

2824
EDWARDS, M. J.
1997

EDWARDS, Mark J. - *Being, life and mind: a brief inquiry*. SyllClass 1997 8 : 191-205. • Iamblichus was the first to establish this neoplatonic triad in the canonical order, and did so from basic Platonic tenets, not from the Chaldaean Oracles or any Gnostic texts, contra P. Hadot (→ 31, p. 172). [68-02444]

2884

SYLLGTA CLASSICA

8 1997

Being, Life and Mind: a Brief Inquiry

Mark J. Edwards

For Iamblichus and the later Neoplatonists, the noetic or intelligible triad is the symbol of the demiurgic mind in its procession from and reversion to the fountainhead of being.¹ When being overflows from its self-sufficiency, it begets the amorphous energy of life; but life, though inexhaustibly dynamic, remains inapprehensible without the determining qualities of mind. Being is the source of all existents, life of soul, and mind of the lower intellects: a law divined by Proclus therefore states that what is higher in the order of procession will be present in a lower tier of the generated world.² All things in the world have being, some have life, and only a few of these possess intelligence; for that very reason, the intellectual principle is the lowest of the three:

Among these principles Being will stand foremost; for it is present to all things which have life and intelligence . . . but the converse is not true . . . Life has the second place; for whatever shares in intelligence shares in life, but not conversely . . . The third principle is intelligence; for whatever is in any measure capable of knowledge both lives and exists. (Proclus, *Elementa* 101)

This triple thread was not spun out of nothing. Plato had declared, in a famous passage of the *Sophist*, that the essence which gives rise to all existents would be weaker than its offspring were it not already instinct with life and motion (*Sophist* 248e). Since it is by life that being imparts itself to us, and through our minds that

¹ All research on this topic is indebted to P. Hadot, *Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin* (Geneva 1960) 107–41, *La Métaphysique de Porphyre* (Geneva 1966) 127–57, and *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vols. 2 (Paris 1968). For review and bibliography, see A. Smith, "Porphyrian Studies since 1913," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, vol. 2, 36.2 (Berlin 1987) 717–73. Some of my remarks here are anticipated in M.J. Edwards, "Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad," *JHS* (1990) 14–27.

² Translation by E.R. Dodds, *Proclus. The Elements of Theology* (Oxford 1963) 91.

we participate in being, each of the three implies the other two. Drawing upon the five prime categories (μέγιστα γένη) of the dialogue—being, rest, motion, identity and difference—the Neoplatonists equated mind with rest and life with motion. As rest sustains identity and motion produces difference, all five μέγιστα γένη are included in the triad, and without it nothing further could exist.³

Identity and difference are the elements from which the Demiurge creates the soul in the *Timaeus*; he himself, as a being who spontaneously communicates his goodness, is another illustration of the axiom that perfection must be accompanied by motion.⁴ The receptacle in which he shapes the cosmos suffers constant, though unregulated, motion; the intellectual paradigm which he imitates can never be estranged from its repose. According to the handbooks of the early Roman period, the paradigm, the receptacle (or matter) and the Demiurge (“God”) are the three cosmogonic principles of Plato;⁵ we shall see that it is no great change to rebaptize the members of this triad, in the Neoplatonic idiom, as being, life and mind.

We see, then, that the concept and nomenclature of the Neoplatonic triad are inchoate in the dialogues of Plato; for all that, it did not mature as a system there and is not among the trinities which populate the works of his immediate successors. The triad owes its celebrity in modern times to Hadot,⁶ who looks for its first expositor in Porphyry, and its earliest occurrence in that mysterious compilation which the Neoplatonists styled the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Though neither these nor Porphyry’s reports of them survive except in fragments, Hadot contends that we have a loquacious mouthpiece of the latter in a Christian writer, Marius Victorinus, who correlates each member of the triad with a Person of the Trinity. This claim, if true, might lead to our crediting Porphyry with an influence that he would have found surprising and pernicious; for Marius Victorinus made the Platonists accessible to Augustine, whose laborious speculations on the Trinity have defined, for over one and a half millennia, the orthodoxy of the Christian west.⁷

My object in this paper is to question all these claims. I shall argue that the terms employed by Porphyry and the *Oracles* are not simply interchangeable with other formulations; that the sequence being-life-mind had a place in Christian speculation of the third century that was largely independent of its history in Neoplatonism; and that when Augustine cites these terms from Marius Victorinus, he

³ For Plotinus’ interpretation of the *Sophist*, see J.M. Charrue, *Plotin Lecteur de Platon* (Paris 1978) 205–29; *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 1 (above, note 1) 219–22.

⁴ See *Timaeus* 29e–30a; and on the interpretation of the Demiurge, A.J. Festugière, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 4 (1953) 275–92.

⁵ See Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 1.19.1, with the annotations of M. Marcovich, *Hippolytus: Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (Berlin 1986) 76; C. Moreschini, “La ‘doxa’ di Platone nella ‘Refutatione’ di Ippolito,” *Studi Classici et Orientali* 21 (1972) 254–60.

⁶ See the articles by Hadot (above, note 1).

⁷ See P. Henry, “The *Adversus Arium* of Marius Victorinus,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 1 (1950) 42–55; for recent doubts as to the relation between Augustine and Victorinus, see P. Manchester, “The Noetic Triad in Plotinus, Marius Victorinus and Augustine” in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, J. Bergman and R.T. Wallis, eds. (Albany 1992) 207–22.

does not accept the thought that underlies them. The evidence persuades me that among the Neoplatonists Iamblichus was probably the first to give canonical expression to the triad, though his predecessors might have seen there nothing but the expression of their uncompleted thoughts.

I

Among the pagan claimants to the invention of the triad, the *Chaldaean Oracles* are almost certainly the oldest, even if they were not composed, as tradition states, in the reign of Marcus Aurelius.⁸ Michael Psellus detects an echo of them in Plotinus, and Porphyry's defence of the Chaldaeans enjoys a painful immortality in Augustine's *City of God*.⁹

While the noetic triad was by no means the highest principle in the Chaldaean system, it was the first whose attributes the Neoplatonists ventured to expound.¹⁰ Trinities are legion in the late reports of Proclus and the Byzantines, and half a dozen fragments of the *Oracles* make mention of a triad; but none of these enumerates all three members, and the triad seems to be not so much a family of three as a filiation of one double to one simple entity:

A dyad sits by this one, for it has the functions both of comprehending the intelligibles by intellect and to introducing sense-perception to the world.
(*Chaldaean Oracles*, frg. 8)

The dyad which fuses sensory perception with intelligence is identified in another place as the Second Mind, which mortals style the first.¹¹ The Father is a dark abyss, known only through his illuminative force or *dunamis*; the filial mind, as Demiurge, communicates this force to the material universe.¹² In his exercise of *dunamis*, the Father keeps back something of himself; none the less, his *dunamis* sits closer to him than the Second Mind:

The Father has withdrawn himself, not enclosing his own flame in his intellectual *dunamis*; *dunamis* sits with him, but mind is from him.
(*Chaldaean Oracles*, frgs. 3–4)

⁸ See H.D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur la Néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris 1990) 209–15.

⁹ Edited by J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent and Leipzig 1913) appendix 2.

¹⁰ For the commentaries of Psellus and Proclus, see É. des Places, *Oracles Chaldaïques* (Paris 1971) 153–224. Psellus (page 194, etc.) makes it clear that the first triad follows a number of ineffable principles.

¹¹ See *Chaldaean Oracles*, frg. 7. The relation between this and Numenius, frg. 17, remains obscure. See e.g., E.R. Dodds, "Numenius and Ammonius," *Entretiens Hardt 5. Les Sources de Plotin* (Geneva 1957) 11; but the possibility of a later dating for the *Oracles* must be taken into account (above, note 8).

¹² See especially *Chaldaean Oracles*, frgs. 1 and 5.

This force, like other terms, has a mythological appellation: Hecate, the patroness of magic, is said in both the fragments and the commentaries to sit between the two paternal minds:¹³

Hecate's centre is carried in the midst of the Fathers.

(*Chaldaean Oracles*, frg. 50)

Have we then to do with a quaternity—the dyadic Son, the paternal Monad and Hecate between them? None of the extant fragments tells us so, and such an inference would neglect the very meaning of the term *dunamis*, which is not used in philosophy to signify determinate or separable being. *dunamis* is mere potentiality, a capacity for being which is wholly unintelligible, and therefore barely real, until it is brought to actuality. Nothing subsists as mere potentiality, yet nothing exists at all unless it actualizes some potentiality; while the potential makes the actual possible, it is only by the resulting actuality that the potential is defined.

I may seem to be dwelling here upon the wrong sense of *dunamis*, which with reference to the Father surely ought to signify not “potentiality” but “power.” But just as we can apprehend potentiality only in the light of its supervenient actuality, so we can think of no power which is not the power to realize some effect. The dominant physics, that of Aristotle, states that where there is an agent and a patient, the exercise of the agent's power fulfils the actualities of both.¹⁴ But where there is only God, there can be no patient, and the sole effect to which his power can tend is the fulfilment of itself as actuality; this it can achieve only by reversion to the father, in the course of which it actualizes mind. Mind, as the actuality of *dunamis*, is thus the precondition for the existence of its own matter and the working of its own efficient cause.

Therefore the very *dunamis* which creates the possibility of a Second Mind is the source of its duality. In so far as it is mind, it is immutable; in so far as it is *dunamis*, it tends perpetually to the realization of something other than, and consequently inferior to, itself. Psellus calls the Second Mind both the *dunamis* and the *horos* or definition of the Father;¹⁵ the terms seem antithetical, yet logic indicates that where a *dunamis* is nameable as *dunamis*, it submits to definition. Psellus also states that the Second Mind is a transcendent dyad (δὺς ἐπέκεινα), supervening on the Father's *dunamis*.¹⁶ In fact, it is not so much that *dunamis* precedes the dyad as that *dunamis*, like mind, is half the dyad. The dyad is by nature indeterminate, and hence unformed by intellect; for all that, it is *dunamis*, in so far as it admits of being qualified by the very name of *dunamis*, that constitutes the mind.

According to the commentators Hecate also exercises influence outside the noetic triad, and as the wellspring of her own trinity, dispensing soul in the left-hand

¹³ For a recent study of Hecate in the *Oracles*, see S.I. Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: a Study of Hekate's Role in the Chaldaean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta 1990).

¹⁴ See, e.g., Aristotle, *Physics* 202a13ff.

¹⁵ See Psellus, *Papyri Graeci* 122, 1144a14, 1144b4 = É. des Places (above, note 10) 180–1.

¹⁶ See *Papyri Graeci* 122, 1152a4 and frg. 169, with des Places' note (above, note 10) 147.

stream and virtue in the right, becomes the source of life in the generated universe.¹⁷ Since Hecate is *dunamis*, the force that always tends to change and otherness, this continuing emanation is in keeping with her nature. At the same time it leads her into schism, since in her higher nature she resides between the two paternal minds, but in the form of soul, her lower aspect, she is inferior to both:

After the paternal intelligences dwell I, soul, ensouling all with warmth.

(*Chaldaean Oracles*, frg. 53)

Commentaries suggest that in this lower sphere the activity of Hecate is life, which for the Greeks was an essential operation of the soul. From this some modern scholars have deduced that Life is itself a name for Hecate, and the *Oracles* already contain the triadic series being, life and mind.¹⁸ Yet this is a rash conclusion, as life is a function, not the essential character, of Hecate in the *Oracles*, and then in her intermediate, not her most exalted, aspect. Psellus in his Commentary alludes to the later triad, but not in his account of the higher cosmogonic agencies, where the middle term is always *dunamis*.¹⁹ If it is the case (and it has not been proved) that Porphyry knew this triad and purported to have found it in the *Oracles*, that is no proof that it was there to be discovered, since he could either have imposed his own nomenclature or borrowed it from an independent source.

If Plato was his well of truth, his windlass was the teaching of Plotinus. Hadot and others have cited numerous passages from the *Enneads* where being, life and mind conspire in the origin of sensible and intellectual natures.²⁰ It is not so clear, however, that these terms make up a triad by themselves, or are presented in an order which implies that mind originates from being through the medium of life. What is certain is that mind and life proceed from being, and are closely interfused. Life in the intellectual world is a function of the mind in its reversion to its source (*Enneades* 6.7.15); mind, where it is active in the lower realm, always coexists with life (*Enneades* 3.6.6. etc.).

Intelligence and vitality are notes of being both in the noetic sphere and in the present universe; but it may be that the gradient entails a certain difference in the sequence of activity. Life, as an operation of the soul, falls short of intellect in dignity, and when transcendent principles are in question it will therefore be the third:

¹⁷ See *Chaldaean Oracles*, frags. 51–52. On Hecate's role as Life, Nature and Soul, see H. Lewy, *The Chaldaean Oracles* (Cairo 1956) 84–99.

¹⁸ See Plato, *Phaedo* 105d; Aristotle, *De Anima* 412a28 etc.; Hadot, *La Métaphysique de Porphyry* (above, note 1) on the noetic triad in the *Oracles*.

¹⁹ See des Places (above, note 10) 189 and 197. In both the first term of the triad is the Father, rather than Being. For the occurrence of the noetic triad, see page 182 (= *Papyri Graeci* 122, 1145a5ff).

²⁰ See Hadot, *Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin* (above, note 1); Dodds (above, note 2) 252–54.

If now that which is should be taken as existing first, then mind, then the living being—for this appears already to “contain all things” [*Timaeus* 31a4]—and mind is second because it is an energy of being—number would not depend on the living being, since before it there were already one and two; nor would it depend on mind, as before it was being, which is one and many.

(Plotinus, *Enneades* 6.6.8.17–22)

Here the chief text proposed for exegesis is *Timaeus* 39e, where mind is said to contemplate the ideas in the perfect living being. As Hadot and others have observed, the interpretation of this passage in the third century always yields the sequence being, mind and life.²¹ Elsewhere, however, Plotinus seems to put life in the second place, on the grounds that life is motion, whereas mind is the determination of motion as an energy or activity of being:

One who considers this manifold power (*dunamis*) calls it being in so far as it is, as it were, a substrate, then motion, in so far as he sees its life, then rest, because it is invariably the same, and difference and sameness, in so far as it is altogether one.

(Plotinus, *Enneades* 6.7.3.8–11)

But here we find all five μέγιστα γένη of the *Sophist*, and it seems a little tendentious to abstract the first three members as an independent triad. At *Enneades* 5.3.16—an obscure text if there are any in Plotinus—life is said to imitate the life in the first existent, whereas mind imitates its essence, and *Enneades* 6.7.17 repeats the axiom that mind gives form to life. At *Enneades* 3.6.6, Plotinus notes that motion is the first property that raises natural bodies above the level of naked being; it follows, then, that life will be more generally distributed, and in some sense prior, to mind.

To discern this threefold ranking in the physical world, however, one has no need of the *Sophist*, the *Timaeus* or any dialogue of Plato. No society wholly fails to distinguish the inanimate from the animate, and the division of living creatures into rational and irrational has been a cornerstone of western thought. These premisses are synthesized in Plato's notion of man as a trichotomy of body, soul and intellect; but also (for example) in the Aristotelian theory which discriminates the vegetative, sensitive and rational capacities of soul.

Life as a source of intellect is not found in Plotinus, but, as Hadot has pertinently observed, he feels some need of an intermediary between the source of being and the cosmogonic mind.²² This intelligible matter (as he calls it) has been plausibly compared with the indefinite Dyad of the Pythagoreans, which is not itself an entity but the cause of propagation from the Monad.²³ The designation “intelligible matter” is anomalous in so far as it is not the receptacle of concrete being but something prior to it, and, because it is not susceptible of differentiation, it

²¹ See Hadot, *Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin* (above, note 1) 116–19; Smith (above, note 1) 729–30. See further J.M. Dillon, “Plotinus, *Enneades* 3.9 and later Views on the Intelligible World,” *TAPA* 100 (1969) 63–70.

²² See Hadot, *Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin* (above, note 1). For intellectual matter, see Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.4.4.2–5 etc.

²³ See especially J.M. Rist, “The Indefinite Dyad and Intelligible Matter in Plotinus,” *CQ* 12 (1962) 99–107; L. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London 1994) 101.

guarantees the unity of intellect at the same time as enabling it to exist as something other than the One.

In the vocabulary of Plotinus, this precursor of the intellect is distinguished from its life, which accrues to it in the course of its reversion to the highest principle. But this is merely a lexical observation on a subject, which, as Plato, warned, is not to be approached except by a kind of bastard reasoning.²⁴ Matter, having no form, cannot exist but as the substrate of some formally determined entity; mind is thus constitutive of matter no less than matter is constitutive of mind. And, since the mind acquires its formal being by a process which necessitates reversion, the life which is implied in that reversion is as much the cause of mind as its effect. Plotinus thus made way for an equation of the life that resides in intellect with the indeterminate potency that generates the intellect; the question now is, which of his disciples was the first to take this way?

Porphyry cannot fail to be a candidate, as he codified the lectures of his master and reduced the *Chaldaean Oracles* to an economic trinity of triads.²⁵ Two familiar members of the first triad are the Father and his intellect; the third remains concealed by the real or feigned incomprehension of Augustine:²⁶

For he speaks of God the Father and God the Son, whom he calls in Greek the paternal intellect or . Of the Holy Spirit, however, he either says nothing, or says something under a veil; though what he means by the other which is between these I do not know.

(Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 10.23)

The evidence that the median term is life is: first, that Porphyry read Plotinus, second that he was read by Victorinus; third that he recognises all three terms in a comment on the *Timaeus*. The first point would be sound if we knew that Porphyry had tried to prove congruity between Plotinus' doctrines and the *Oracles*; the second would suffice if Victorinus never read any Neoplatonist but Porphyry. Since we have no right to these assumptions yet (if ever), the argument must rely on one report:²⁷

. . . according to [Porphyry and Theodorus] . . . the Sun, being Essence, journeys to Intellect through Life; Venus, being Intellect, yet proceeds through Life to Intellect; Mercury is Life, but proceeds through Essence to Intellect. This Intellect, however, to which they all turn, is in one case essential, in another intellectual, in another vital.

Porphyry's contribution is occluded by the name of Theodorus of Asine, who, being later than Iamblichus and possibly his pupil, might have seen the noetic triad where it

²⁴ See Plato, *Timaeus* 52b; the "Pythagorean" *Timaeus* Locrus 94b interprets this as reasoning by analogy.

²⁵ See Lewy (above, note 17) 1-64; Hadot, *La Métaphysique de Porphyre* (above, note 1).

²⁶ See Bidez (above, note 9) 36*; cf. the passage cited from Arnobius, *Adversus Nationes* 2.25 by J.M. Dillon, "The Concept of two Minds: a Footnote to the History of Platonism," *Phronesis* 18 (1973) 176-83.

²⁷ Translation by Dillon (above, note 26) 357 (annotation to *In Timaeum*, frg. 70).

was only half expressed.²⁸ In any case, the excerpt gives no clue as to the ordering of the triad; or if it does, the median place does not belong to life. Proclus testifies that Theodorus espoused a version of the triad in which life succeeded mind:²⁹

He designates the first intellect essential, the second an intellectual substance, the third the source of souls.

(Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* 3.309)

We cannot say that the sequence of the terms is insignificant when Proclus himself insists upon another. Hadot is right to infer that the canonical triad cannot have been devised by Theodorus;³⁰ but where does he find the evidence that Porphyry espoused it in the order and the terms maintained by Proclus? Only in a fragment from a commentary on the *Parmenides*, which lacks the author's name:³¹

According to the first idea it is one and simple . . . but neither one nor simple in respect of substance (ὑπαρξίς), life (ζωή) and intellection (νόησις).

I have written at length elsewhere against the ascription of this work to Porphyry, arguing that the thought is not so consonant with his as Hadot contends, that where it is consonant it is not uniquely so, and that some of its technicalities belong to a later period.³² The above quotation cannot by itself afford good evidence for Porphyry's construction of the triad; I should rather say that it precludes his being the author of the anonymous commentary.

II

We recognise something closer to the Neoplatonic triad in a chapter of Origen's *De Principiis*, written before Plotinus went to school, in which he associates the Persons of the Trinity with being, life and mind:³³

Thus the working of the Father, which endows all with existence, is found to be more glorious and splendid, when each one, through participation in Christ in his character of wisdom and knowledge and sanctification, advances and comes to higher degrees of perfection; and when a man, through being sanctified

²⁸ On the place of Theodorus in Neoplatonism, see H.D. Saffrey, "Le Philosophe de Rhodes, est-il Theodorus?" in *Memorial A.J. Festugière*, E. Lucchesi and H.D. Saffrey, eds. (1984) 65–76. See also Dillon (above, note 26) 26ff.

²⁹ See Festugière (above, note 4) 282–3.

³⁰ Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 1 (above, note 1) 102, note 3.

³¹ On the dating and authorship of this commentary, see P. Hadot, "Fragments d'un Commentaire de Porphyre sur le *Parménide*," *REG* 74 (1961) 410–38. For the text, see Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 2 (above, note 1) 65–112. Hadot's arguments assume, perhaps illegitimately, an identity between οὐσία and ὑπαρξίς.

³² M.J. Edwards ("Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad," *JHS* 110 [1990] 14–27) supporting W. Kroll, "Ein Neuplatonischer Parmenideskommentar," *RhM* 35 (1892) 599–627.

³³ Translation G.W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles* (Gloucester 1973) 38.

through participation in the Holy Spirit, is made purer and holier, he becomes more worthy to receive the grace of wisdom and knowledge.

(Origen, *De Principiis* 1.3.8)

Here the unique activity of the Father may be contrasted with the interchange of functions between the Son and the Holy Spirit; being is the monad, mind and life are an inseparable pair. The Son perfects life, the Spirit increases knowledge; though each shares in the office of the other, and if the passage will bear a close interpretation, it would seem that the Spirit's work inverts the order of the Son's. J.M. Dillon has pointed out that, in another passage, Origen anticipates the Neoplatonic principle that what is first in the order of procession reaches furthest in the order of operation.³⁴ But Origen does not speak of reversion of the Spirit to the Father, as the Neoplatonists speak of a reversion of the intellect to the One; at this point his concern is the activity of the Godhead, not the nature of the Godhead in itself. Man, as a tripartite being of body, soul and intellect, is saved by the threefold action of the Trinity; but if man shows any likeness to his author, it can only be (in Origen's scheme) by virtue of his mind.³⁵

More interesting, because it concerns the origin and not merely the operation of the Trinity, is a passage from the *Commentary on John*:³⁶

Ἀπαύγασμα οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, καὶ τοῦ αἰδίου φωτὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀτμίς οὐ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλὰ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.

He is a ray, not of God, but of his glory and his eternal light, and a breath not of the Father, but of his power.

(*Commentary on John* 13.153)

Here we find the Chaldaean pattern—Father, Son and intermediate potency—but not derived from the *Oracles*, which Origen may have had no opportunity to read. The result is not the Trinity, since for Origen the Spirit is posterior and subordinate to the Son;³⁷ nor, since there is no scriptural warrant for it, is there any equation of *dunamis* with life. In any case, the Logos is more properly called the Father's soul than his intellect, his title connoting not so much immutable stability of reason as the perennial vitality of speech.³⁸

³⁴ "Origen's Doctrine of the Trinity and some later Neoplatonic Theories" in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, D.J. O'Meara, ed. (Norfolk 1982) commenting on *De Principiis*, frg. 9, inserted at 1.3.5.

³⁵ See, e.g., *De Principiis* 1.1 *passim*; but such passages as *Contra Celsum* 7.38 imply that God is in fact superior to mind.

³⁶ Origen is commenting on John 4.24, with assistance from Hebrews 1.3.

³⁷ See, e.g., *Commentary on John* 2.10; *De Principiis* 1.3.4–5; H. Ziebritski, *Heilige Geist und Weltseele* (Tübingen 1994) 237–48.

³⁸ See *Commentary on John* 1.24; *De Principiis* 2.8.5.

Origen holds that the Spirit infuses knowledge in the Christian, the Son perfects his life, and the Father consummates his immortality. Another Christian text which, in its earliest form, must antedate the mature thought of Plotinus, is the Gnostic *Zostrianus*, which raises the initiate through the water of life to blessedness (the resting-place of intellect) and then finally to existence in a heaven of divine simplicity.³⁹ These three also constitute an archetypal triad, but in a different order of succession.⁴⁰

... They are powers of Existence [...] and Life and Blessedness. In Existence he exists as a simple head ... Existing in Life, he is alive ... He exists as [the] [...] since he is in [the] mind. (Zostrianus 66.15–67.18)

In the *Enneads*, we found reasons for attributing one order of the terms to the noetic realm, another to the temporal universe. Here we find, if anything, the converse; but in any case, a Gnostic could not long remain content with such asymmetry, as the taproot of his system was a perpetual replication of the higher in the lower. Life in Gnostic texts is an appellation of Sophia, who can be both the bride of God and a lesser aeon, the mother of an abortion and the abortion itself, the parent of the Demiurge and the hidden source of Spirit in his universe, primordial Eve and every human soul.⁴¹ In another Gnostic writing of this period, the *Allogenes*,⁴² Vitality is described as the first activity of the one who exists in silence, and Mentality as his second indivisible activity, the third silence and the fruit of his eternal blessedness.

The tenets of the Gnostics were regarded by Plotinus as a deviation from the true philosophy; but in the light of passages like this, both he and Porphyry have sometimes been suspected of a surreptitious harvest in the fields of their opponents. Another view would posit a continuous redaction of the Gnostic texts to keep pace with developments in Neoplatonism.⁴³ Both hypotheses ignore the fact that Gnostic thought is an organic growth from Christian speculation,⁴⁴ which, even before the dawn of Neoplatonism, conceived a sacred Trinity of being, life and mind.

39 See *Zostrianus* 15 in J.M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden 1990) 408. See further García Bázán ("Sobre el Origen Histórico y las Transformaciones de la Triada ser, Vida y Conocimiento," *Philosophica Malacitana* 5 [1992] 43–54), where the case for the Gnostic role in the invention of the triad is strongly argued.

40 Translation by J.N. Sieber in Robinson (above, note 39) 419–20.

41 See the Coptic *Apocryphon of John*, *Exegesis on the Soul* and *Origin of the World* in Robinson (above, note 39); also, e.g., G.C. Stead, "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia," *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969) 75–104.

42 See *Allogenes* 53 = Robinson (above, note 39) 494–5.

43 For diverse views, see, e.g., Edwards (above, note 32) 27; R. Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles* (Leiden 1992); García Bázán (above, note 39) 43–54.

44 Proved in my view (though with many gratuitous hypotheses of little merit) by S. Pétrement, *Le Dieu Séparé* (Paris 1984).

III

We meet the final version of the triad in Iamblichus, whom Proclus and Eunapius treat as almost a second founder of the school.⁴⁵

These three qualities, he says, are conferred by Time on the realm of becoming, the first, the idea of "was" and "will be," the second, "becoming younger and older," the third "coming to be" . . . The first of these . . . by virtue of its procession from Being, the second, as coming forth from Life, the third, as dependent on the Intellectual Order.

(Proclus, *In Timaeum*, frg. 65)

It is possible to retrace the steps which brought Iamblichus to this position. In our previous discussion, we observed two inconcinnities in the theory of Plotinus. The first is that, in contrast to his usual disparagement of matter, he could posit an intellectual matter free of all deficiency and superior to the mind; the second is that the special place accorded to this matter allows the inference that the intellect's procession and reversion are consecutive in time. Iamblichus construed the temporal idiom of Plato as a symbol for the working of three demiurgic instruments—the mind, the soul and providence (πρόνοια)—in a timeless symphony:

Plato [wishes] to make clear how the Providence coming down into the universe from the Demiurge and the ordering influence coming from Mind and the presence of Soul are causes of so many and such varied good principles in the cosmos . . . in fact the cosmos is eternally in being, but the exigencies of exposition must . . . bring into being in a time-sequence things that cannot substantially be separated.

(Proclus, *In Timaeum*, frg. 37)

We may perhaps discern in these three agents of creation the equivalents of being, life and mind. The third is given to us under its own name, and the second is a function of the soul. It may appear tendentious to identify the paradigm with πρόνοια, yet both are said, in different parts of the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, to be utterly transcendent with regard to natural kinds and individuals, and at the same time immanent in each of them by virtue of their ubiquitous causality.⁴⁶ The paradigm is an undivided unity, but πρόνοια does its work in the regulation of the world.

Yet since the soul for Iamblichus is inferior to mind, the ordering of the terms here would be that which we see ascribed to Theodorus of Asine. Iamblichus' construction of the true noetic triad is a consequence of a striking innovation in cosmogony:⁴⁷

⁴⁵ All translations from the commentaries of Iamblichus are from Dillon (above, note 26). On this passage, Dillon remarks that the use of "intellectual order" rather than "intellect" is determined by the text (*ibid.*, 349–50).

⁴⁶ See *In Timaeum*, frgs. 35, 37 and 88.

⁴⁷ Cf. *In Timaeum*, frg. 38, and see further G. Shaw, "Theurgy as Demiurgy: Iamblichus' Solution to the Problem of Embodiment," *Dionysius* 12 (1988) 41ff. Dillon ([above, note 26] 313) remarks that materiality "will presumably be a noetic archetype of *Matter*, perhaps connected with ζωή in the noetic world."

God brought matter forth from essentiality, materiality being produced by schism; this, since it is imbued with life (ζωτικῇ), the Demiurge adopted for the creation of the simple and impassible spheres.

(Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 8.3)

Iamblichus' primal matter is superior to the soul, as the first recipient of the motion and vitality which the cosmic and hypercosmic souls impart to the world of natural phenomena. These should come into being below the Demiurge, whose relation to primal matter is more obscure. On the one hand he appears to be its creator; on the other, it is an immediate derivative of pure essentiality, and will thus rank second only to the paradigm, the seat of all true being. Iamblichus himself resolves this problem with his statement that the Demiurge is united to the paradigm by virtue of the unity of the intellect with the object of its knowledge.⁴⁸ This Plotinian principle implies that the Demiurge contains the paradigm and is all but identical with it;⁴⁹ nevertheless, there must be something to differentiate them, and this, I would suggest, is primal matter. While soul, then, is the instrument of the Demiurge in his shaping of the lower world, matter is both the necessary condition and sufficient means of bringing forth his own identity.

Earlier speculations on the soul may have played a part in this new concept of a matter that is substantial and divine. In the *Timaeus* Plato had ascribed to the receptacle an inalienable motion which appears to be older than the cosmic soul. Plutarch, who is answered in fragment 37, posited an evil soul in matter, which Iamblichus could accept no more than any other Neoplatonist.⁵⁰ But his notion of intellectual matter offers an explanation for the presence of a motion coeternal with the Demiurge and indeed for the activity of the Demiurge himself. As mind, the Demiurge not only encompasses the triad, but is himself the third member of it. He is at once the formal cause of the triad and inseparable from its second term, his own material cause. Intellectual matter gives him both the potentiality for existence and his potency to act. Dyadic in his own nature, he propagates all the inferior dyads; and rather than being, as others thought, the hypercosmic soul, he is its origin and archetype, his mind conferring form on it while his matter imparts to it the power of life.

We surmised above that providence, soul and mind make up a triad in the image of the higher one, which is formed by the paradigm, matter and the Demiurge. If this is so, we are not surprised to find that the production of the first soul is analogous to the origin of matter:

48 Frg. 44, with commentary by Dillon (above, note 26) 317–8. I differ from Dillon (above, note 26, 36) in finding the paradigm, in the strictest sense, superior to "being in itself," since at frg. 35 it is called αὐτὸ τὸ ὅπερ ὄν and τὸ αὐτὸ ὅπερ ὄν is merely *sundromos* with it. See also the remarks of Proclus, quoted by Dillon (*ibid.*, 309).

49 Frg. 45.

50 See *De Procreatione Animae in Timaeo* 6–7; J.M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977) 191.

Timaeus, he says, creating in speech through the generation of the soul the One and the hypercosmic soul, from which springs the soul of the All and others, produces from it at this point the Dyad; for the splitting signifies the dividing action of the Demiurge, which goes forth in sameness and completeness.
(Iamblichus, *In Timaeum*, frg. 54)

As in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, even the first procession from the monad is a dyad, since nothing can become actual which lacked the potentiality for existence. In the stream of efficient causes, the potential precedes the actual; in the chain of final causes, it is only for the sake of and with respect to actuality that potentiality can partake of being. In the lower triad mind is an image of the Demiurge, and being of the paradigm, while matter and the hypercosmic soul are both results of a bifurcation which the Demiurge introduces into being. The noetic triad, then, is nothing other than the Middle Platonic triad of first principles; Iamblichus obtained the classic order by making matter the seat and origin of life.

Could his train of thought have been assisted by the Gnostics? Iamblichus is the only Neoplatonist to mention them without a condemnation, and the earliest sect of this name had forestalled him in describing matter as a "blessed substance."⁵¹ Gnostics, like Iamblichus and all Pythagoreans, built the world on numerology, and their *ogdoads* and *hebdomads* were borrowed, like his own, from the priestly hinterland of Egypt.⁵² Some postulated a highest female principle, called Barbelo, who governs all below with her *pronoia*. To these it was all one to say that something is the image of an archetype and to say that it was the archetype itself at a different level; they would have taken no exception to Iamblichus' belief in the concentricity of the lower and the :

And through these [viz. division and procession] are generated two souls after the One, each of which has the same system of principles and . . . they are united by their very centres, and this is the meaning of the phrase [*Timaeus* 36b] "middle to middle."
(Iamblichus, *In Timaeum*, frg. 54)

Yet parallels are treacherous, for in many cases the more there are the less they signify. An equally sound analogy could be drawn with the Hecate of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, whose affinities with the writings of Iamblichus and the Valentinian Gnostics have been canvassed in a number of recent studies.⁵³ We must not be misled, however, into reckoning similarities as tokens of historical influence. In any one society at any epoch, many will subscribe to the same beliefs without a single book in common, and thinkers who are moved by different interests and proceed by different methods will approach the same results. We ought not to seek extraneous material in the *Oracles*, the Gnostics or Iamblichus until they exceed the logic of their premisses and the tools of their own tradition. The history of ideas is precisely that—

⁵¹ See Iamblichus, *De Anima* 375.1; the report on the Naassenes at Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 5.7.13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.21–37; Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 8, and *In Timaeum*, frg. 53 etc.

⁵³ See M. Tardieu, "La Gnose Valentinienne et les *Oracles Chaldaïques*" in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, B. Layton, ed., vol. 1 (Leiden 1980) 194–237, and the introduction to Majercik (above, note 43).

the history of *ideas*; it is not a tale of casual thefts, unmotivated borrowings and involuntary conceptions from a fashionable breeze.

IV

Works produced before the reign of Constantine have so far claimed the whole of our attention; but a consequence of his revolution was that Christians studied pagan literature in earnest. Marius Victorinus, whose conversion was preceded by a long career in rhetoric, paraded his acquaintance with philosophy in his tracts against the Arians. Here he presents the Godhead as a Trinity of being, life and mind:⁵⁴

If Christ is life, and living in itself is the Logos, yet this very life is being in itself and being in itself is the Father; if again this very life is understanding in itself, and this is the Spirit, then all these are three and three in each and one three and consubstantial.

(Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arianos* 1.63.1)

Hadot's researches leave no doubt that Victorinus appropriated Porphyry as his mentor in philosophy. But to argue that, because he drew so much from one, he made no use of others is to practice an irrational parsimony in speculation. In Victorinus life pertains to the Son and mind to Spirit; but when Augustine, using only Porphyry as his manual, approached the Chaldaean triad, he chose to couple mind with the Second Person of the Trinity, and despaired of any equivalent for the Third. We find a closer parallel in Origen, and the closest in Iamblichus, and we need not choose between them. Victorinus holds the creed of catholic Christianity, but interprets it with a logical apparatus that could only have been acquired in pagan schools. Less interested in the origins than the fruits of speculation, he was not obliged, as we are, to inspect the different sources of the streams that had converged so happily in his own career.

What Augustine knew of Platonism he derived, by his own account, from Victorinus,⁵⁵ and the latter is seldom absent from attempts to trace the provenance of the Augustinian doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁶ The African father does indeed invest his God with the attributes of being, mind and life:

No one doubts that nobody has understanding unless he is alive, or life unless he exists; the consequence is that what has understanding both is and lives.

(Augustine, *De Trinitate* 10.13)

But here the terms are not employed to illustrate the distinction of the Persons in the Trinity; the burden of this argument is that, just as the mind both is and lives, so all

⁵⁴ Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (above, note 1) has collected the relevant passages from Victorinus' writings in vol. 2, 13–55.

⁵⁵ See *Confessions* 8.3. On Augustine, Victorinus and the Neoplatonists, see further W. Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Halle 1933) and J.M. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism," *Hermes* 92 (1964) 213–25.

⁵⁶ See, above, note 7.

three Persons work as One in every operation. Augustine's favoured image of the Trinity convenes the mental faculties of memory, understanding and volition; of these the second and third are inextricably united, for nothing is desired without acquaintance, nothing known without desire.⁵⁷ It must have been such reasoning that led the *Chaldaean Oracles* to the notion of an intellectual dyad, and persuaded Victorinus that both life and mind could be styled, on different grounds, the form of God.⁵⁸ Like the Neoplatonists, Augustine banishes temporal succession from his Trinity, finding it as true to urge the priority of will to understanding as that of understanding to the will.⁵⁹ It has sometimes been suspected that he robbed the *Chaldaean Oracles* for another of his similes,⁶⁰ in which the Son appears as the reflection of the Father's mind, and the Spirit as a bond of love between them. The alleged source, having been edited by Theiler,⁶¹ does not quite speak for itself:

Ψυχᾶιον σπινθήρα δυσὶν κράσας ὁμονοίαις νῷ καὶ νεύματι θείῳ, ἐφ' οἷς
τρίτον ἀγνὸν Ἔρωτα.

The Father mixed the spark of the soul from two concordant elements,
mind and the reflection (νόματι; MS νεύματι) of God, to which he added love as
the third.
(*Chaldaean Oracles*, frg. 44)

Once again we must plead for circumspection. The case for plagiarism from the *Oracles* requires an emendation to the verses, and supposes that Augustine was prepared to steal from Porphyry a battery of terms that he elected not to quote in his critique. The emendation is dubious, and the theory ignores the prolix chain of reasoning by which Augustine reaches his conclusions. The most original mind since Socrates was never guided by the din of fading voices; even when engaged in a public argument, he will fall into soliloquy, exhausting his opponents' answers long before he has ceased to tax his own propensity for interrogation. To such a mind the questions occurred spontaneously, and he never had to lift a doctrine bodily from any source but the Bible and the Creeds. His doctrine of the Trinity and the triads of the later Neoplatonists stem from different proximate causes; their ultimate cause is one in this respect, that both attempt to grasp God's nature through the medium of his greatest work, the mind.⁶²

Christ Church, Oxford

⁵⁷ See Augustine, *De Trinitate* 12.4 etc.

⁵⁸ In *Hymn* 3.163ff., both *vita* and *substantia* (Son and Spirit) are form; At *ibid.*, 114–5 the Son is *forma*, the Spirit *reformationem*.

⁵⁹ See Augustine, *De Trinitate* 11.5, 12.12 etc.

⁶⁰ For the triad *mens-notitia-amor*, see Augustine, *De Trinitate* 11.17 etc.

⁶¹ See des Places (above, note 10) 131, citing W. Theiler, *Die Chaldaischen Orakel und die Hymnen des Synesios* (Halle 1942) 9.

⁶² I am grateful for comments made in the seminar by Dr. H.J. Blumenthal, Dr. L. Siorvanes, Dr. C.G. Steel, Mr. R.M. Van Den Berg, Prof. F. García Bázan and Prof. F. Romano.