

PORPHYRY AND THE INTELLIGIBLE TRIAD

PASSAGES from Plato often inspired in late antiquity a speculative profusion of ingenuities that can scarcely have been intended by the author. Even in the *Timaeus*, however, few passages could be found which were to undergo so much elaboration as the sparse and incidental remarks in the *Sophist* concerning Being, Life and Mind. These terms are given some prominence in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, where it remains nonetheless very difficult to reconstruct a hierarchical order either of dignity or of procession, or to give the triad that cardinal place in his system which is certainly accorded to the triad One-Mind-Soul.¹ If the term Life is to take a place between Being and Mind it must be sharply distinguished from Soul, which is always inferior to the intellect in the ontology of the true Platonist. Plotinus is one of the most exact of philosophers, and if he fails to make the discriminations which would be necessary to anyone wishing to understand this nomenclature, it is because he is not expounding such a triad even as a subordinate part of his system: at most it might be thought to be implied or presupposed.

There can be no doubt, however, that the triad is of fundamental importance to the successors of Plotinus, and Proclus is at pains to make his exposition both logical and clear:²

‘Among these principles Being will stand foremost; for it is present to all things that have life and mind . . . but the converse is not true . . . Life has the second place; for whatever shares in mind shares in life, but not conversely, since many things are alive but remain devoid of knowledge. The third principle is Mind; for whatever is in any measure capable of knowledge both lives and exists’ (*Elements of theology* 101, trans. E. R. Dodds with adaptation).

Where do we find this triad during the centuries which intervene between Plotinus and Proclus? Certainly in the voluminous works of Marius Victorinus, a Christian theologian of the fourth century; but what of the Syrian Porphyry, the most celebrated pupil of Plotinus, upon whom Victorinus can be shown to have drawn so freely?³ Certainly again we find that Porphyry anticipates the theology of the triad, as did Plato and Plotinus; but can we prove that this author had already developed the system in its completed form by the middle of the third century?⁴ Can we then go on to demonstrate that Porphyry was the author of a *Commentary on the Parmenides* whose fragments it was once usual to quote without name or date?⁵

Both positions, that Porphyry gave systematic form to the triad ‘Être-Vie-Pensée’ and that he wrote the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, have been maintained with formidable eloquence and learning by the French scholar Pierre Hadot.⁶ Both positions, however, were taken up in defiance of Wilhelm Kroll, who attributed both the triad and the *Commentary* to the Platonists of the fourth century.⁷ Kroll’s arguments were more cursory than those of Hadot, who has almost entirely effaced the views of his predecessor. Nonetheless, there is still a need for a careful review of the evidence, and I hope to show in this study that, while the arguments of Hadot are not absolutely

¹ See in particular *Enneads* i 6.7; v 4.2; v 6.6.

² See E. R. Dodds, *Proclus: the elements of theology* (Oxford 1963) for observations upon this passage and its antecedents.

³ See P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Paris 1968) *i passim*.

⁴ On the Coptic *Allogenes* and *Zostrianus* see Appendix and the remarks on the Gnostics of Plotinus below.

⁵ P. Hadot, *REG* 74 (1961) 410–38.

⁶ The relevant articles are cited below. Hadot’s attribution of the *Commentary* is assumed to be correct by A. C. Lloyd in *The Cambridge history of later Greek and early medieval philosophy* 291–2. Qualified assent is expressed by R. T. Wallis in his *Neoplatonism* (London 1972) 97 and 114–18.

⁷ See Kroll (1892) cited below, n. 41.

disprovable, he embellishes the data with a subtlety that disguises important differences and lacunae, and ought not to command uncritical belief.

I

Speculation on the intelligible triad (as the later philosophers call it) has its origin in the following remarks in Plato's *Sophist*:

'Are we to be so easily persuaded that motion, life, soul and mind have no real place in that which fully is—no, neither life itself nor intellection—and that Being stands unmoved in high and holy isolation, devoid of Mind?' (*Sophist* 248e–249a).

Any thoughtful Platonist must therefore admit the necessity of some process which results in the creation of determinate Existence out of undetermined Existence, a process by which Being becomes intelligible in Act. Hadot has gathered together and interpreted those passages in the *Enneads* which speak of Life as the principle of motion in the 'procession' of Existence into Mind and again in the 'conversion' of the Mind back to its source.⁸ He rightly observes, however, that Being, Life and Mind do not constitute separate categories or hypostases, that the triad belongs to the superstructure, not to the foundations, of this philosophy.⁹ Peripatetics, Stoics and other Platonists, even the pedagogical conventions of antiquity, are laid under contribution in Hadot's search for anticipations of the triad;¹⁰ nevertheless, it does not appear that any work before the *Chaldaean oracles* would have invoked it as a necessary element in a metaphysical system or accorded it the dignity of a precise and philosophical exposition.¹¹ Even the *Oracles* do not seem to provide us with the nomenclature that later became conventional, or with more than hints of a system; for the refinement and establishment of both, we must look to Porphyry, or rather to his lost works as they are restored and illuminated by Hadot.

It is unfortunate that the appeal of Hadot's theory must be to fragments and conjectures, and that the triad is lacking even in works which might have been expected to reveal the heart of Porphyry's philosophy. We should not expect to find anything either profound or comprehensive in the *Letter to Marcella*, the *Life of Pythagoras* or the treatises on abstinence and the interpretation of Homer; but the reader who peruses the *Life of Plotinus*, the *Isagoge* or the *Sententiae*, even the student who has sifted whatever scholarship can recover of the *de regressu animae* or the *Philosophy from the oracles* will perhaps be surprised to find himself as ignorant as ever of the mysteries of Being, Life and Mind. Some germs of the system ascribed to him by Hadot there must of course have been in Porphyry, as in anyone who had the right to call himself a Platonist; but if we are to establish Hadot's position, and thus have grounds for supposing that the use of 'Life' as a name for the median principle in the fourth century is a direct legacy of this one author, we must insist upon being shown, not only the scattered limbs of such a system, but the system itself expressed in certain words.

One passage, and one passage only, in the commentaries of a later source, can be said to bear immediately on this question:¹²

'Among these Platonists are Porphyry and Theodorus . . . According to them the mind of these stars advances towards being, sometimes through intermediaries and sometimes

⁸ 'Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin' in *Entretiens Hardt v: Les Sources de Plotin* (Geneva 1960) 108–57.

⁹ Hadot (n. 8) 122 and 139.

¹⁰ Hadot (n. 8) 122–30.

¹¹ See P. Hadot, 'La métaphysique de Porphyre'

in *Entretiens Hardt xii: Porphyre* (Geneva 1965) 127–63.

¹² Cited in Zeller's *Die Philosophie der Griechen* III ii 705 n. 1. This is fr. 17 in W. Deuse *Theodoros von Asine: Sammlung der Testimonien und Kommentar* (Wiesbaden 1974).

without intermediaries . . . Thus the sun, which is Being, approaches the Mind by way of Life; Aphrodite is Mind and Hermes Life, but the former approaches Mind by way of Life, the latter by way of Being. Even if Mind is their common goal, it can be reached at times existentially, at times intellectually, at times vitally . . . The goal of the First Triad is Being, that of the Second Mind, that of the Third Life . . . they speak everywhere of all three, Being, Mind and Life, maintaining that each of the gods participates in the three Fathers, but that different properties (*idiómata*) dominate in each, each possessing a different activity (*energeia*) and approaching its goal through different intermediaries' (Proclus, *Comm. in Timaeum* iii 64 Diehl).

Those like Zeller, Dodds and Hadot,¹³ who use this passage as evidence that Porphyry himself devised the intelligible triad and its nomenclature have not been disturbed that the three terms Being, Mind and Life appear persistently in this sequence, and not in the later sequence Being, Life and Mind. They might argue that, the true sequence being sufficiently familiar, the terms might be transposed for the sake of rhythm or variation; nevertheless the consistency with which the series occurs deserves more attention. Here it will be argued that the sequence Being-Mind-Life is of an independent and earlier origin than the one ascribed to Porphyry by Hadot, and that this is in fact the sequence which is delineated in the passage above.

We must consider, for example, the following passage from Plotinus, which is adduced by Dodds as evidence that the triad Being-Life-Mind would have been adopted in that form by his disciple:¹⁴

'First, then, we take Being as first in order; then Mind, then that which has Life, considered as containing all things. Mind, as the energisation of Being, is second. Thus it is clear that numbers cannot depend upon that which has Life, since unity and duality existed before that . . . ' (*Enneads* vi 6.8 trans. McKenna, with adaptations).

It is obvious that the argument would vanish if the order of terms were disturbed. The terms appear elsewhere, sometimes ordered in this way, sometimes in the sequence Being-Life-Mind, but there appears to be no other passage where Plotinus has invested it with so clear a philosophical significance.¹⁵ That attention is not always paid to the order is evident from the haphazard medley in *Enneads* i 8.2 of 'Mind, Being, Soul, Life and the *energeia* with regard to Mind'; this passage, however, though not, perhaps, directly related to our present study, affords proof that there are occasions when the order cannot be ignored.

Similar terms appear to have been employed by the 'Gnostic' adversaries of Plotinus in their threefold division of the nature of Intellect, though this is regarded by him as only one specimen of a tendency to a gratuitous superfetation of hypostases:¹⁶

'And making a plurality of the intelligible world—Being, Mind, the Maker different from Mind, and Soul—is taken from the *Timaeus* [citation of 39e 7–9], failing to understand which, they take it to mean that there is one mind which contains in repose all realities, and another mind different from it which contemplates them, and another which plans—but often they have soul as the maker instead of the planning mind' (*Enneads* ii 9.6, trans. Armstrong with some adaptation of punctuation and wording).

Here again it is impossible to order the terms anew without making nonsense. The faculty of discursive reason must always wait upon the contemplative faculty, and soul is always subordinate to the universal mind. The final sentence appears to mean that the

¹³ See nn. 4, 6, 12 and 17; also Rist (n. 52).

¹⁴ Dodds (n. 2) 253 against Kroll.

¹⁵ For relevant citations see Hadot (n. 8).

¹⁶ See *Enneads* ii 9.2 etc. *Enneads* ii 9.6 and ii 9.10 present close parallels to the extant *Zostrianus*,

which is discussed in the Appendix. For an explanation of the Gnostic position as expounded in that tractate see J. Sieber in *Novum Testamentum* xv (1973) 233–40.

third term in the triad was sometimes entitled Mind, and at others Soul. That Soul should stand in place of Life is consistent with the assumptions of Greek philosophy, and especially of Plato:¹⁷ here then we have an instance of the triad Being-Mind-Life.

Plotinus' grounds for quarrelling with the 'Gnostics' are that they treat these mental powers as distinct hypostases, that they assign the title demiurge exclusively to the third power, and, worst of all, that they cannot allow the third power to act creatively without falling into sin.¹⁸ Yet the notion of a fallen mind, the last of three, which brings the world into being by its transgression, would not be foreign to every Platonic thinker of late antiquity. A similar procession of three Intellects is the fundamental postulate of Numenius, who made his First Mind both an *argos theos* and the form of Being (*to on*),¹⁹ the Second Mind the contemplating Intellect, the Third the fallen principle which unites the contents of Intellect with matter.²⁰

Numenius (fl. A.D. 170) is a figure rarely accorded his full due in the histories of Neoplatonism, despite the fact that Plotinus used his writings as a pedagogical instrument, and one of his pupils, Amelius, had almost the whole by heart (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 3). He has never been adduced as the source of the teaching quoted above from Theodorus in Proclus *Commentary on the Timaeus*. Theodorus himself has been credited by Kroll with inventing the theory and reading it back into the works of his former master,²¹ and the very citation of him might be thought to give some force to this suspicion. As a pupil of both Porphyry and Iamblichus,²² Theodorus matched them neither in influence nor repute, and even a modern article which has argued most persuasively for his importance has also shown that Proclus treated him only with a qualified esteem.²³ It might therefore be assumed that if he is quoted in this passage, he must have amplified the doctrine of his illustrious predecessor, whose authority he would do little to enhance. What we hear of his debts to Numenius, however, suggests that, whatever he added to the wording, he did not spin the basic system from his own thoughts.

That Theodorus had turned to Numenius at least for some triadic ordering of Being, Life and Mind, we learn from another citation in Proclus *Commentary on the Timaeus*:

'Theodorus, the philosopher of Asine, inflated with the tenets of Numenius, has introduced a novel doctrine concerning the progression of the soul . . . Let us recapitulate these doctrines point by point. Rightly, then, he celebrates the first principle as the unspeakable, ineffable source of all and the cause of that which is good. After this, raised as it is above all other things, is the triad which determines the extension of the intelligible . . . [Two other triads are then distinguished] The former is the Being anterior to Being, the Mind anterior to Mind, the Life anterior to Life. The demiurgic triad which follows possesses first Being, then Mind, then the source of souls.' (ii 274 Diehl).

The reference to Numenius is no idle insinuation. Theodorus was the author of a work designed to prove the Numenian tenet that the soul was identical with the world of Forms,²⁴ and he was ranked by commentators with Amelius, a great devotee of

¹⁷ *Republic* 353; see also Proclus, *Elements of theology* 188–9 and 197. The later position appears to be that Soul is the communicator of life, but not Life itself; this distinction appears to be unknown in the early school, and even if we distinguish 'source of souls' from 'soul' in Theodorus, we have not proved that Life itself could stand between Intellect and Being.

¹⁸ See especially *Enneads* ii 9.10 for the myth of Sophia.

¹⁹ fr. 12.13 ff.

²⁰ fr. 11.13 ff.

²¹ See Dodds (n. 2) 253 against Kroll. A. J. Festugière in his translation of the *Commentary on*

the Timaeus, Vol iv (1964) 88–9 finds it impossible to distinguish the contribution of Theodorus from that of Porphyry.

²² See Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* v A2 (1934) 1833 ff.

²³ H. D. Saffrey, 'Le 'Philosophe de Rhodes' est-il Théodore d'Asine?' in E. Lucchesi and H. D. Saffrey (eds) *Mémorial A. J. Festugière* (Geneva 1984) 65–76.

²⁴ fr. 37 Deuse. Numenius seems bound to support the position that 'the soul is all the intelligibles' in fr. 41; moreover, he makes the soul identical with its first causes (fr. 42). Perhaps this belief was confined to the rational soul (see fr. 44).

Numenius as one who conceived of a triad of three demiurgic principles.²⁵ In fragment 12 of Numenius (Des Places) we find Life proceeding from Intellect, and Intellect from Being:²⁶

'The First God is the King, not occupying himself with any works. The Demiurgic God, however, is the leader, who does his rounds through the heavens. Through him we make our journey, when Mind is sent below, through the different levels, to all those who are destined to be partakers. So when God looks and turns towards each one of us, the consequence is that bodies live and enjoy animation.'

The Second Intellect proceeds from the First, which is Being, and 'looks towards each of us' to produce life. In fragment 13 it is the soul that is distributed 'to each of us' by the Second Mind. In fragment 11 the Second Mind acts upon us by the Third, which is the result of a rupture caused by looking down. We may thus conclude that this Third Mind is the medium through which soul and life are communicated, hence the 'source of souls'.

Later Neoplatonic exegeses might induce us to interpret 'Source of Souls' as a title of Hecate, who personifies a mediating principle in the *Chaldaean oracles*;²⁷ but Theodorus' acquaintance with the *Oracles* is not so securely attested as his fidelity to Numenius, and we have seen that we need not invoke such sources to discover here, as Hadot does, all the elements of the intelligible triad, though not, as he observes, the triad itself:²⁸ 'On remarque de l'ordre différent: être, vie, pensée chez Victorinus; être, pensée et vie chez Théodore.'

Hadot hopes to demonstrate conclusively by this argument that it was Porphyry, not Theodorus, who was the precursor of Victorinus. The inference is warranted if we assume: (1) that Proclus represents Theodorus correctly in one passage, but conflates his teaching with Porphyry's in another; and (2) that the sequence 'Being-Mind-Life', adopted in Proclus' recapitulation of the first passage, is either irrelevant or represents the position of the less eminent of the two authorities named. At the same time assumption (2) involves the premiss that this excerpt is in other respects an accurate description of an intelligible triad which only Porphyry espoused. If the order is irrelevant in the second passage also, Hadot's attempt to banish it from the argument comes to nothing; if it is as fixed as Hadot supposes, it is reasonable to apply an equally rigorous exegesis to the first passage, and his theories are deprived of their chief support.

In fact the formula 'source of souls' is easily justified from the works of the earlier Neoplatonists. Plotinus, commenting on *Timaeus* 39e (*Enneads* iii 9.1) gave a similar account to that of the 'Gnostics', discovering: (a) a contemplated intellect, the *noêton*; (b) the contemplating *nous*; (c) the *dianooumenon*, which is mind in one sense, not mind in another, and performs the functions of *psuchê* to engender individual souls in the world. We need only add this third term from Plotinus to the Being and Intellect which the 'Gnostics' discovered in the same text to produce the triad of Theodorus.

Porphyry was upbraided by the later commentators—though he was clearly true to Plotinus—because he designated the Demiurge a 'hypercosmic soul' (See Proclus *in*

²⁵ fr. 12 Deuse. Note that the third term is again 'Source of Souls'.

²⁶ The passage contains many difficulties: for the most part I have followed the translation of Des Places in his edition of 1973. I do not suggest that Theodorus has been faithful to the meaning of Numenius, only that such a passage as this could easily have been subjected to a tendentious exegesis which would produce the system ascribed to him by Proclus at *In Tim.* ii 274.

²⁷ On Hecate in the *Chaldaean oracles* see H.

Lewy, *The Chaldaean oracles and theurgy* (Paris 1956) 142. As will appear below a student of the *Oracles* (such as Porphyry) could equate Hecate with *dunamis* without introducing the term Life. What Theodorus made of this figure we cannot tell.

²⁸ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 102 n. 3. Hadot maintains in the same note that the passages are different in context, which, if true, deprives the present one of any evidential value in his argument.

Tim. i 306 ff. Diehl). To other Platonists—even perhaps to a Platonist so early and so faithful to Numenius as Amelius—the proper interpretation of *Timaeus* 39e was a closed system of three intellects; Porphyry therefore differed from his successors on this point of exegesis to produce a result analogous to the difference between the intelligible triad and the triad Being-Mind-Life.²⁹

What Porphyry or Theodorus intended to say of the planets remains obscure. Deuse's edition of Theodorus (pp. 112–16, on Proclus, *In Tim.* iii pp. 64–5 Diehl) demonstrates that the different intermediaries are determined by the different *idiòmata* of the planets, and does nothing to warrant the inference that the order of terms is indifferent or that Life holds a privileged place between Intellect and Being.

We need no longer surmise that the intelligible triad was the invention of Theodorus rather than Porphyry; we may rather assume that the triad which bore that name in the later school superseded an earlier one, in which Life was simply the principle through which the contents of Mind acquired a sensible existence, and strict order both of dignity and procession required that Mind should always hold the second place and Life the third.

II

Hadot has assembled other evidence, both copious and persuasive, to prove that the intelligible triad was foreshadowed in writings of Porphyry's which are now lost. His chief exhibit is Porphyry's treatment of the *Chaldaean oracles* as we are able to reconstruct it from its disparate and fragmentary remains.

Porphyry's contribution to the philosophy of the *Oracles* is the subject of an article in which one suspects that the scholar has improved what he professes to restore.³⁰ Every stage of his argument must be granted except the last. Porphyry conceived the whole scheme of the *Oracles* as an *Ennead* (Lydus, *de mensibus* iv 122); this *Ennead* was divided into triads, and the deity of the Jews assigned to the second (Lydus, *de mensibus* iv 53); the Jewish God was allotted the place of Intellect in a triad whose other terms appear to have been Existence and Power. Hadot constructs a system of three triads, ordered as Being, Power and Intellect, and a subordinate division of each triad into the same succession of terms.³¹ The validity of this scheme is corroborated by ancient writers upon the *Oracles*: what is not confirmed, however, is the assertion that the middle term for Porphyry could not be 'autre que la vie'.³²

Psellus, who wrote voluminously on the *Oracles* before their dissolution, found not 'être, vie, pensée' but the series 'Being-*Dunamis*-Mind', a series which he never proposes to modify by explaining that the word *dunamis* could be exchanged indifferently for the word *zoé*.³³ Both terms are derivable from the same passage in the *Sophist*, and Proclus treats them as synonyms;³⁴ yet if we compare the frequency of the word *dunamis* in the *Oracles* with that of the expressions which signify 'life' we shall see that the substitution of 'Life' for 'Power' in such a triad would not have been either natural or legitimate at all times.³⁵

This is not to say that Porphyry could not have been the author of the nomenclature

²⁹ On the interpretation of *Timaeus* 39e, and on the 'hypercosmic soul' of Porphyry, see J. Dillon, *TAPA* c (1969) 63–70, and K. Corrigan, *ANRW* xxxvi 2 (1987) 978–84.

³⁰ Hadot (n. 11). The value of this article cannot be exaggerated, but I think that Hadot attempts to prove too much.

³¹ Hadot (n. 11) 139–40.

³² Hadot (n. 11) 140.

³³ See E. Des Places (ed.) *Les oracles chaldaïques* (Paris 1971) 189–201.

³⁴ See *Sophist* 248b and c. and Proclus, *Comm. in Timaeum*, Vol i p. 17 17.23 etc. Also Dodds (n. 2) 253.

³⁵ *Zoé* relevant only at 96.2; *dunamis* probably relevant at 3.2, 4, 5.5, 56.2, 96.1, 136.2 and 137.

expounded in the later Neoplatonists, and he could easily have been induced to devise it by a desire to reconcile the thought of the *Oracles* with the doctrine of the *Enneads* and the *Sophist*. But if Porphyry reserved Hadot's three terms for the purposes to which they were applied by Plotinus before him, and by Theodorus even in the fourth century, we have all the more reason for doubting that he was the man to take the Chaldaean triad and substitute Life for Power. The result would be two triads of identical but differently-ordered terms, creating an equivocation that any careful writer would wish to avoid.

We cannot demonstrate the extent of Porphyry's contribution by an immediate resort to Victorinus, whose borrowings from him, though evidently legion, ought not to be assumed before they are proved.³⁶ Nor can we elicit a satisfactory conclusion from Augustine, who is adduced by Hadot as a witness, but falters in his testimony in a way that would be impossible if Porphyry had spoken so consistently and so plainly as the French scholar:³⁷

'Dicit enim Deum Patrem et Deum Filium, quem Graece appellat paternum intellectum vel paternum mentem . . . quamvis quem alium dicat horum medium non intellego. Si enim animae naturam etiam iste vellet intellegi, non utique diceret horum medium' (*de civitate Dei* 23).

The hypothesis that Soul is the median principle in the triad is aired but to be discounted, and might have little relevance in the time of Victorinus to a discussion of the term 'Life'. Nevertheless the saint remains an embarrassing sponsor for the theories of Hadot, who has shown that Victorinus espouses the triad 'Being-Life-Mind' when he adopts a certain titlature for the persons of the Trinity, designating the Father as Existence, the Spirit as Mind and the Son as Life.³⁸ There are other places in Victorinus where the Son is given the predicates of Mind, sometimes in conjunction with those of Life;³⁹ but here he is given only those of Mind. Augustine speculates that the middle term is the Spirit, but the Spirit in Victorinus is not styled Life, and is never the middle person of the Trinity. Augustine, by insisting upon the likeness between this 'medium' and the Spirit (x 23.3, where it is expressly said to proceed from Father and Son) guides us to the correct interpretation, which Proclus received through Theodorus from Porphyry himself, and which, notwithstanding the strictures of the later commentator, has been traced to Chaldaean teaching by at least one modern authority:⁴⁰

'But others . . . speak of two intellects prior to soul, one containing the forms of general principles, the other those of particulars; and soul, he says, is the middle term, in that it proceeds from both' (Proclus, *In Tim.* ii 154.4).

This passage would clearly unravel all the perplexities which were not solved for Augustine by his study of Victorinus (*Confessions* viii 3). It gives the soul the characteristics of the Holy Spirit and explains how it might be described as an intermediary; it does not, however, accord it that ontological priority over the Intellect which Proclus accords to Life.

³⁶ Rist (cited below, n. 52) gives only qualified assent to this 'working hypothesis' adopted by Hadot and Theiler.

³⁷ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 266 and especially 475. For an edition with commentary of the *de regressu animae* see J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent 1913) 27*-44*.

³⁸ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 46-74.

³⁹ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 50-7. We might speculate that only the relation of Son to Father is in question here, perhaps with an appeal to some

distinction such as that between *vita* and *vivere*; but the language of Augustine appears to make this position untenable, and even if we cannot hope to interpret him, we ought to respect his confusions.

⁴⁰ See J. Dillon, *Phronesis* xviii (1973) 180-5. The statement that Porphyry called the doctrine 'Persian' on the authority of a certain Antoninus does not, of course, prove that it was not Chaldaean. The fact that Proclus declines to recognise it as such is a mark of his animosity to the fanciful Theodorus.

III

No-one could belittle the service rendered to scholarship by Hadot's edition and translation of a commentary on the *Parmenides*, which was disengaged from a palimpsest of the sixth century in 1873;⁴¹ nor can one deny that the *Commentary* yields the terms Being, Life and Intellect according to the sequence in which he wishes to dispose them. In the last of these damaged fragments the author describes the process whereby the objects of the Intellect issue from and revert to the source of Being:⁴²

'And the Intellect and its object have one essence, but mind is Life when it emerges from Being and inclines towards the Intellect with the result that it arrives at the Intelligible and contemplates itself . . . All three are acts: considered as Being the act is at rest, considered as Intellect it is turned upon itself, considered as Life the act is emerging from the Intellect'.

Since, however, Hadot's dating of this *Commentary* differs from that of previous editors by a matter of a century,⁴³ it would be no fitting compliment to his industry if we merely sustained his judgment without examining his reasons. These are most fairly stated in his own words. The fragments, he informs us, should be assigned to Porphyry because:⁴⁴

'Leurs méthodes et leurs doctrines sont identiques a celles de Porphyre: fidélité à Numénus, traits plotiniens, utilisation de la physique stoïcien dans la métaphysique néoplatonicienne, reticence a l'égard des *Oracles Chaldaïques*.

Des expressions comme *ho epi pasi theos . . . dia smikrotetos diapheugousés* suffiraient a révéler que Porphyre est l'auteur de ces fragments. D'autres termes, et d'autres tours, familiers à Porphyre, et par notre anonyme, confirment cette conclusion.'

If we were to grant to Hadot all the premisses of his first paragraph they would not enforce the conclusion: even in the twilight of pagan antiquity, Numenius did not lack admirers, while Plotinus was half a god;⁴⁵ the parts of Stoic, Pythagorean and Platonist were easily combined by any successor of Plotinus; and, as for the *Chaldaean oracles*, it was never so easy to read them as to doubt them. A work from Porphyry's hand and one from the hand of any intelligent student of his writings might be expected to exhibit similar methods: scholars who address themselves to the dating of ancient manuscripts are apt to forget that any trait of a writer (except his genius) may be reproduced in his school.

What is meant by 'fidelity to Numenius'? Chiefly it seems, the notion that 'l'être pur est l'idée de l'étant.'⁴⁶ The *Commentary* thus postulates two varieties of being, one the being of individual substances, the other a purer category, denoting the mere existence which we must predicate of anything that is.⁴⁷ For Numenius, argues Hadot, the First Mind contains the ideas of the goodness and the being which are present in the Second, and this thinker may thus be responsible for the distinction between the participated existence and the essence which participates. If this claim is to be supported, it must be with evidence from some other source than the fragments of Numenius, since these afford no instance of the phrase *idea tou ontos*, and indeed the phrase would seem to be scarcely compatible with the locutions that he habitually employs.

Numenius speaks of the First Mind as *idea agathou*, rendered by Hadot as 'l'Idée du Bien'.⁴⁸ The Second Mind is good by participation in the First: it is to the latter, and that

⁴¹ For text see *Porphyre et Victorinus*, ii 64 ff. The text was first produced with commentary by W. Kroll in *RhM* 47 (1892) 599–627.

⁴² xiv 16–26; see *Porphyre et Victorinus* ii 110–2.

⁴³ See Hadot (n. 5) 114 f.

⁴⁴ Hadot (n. 5) 438.

⁴⁵ See Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum* 455 Bois-

sonade. Among admirers of Numenius we must count Amelius and Theodorus (pp. 17, 22).

⁴⁶ Hadot (n. 5) 418 and n. 36.

⁴⁷ xii 32–3; see *Porphyre et Victorinus*, ii 106 and Hadot (n. 5) 418 f.

⁴⁸ See Numenius fr. 20 Des Places.

alone, that such a phrase as *idea agathou* or *autoagathon* belongs.⁴⁹ The same is true of the simple expression *to agathon* when used as the appellation of some particular entity. The Second Mind falls under the description of 'that which is good', which might in certain contexts be represented by *to agathon*; but Numenius avoids the locution *idea tou agathou* (Hadot's 'idée du Bien') at the cost of some eccentricity in expression. We read only *idea agathou*,⁵⁰ so we cannot postulate any linguistic distinction between 'The Good' and its Idea. Hadot's further assumption that the usage of *agathon* will furnish some analogy to the usage of *on* is misguided and unfortunate: what separates *to on* from the *idea tou ontos* it would have taken a different philosopher to determine, since *to on* is the name repeatedly and exclusively used in the fragments of Numenius to designate the First Mind.⁵¹

We may thus conclude that this document evinces no uncommon degree of fidelity to Numenius, and we may also add that Hadot's case for ascribing it to Porphyry would be no stronger if it did. Porphyry labours jealously in his *Life of Plotinus* (VP 20–1) to prove that his master is no mere imitator of Numenius, and it is obvious that he regarded the way of Plotinus, and his intellectual virtues, as his own. He is emboldened by the suffrage of Longinus to suggest that his contemporary Amelius, who had the works of Numenius by heart, was unphilosophical and diffuse. Porphyry would therefore cleave to the teachings of Plotinus against Numenius,⁵² and, since Plotinus spoke of ideas only as constituents of the second hypostasis, Intellect (*Enneads* v 5 etc.), it is difficult to see how such adherence would be compatible with the statement that the First Principle is an idea.

So far is the disciple of Plotinus from confounding the highest principle with essence or form that he states in the *Sententiae* that this principle is the 'Non-being transcending Being'⁵³. This is, of course, a work which adheres dogmatically to the tenets of Plotinus: it is widely admitted that Porphyry's philosophy underwent continual change, and his adoption of the term *huparxis* as a title for the One has been thought to suggest that his allegiance was not sustained.⁵⁴ John Rist has proposed that a study of the Chaldaean system at some late stage in his life would enable Porphyry to admit not only this term for the first principle, but also the expression *to einai monon*, which would place the One unequivocally in some category of Being, and would anticipate the *existentia* of Victorinus.⁵⁵ Whether this hypothesis can be upheld we may judge from a comparison of Porphyry's misgivings with regard to the *Chaldaean oracles* with those found in the *Commentary* by Hadot.

With regard to the *Oracles*, what Porphyry doubted, if anything, was not their authenticity, but their efficacy in preserving the most valuable element in man:

'Sufficit quod purgatione theurgica neque intellectualem animam, hoc est mentem nostram, dicis posse purgari, et ipsam spiritualem . . . immortalem tamen aeternamque non posse hac arte fieri confiteris' (Augustine, *de civ. Dei* x 27).

The arts of Chaldaea may be divinely-ordained, but there is something diviner in man. The soul may be rendered pure by incantations, but only the arduous vigils of philosophy will prepare the mind for everlasting repose.⁵⁶

Such discriminations do not compromise the authority of the *Oracles*, as the author

⁴⁹ Numenius, fr. 20.5 and 20.11.

⁵⁰ Frr. 16.9 and 14; 20.12. For *to agathon* see frr. 16.4 and 5; 19.12.

⁵¹ Frr. 5.5 and 14; 6.7 and 8; 7.2; 8.2, etc.

⁵² J. M. Rist, 'Mysticism and transcendence in later Neoplatonism', *Hermes* xcii (1964) 213–25 discusses this question, admitting the *prima facie* case against such a deviation on Porphyry's part.

⁵³ *Sententiae* xxvi; see Rist (n. 52) 220.

⁵⁴ See Rist (n. 52) 223–4.

⁵⁵ See Rist (n. 52) 220–2.

⁵⁶ For edition of the *de regressu animae* see Bidez, cited above (n. 37). For analysis see H. Lewy, *The Chaldaean oracles and theurgy* (Paris 1956) ch. 1 and Excursus on Porphyry and the Oracles.

of our *Commentary* is said to do by Hadot. The hesitant 'if indeed the gods have spoken' is his sole allusion to the possibility of any divine unveiling, hardly the tone which Porphyry must have adopted in his treatise *On the regression of the soul*.⁵⁷ If we are to make use of Rist's hypothesis we must suppose that after the composition of this treatise Porphyry came to doubt the divine inspiration of the *Oracles*, but at the same time conceived so high an estimate of their value that he adopted from them a nomenclature which is foreign to that of Plotinus, and indeed strikes at the roots of his master's thought.

It might be urged, on the other hand, that the formula 'if indeed the gods have spoken' is a mere elegance, and does not convey any genuine reservations. In that case, Rist's hypothesis is tenable, though unproven, but the argument that treats the phrase as a circumlocution peculiar to Porphyry is impossible to sustain.

All these objections are nugatory if it is true that the quotation in Hadot's next paragraph 'suffiraient a révéler' that Porphyry is the author of this work. No-one, says Hadot, could entertain the hypothesis that the One escapes our perception by its smallness unless he were that Porphyry who maintains in his *Sententiae* that the true being of any object is diminished by augmentation in corporal volume.⁵⁸ May we not even be pardoned for wondering how Hadot can dispose so easily of all readers and imitators of the *Sententiae*? May we not ask why the Porphyry of this *Commentary* employs the words so diffidently, and introduces them only as the result of an unsatisfactory conjecture by Speusippus? This at least appears to be the tenor of certain corrupt lines in an earlier part of the *Commentary*, where the noun *smikrotêta* is joined with the title *ho epi pasi theos*, and the citation of Speusippus is not disputed by Hadot.⁵⁹

Hadot ekes out the lacunae to imply that those who follow the conjecture of Speusippus are mistaken, and he is supported by a quotation from Damascius, already adduced by Kroll. When the word *smikrotêta* recurs at ii 3, however, he treats it as the peculiar nomenclature of Porphyry himself. The truth is rather, as Kroll points out, that the Speusippean vocabulary is rejected in the first folio to be endorsed with a somewhat different connotation in the next: 'Doch kan der Satz auch ironisch gemeint sein'.⁶⁰

The passage produced by Hadot as the closest in wording to *dia smikrotêta is in harm. Ptolem.* 17.20, where the preposition is *hupo* in two cases, and the phrase is employed with no sense that it is compromised by its previous use in Speusippus. We are obliged to be pedantic, since the words in question are scarcely recondite, and comparisons will prove nothing unless the coincidences are shown to be minute.

Citations of the title *ho epi pasi theos* in Christian authors might be discounted, since pagans were unlikely to imitate them. We cannot, however, afford to make so light of their presence in Origen, who studied, like Porphyry's master, under the Alexandrian Platonist Ammonius, surnamed Saccas.⁶¹ It is more than remotely possible that writers other than Origen and Porphyry should be indebted to the same source for a similar turn of phrase.

Likeness in vocabulary is again an argument only for imitation, not for authorship; the probative force of dissimilarity is, of course, much stronger, and Hadot does not pretend to have discovered any Porphyrian antecedents for such important substantives as *henas* and *plêrôma*, which occur in this *Commentary* and in many specimens of later

⁵⁷ On the dating, which Rist (n. 52) 223 is inclined to follow, see Bidez. Even those who believe with J. J. O'Meara, *Porphyry's philosophy from oracles in Augustine* (Paris 1959) that this work was identical with the *Philosophy of the oracles* will be inclined to think that it represents his mature thought.

⁵⁸ *Commentary* i 18–20 = *Porphyre et Victorinus*,

ii 66. See Kroll (n. 41) 619.

⁵⁹ See notes to *Porphyre et Victorinus* ii 66.

⁶⁰ Kroll (n. 41) 620; Damascius admits that the One is elusive, but denies its smallness, attributing the inaccurate opinion to Speusippus. See Kroll 619.

⁶¹ See Origen, *Werke*, i 261.26 Koetschau.

Platonic writing, but do not appear in pagan works before the time of Iamblichus with a precise metaphysical meaning. Hadot does little to strengthen his case for these and nine other difficult items by claiming that they are words which the philosopher of the third century 'might have employed'.⁶²

Henas and *plêrôma*, if none of the others, might have been expected to find their way into the *Sententiae*: that they did not would be for Hadot a sign that Porphyry was unwilling in this instance to depart from the vocabulary of Plotinus or else that he began to favour these words in an undocumented late phase of his thought. The same proposal would also explain the lack of reserve in the use of other expressions which Porphyry would once have declined to employ without some prefatory formula. Yet would it not be equally satisfactory to conjecture that we see here, not a late phase of his philosophy, but his philosophy in the hands of a successor? This position becomes the more attractive the more arbitrary Hadot's attempts to verify his own are shown to be.

To bring into the argument such quotidian words as *echesthai*, *katalambanein*, *mênuein*, *idiôtês*, *holos*, *poieisthai* and *hupostasis* is surely to beat the air.⁶³ To protest that certain common words are particularly frequent in Porphyry's writings is to add nothing unless it is also shown that the *Commentary* exhibits, not only a predictable acquaintance with these expressions, but a similar predilection for their use. Hadot must therefore refrain from adducing *mênuein*, *exêgêtikos* and *parastasis*, all of which, according to Hadot's index, appear in the *Commentary* only once.

Following the plan of Hadot's argument, we have discovered:

1. Faithfulness to the teaching of Numenius in one particular, the use of a term denoting rational being as a predicate of the One; that is to say, a faithfulness which was treason to Porphyry's master.
2. Misgivings with regard to the *Chaldaean oracles* of a different kind from any which are exhibited by Porphyry in his treatise *On the regression of the soul*.
3. Many words which Porphyry had in common with other thinkers; others which he either does not employ in his extant writings or employs only with reticence.
4. The diffident ascription to Speusippus of a phrase which Porphyry would have been willing once to use without reserve.

Hadot has parried all objections without completely overthrowing any, and without producing arguments that match the strength of his claims. The *Commentary* cannot be adduced as evidence that Porphyry had already conceived the intelligible triad of later Platonism, which is anticipated in thought by the Chaldaean Oracles, in language by Numenius, and by Porphyry no less, but little more.

M. J. EDWARDS,

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⁶² Hadot (n. 5) 431–4.

⁶³ The words discussed in this paragraph are

listed in Hadot (n. 5) 434–8.

APPENDIX:
THE *ZOSTRIANUS* AND *ALLOGENES**

Although the Greek originals of the Coptic *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes* were certainly known to Plotinus (*VP* 16), the present manuscripts cannot be assigned to any date earlier than the fourth century. There is ample evidence of corruption: the figure of Zoroaster has disappeared from the text of the *Zostrianus*, though his name remains on the seal,⁶⁴ and the present length of this tractate is scarcely such as to have merited the refutation in forty books by Amelius.⁶⁵ A scrutiny of the chief passages which are supposed to contain intimations of the Neoplatonic triad reveals that they have suffered great alterations, though no greater than those discernible in other Gnostic texts.⁶⁶

These passages are as follows:

(a) Existence, Life and Blessedness at *Zostrianus* 66, a corrupt passage which it is impossible to elucidate.

(b) At *Allogenes* 48–9, three triads, each containing the three principles That Which Is, Vitality and Mentality. The triads appear in that order, but the principles are also named in the sequence Vitality, Mentality and That Which Is.

(c) At *Allogenes* 54 praise is accorded, first to Vitality, then to the 'second power' Mentality, which is also the source of blessedness, and finally to the Entire One, under the title That Which Is. Here it appears that the order (which matches *Enneads* ii 9.6) should be significant, and it conforms to the Numenian triad, rather than to that of the later Platonists.

(d) An injunction to ascend from blessedness through Vitality to Existence at *Allogenes* 59. At *Allogenes* 60 this ascent is accomplished. The same principles appear in this order, followed by Non-Existence, at *Allogenes* 61. Again it seems that the order should be impossible to disturb.

Blessedness in (d) is apprehended under stillness and silence; the same properties are the concomitants of Vitality in (c). It appears, then, that one series has been imposed upon the other, and it is natural to infer that it is the system of Victorinus which has supervened upon the Numenian triad. Both formulations appear to be indebted to the vocabulary of fourth-century Christian authors, since pagans were not accustomed to substitute Blessedness for Mind.⁶⁷ Unless we postulate two independent borrowings from the Gnostics, one by Porphyry and one by Victorinus, we shall conclude that the confusion in these documents results from the attempt to keep pace with a century of Platonic innovation.

Both (c) and (d) exhibit the extreme and rigid division of the three terms which was upbraided by Plotinus. Neither would have inspired the refined flexibility of the intelligible triad, and it would seem that we have here the ossified form of a system devised by others—or rather of two, the Numenian system and that of the fourth century, successively appropriated, successively misused.

* Vocabulary and pagination as in the translations of these texts edited by J. M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi library in English* (Leiden 1977).

⁶⁴ Zoroaster may have been the descendant of Zostrianus and recipient of the revelation, just as Messos is in the *Allogenes*. All four names appear as the titles of separate treatises in *VP* 16.

⁶⁵ Sieber (n. 16) finds it 'long enough to merit the lengthy attention of Amelius' and must therefore consider it authentic. On p. 238 he remarks that the use of terms is 'cosmological rather than

logical', which may support my contention that they have re-applied the terms of some earlier Platonist.

⁶⁶ On the four versions of the *Apocryphon of John* and their discrepancies see S. Giversen's edition (Copenhagen 1963).

⁶⁷ See Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, ii 62 and 276.