that he could find was in Sweeney (1961), Gilson had in 1948 written '*énologie*' (1948: 42). As if to make this more plausible, Sweeney himself on p. 510 n.15 refers to Gilson's book in the English translation (Gilson 1952: 21). It must therefore have seemed not unreasonable to Nobutomo to draw the conclusion he did. He was not the first to have done so¹⁰. But the term was already in use at least two years earlier¹¹.

The view that Heidegger's work stands in relation to Plotinus has had its detractors. Beierwaltes comments: '*Zunächst ist festzuhalten, dass sich in dem bisher publizierten Oeuvre Heideggers keine Spiren einer Auseinandersetzung mit dem neuplatonischen Denken finden*' (1980: 105-21). And Pasqua (2002: 681-3) lists three passages in which Heidegger criticises Neoplatonic ideas. He argues that the form transcendence takes in Plotinus, aimed at union with the One, is radically at odds with Heidegger's *Ereignis* or 'event'¹² in which otherness is maintained¹³. However, Neoplatonic resemblances can easily be prised out of Heidegger. Schürmann (1982) refers to these as the 'henological strain in Heidegger' in which 'authenticity' or 'ownness' (*Eigentlichkeit*) falls within ancient traditions in inwardness (1983: 28; SZ 9). We can condense these resemblances as follows: (i) both Plotinus and Heidegger have versions of the forgetfulness of Being (Hadot 1959); (ii) the Plotinian One and *Ereignis* are both placed outside Being (Narbonne 1999); (iii) both see philosophy as not just as a discourse but more fundamentally as a practice or way of life or spiritual exercise, which is none other than a '*exercice de la mort*' (Hadot 1987: 40 and n. 121 where he cites de Waelhens (1942). *La philosophie de Martin Heidegger*. Louvain 135-51); (iv) both speak of Being as fundamentally transcendent (Schürmann 1983), regardless of how that might be qualified. Although they express the notion in very different ways, both for Plotinus and Heidegger alike man is essentially ecstatic. That is to say, in his very being he is stepping beyond himself and

¹⁰ See Wyller, E. A. (1974). *Henology Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* III, col. 1059. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; and (1997). *The Discipline of Henology: A Synopsis Henologische Perspektiven II: Zu Ehren Egil A. Wyllers* 5. Leiden: E. J. Brill; Beierwaltes, W. (1985). *Denken des Einen: Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann); and Aertsen, J. A. (1992). *Ontology and Henology in Medieval Philosophy (Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart and Berthold of Moosburg) Proclus and His Influence on Medieval Philosophy 120-40* (eds) E. P. Bos and P. A. Meyer. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

¹¹ See Donovan, M. A. (1946). *The henological argument for the existence of God in the works of St Thomas Aquinas*. Indiana: Notre Dame University.

¹² Heidegger considered the word *Ereignis* untranslatable. But see the astute introductory discussion by Emad and Maly in *Martin Heidegger. Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (Indiana University Press, 1999). However, I prefer to stay with 'event' rather than the awkward neologism 'Enowing'.

¹³ But see Dodds (1965: 88-9 and n.1) op. cit. n. 8.

characterised by what Heidegger calls *Sichrichten-auf*, directing-himself-towards (SZ 13). Just as we find traces of Plotinus mediated by Augustine in Meister Eckhart, just so a Neoplatonic vein runs through Heidegger from the apophatic emphasis in Eckhart (Schürmann 1983). Indeed, Caputo even speaks of Eckhart in his German sermons and treatises ‘achieving a “breakthrough” beyond metaphysics’ not unlike that of Heidegger (1986: 161-2)¹⁴.

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Abbreviations

- Aug. *Conf.* *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin. Les Confessions.* Bibliothèque Augustinienne 13 and 14 (ed) M. Skutella. Paris: Institut D’Études Augustiniennes [1962], 1998.
- Plot. *Enn.V* Plotinus. *Ennead*, Volume V (trans) A.H. Armstrong. Loeb Classical Library 444. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Plot. *Enn.VI* Plotinus. *Ennead*, Volume VI: 1-5 (trans) A.H. Armstrong. Loeb Classical Library 445. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- SlF Lacan, J. (1975). *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre 1. Les Écrits Techniques de Freud 1953-1954* (ed) J.-A. Miller. Paris : Éditions du Seuil.
- SZ. Heidegger, M. *Sein und Zeit.* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006. Eng: *Being and Time* (trans) J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

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¹⁴ Mitchell discusses the way Heidegger’s notion of *das Ding*, in his text of 1949, in relation to Eckhart’s account of *dinc* (like the Latin *ens*) from which he develops the idea that entities or ‘things’ (*Dinge*) are a gathering (*Versammeln*). He sees in Eckhart’s term ‘the careful and unassuming name for everything that is at all’, see: Mitchell, A. J. (2020). A Brief History of Things. Heidegger and Tradition *Paths in Heidegger’s Later Thought* 227-42 (ed) G. Figal, D. D’Angelo, T. Keiling and G. Yang. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

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