

PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF REBIRTH

FROM ANCIENT EGYPT TO NEOPLATONISM

Algis Uždavinys



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PHILOSOPHY
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FROM ANCIENT EGYPT TO NEOPLATONISM

Preface

This book issues a serious challenge to the orthodox view of philosophy, and its accompanying narrative of development.

Ancient understanding viewed reality as a series of descending steps, starting with the most ineffable and most simple which is first unfolded through divinity and then moves down through varying conditions of existence – the highest of which are closest to the originating simplicity and are purely intelligible, but the lower being increasingly complex and changeable, ultimately becoming perceptible to the senses. These lower conditions of existence were not rejected as evil or illusive, but they were seen as deriving their worth and trustworthiness from their relation to the highest. Each plane of reality had its answering correspondence in the nature of the human being. Since the highest levels possessed the greatest intelligibility and stability, it was here that philosophers sought to centre the art and science of philosophy. For this reason philosophy was seen as an interior discipline which allowed a conscious and active participation in a divine and intellectual drama – in more modern terms it was considered to be a spiritual path, or a yoga of enlightenment.

But at some point in the passage between the ancient and modern era, this view of philosophy and its purpose was largely lost, and today we find that that what is still called philosophy has allowed its centre to slip down the levels of reality. And, of course, the human faculties upon which modern philosophy is based are necessarily at the lower levels of thought: where philosophy was meditative, contemplative and even unitive, it is now confined to a narrow form of logical reason – forever stuck in the temporal world. Reason, once valued as a launching point to the realm of eternal intellect and thence super-eternal divinity, is now an end in itself. Modern philosophy has lost its nerve: like a pilot who no longer trusts his aircraft the forward thrust of reason races us along the ground but is never transferred to an upward movement into the free air.

We now have the worst of both two possible worldviews: modern philosophy, generally speaking, no longer values metaphysics and theology (it considers both to be purely constructs of the human mind, with no basis in reality) and yet since the material world is no longer thought to be a manifestation of providential divinity, modernism cannot rid itself of a deep suspicion that body and matter are ultimately empty of goodness and meaning.

We do not need to accept the present errors: what has been diminished by centuries of neglect can be restored.

This book is not the start of a radical reappraisal of western philosophy and its origins, but it is by far the most coherent and strongest call to this task that has been written in recent times. Once we step back with its author and examine the external and internal evidence for European (in other words Greek) philosophy having grown out of that of the Egyptians, the unbiased reader must conclude that it is incredible that any other possibility should have been entertained. Why should the

writers of antiquity have so consistently claimed that the best of their wise men had visited and learnt from the priests of Egypt unless there was a widespread and deeply held reverence for that land and its teachings?

To appreciate how philosophy's origins have been so thoroughly misrepresented, we need to follow Algis Uzdavinys' exposition of the way in which the true and original nature and purpose of philosophy has fallen from both the scholarly and the common view over these many centuries past. And while ultimately the failure to recognise the Egyptian roots of western philosophy may be considered as a problem largely confined to historical accuracy, the failure to understand its nature and purpose has had – and still has – the most profound, extensive and worrying consequences for the whole of humankind. This is why *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth* is such a welcome contribution to the thought life of today.

As with every radical change of position in any subject, there are likely to be details which will need to be readjusted once the dust has settled, so to speak, and other thinkers have added their own efforts to the task of exploring this new vista. Clearly the challenge this book lays down to the philosophers of today is to consider the very essence of philosophy as a participation in divine reality and, therefore, its activities as being primarily those of inner vision rather than mere logic. Once this position is seen as valid – and this may take time, as inner vision is itself a discipline which requires gradual development – we can then move back across the writings of the tradition dating from between its Egyptian and Neoplatonic phases in order to consider them in this light. At present several writers, for example, see Plato himself as part of the movement away from divine vision towards the limitations of purely logical reason. We need to ask whether this is really so, or whether modern rationalistic schools have so thoroughly misrepresented him as a sceptical logician that this has been accepted too readily by those who are moving towards this radical revision of philosophy: if this questioning is approached with an open mind, we may well find that Plato's dialogues, replete as they are with passages of mythic images, with descriptions of Socrates in meditative states, and with their constant references to traditional myth and initiation, are in reality central to philosophy as rebirth. This is an exciting exploration awaiting further research and deep thought.

Leaving this aside, we can see in *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth* that a sympathetic exploration of Ancient Egyptian high culture so clearly connects with the last flowering of Greek philosophy in the teachings of the late Platonists as well as with Eastern doctrines that we must again consider the now unfashionable concept of the existence of a perennial and universal philosophy. The truths of this philosophy, as Thomas Taylor says, "which though they have been concealed for ages in oblivion, have a subsistence coeval with the universe, and will again be restored, and flourish, for very extended periods, through all the infinite revolutions of time."

Tim Addey, October 2008

PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF REBIRTH

INTRODUCTION

The title of our monograph may appear rather strange and paradoxical to those who are uncritically tied to the prevailing modern systems of classification and presentation of “reality”. Since philosophy now is irremediably reduced to an abstract philosophical discourse, itself frequently viewed as “an illness of language” by academic would-be-therapists, it is often very difficult to realize that an essential aspect of all ancient philosophy consists in the living *praxis* which faithfully follows the course of already established spiritual exercises and imitates archetypal patterns. The art of living demanded by the spiritual and material economy of the ancient theocratic state (itself regarded as an image of the celestial kingdom) and, eventually, by philosophy, understood as “love of wisdom”, was not only a lived exercise, but, first and foremost, a lived and correctly performed sacred ritual of the great divine Mysteries, that is, the Mysteries of existence as played out by Being, Life, and Intellect themselves.

It would be unwise to pay too much attention to certain particular terms, for example, to argue that “philosophy” is exactly that term which should be applied to every manifestation of coherent human thought at all costs, or that it needs to be saved from the modern abomination by all means. However, a consistent logic allows us to use this term in different historical and cultural contexts, in spite of the conventionally accepted usage restricted, as a rule, to certain exceptional methods of investigation or to particular fields of knowledge. This scholarly freedom of interpretation is not to be viewed as a frivolous voluntarism, for the simple reason, at least, that so-called philosophical rationalism can itself be traced back to the hieratic systems of ancient semiotics which are logically coherent meta-structures of metaphysical knowledge.

In this respect, one should remember that even empirical and positivistic studies may be regarded as “fantasies elaborated in the genre of objective science and technical formula”.¹ By extension, one can speak of the *genres* and *topoi* not only in literature, but also in all aspects of human social and individual life, including philosophical reasoning, creative imagination, and any kind of “experience”. Even so-called scientific research and, as a consequence, contemporary technologies have their own “literary style” and contain hidden ontological premises that are utterly mythical, if not fantastic. Therefore James Hillman argues:

“Our lives are the enactment of our dreams; our case histories are from the very beginning, archetypally, dramas; we are masks (*personae*) through which the gods sound (*personare*)... All ways of speaking of archetypes are translations from one metaphor to another. Even sober operational definitions in the language of science and logic are no less metaphorical than an image which presents the archetypes as root ideas,

psychic organs, figures of myth, typical styles of existence, or dominant fantasies that govern consciousness".²

Instead of asking "what is philosophy?"³, one should perhaps ask what kind of contents, i.e., what kind of mental activities, spiritual dimensions, methods, attitudes, practices, or even behavioural and ritual patterns may be subscribed under the name of "philosophy" when understood in the ancient sense of the way leading to wisdom. Therefore our present intention is to show that *philosophia* in its Pythagorean, Platonic, and Neoplatonic form is structurally, thematically, and even genetically related to the ancient traditions of the Middle East, and especially those of Egypt.

The main distinction which characterizes Hellenic philosophy is not rationality as such (because the mythological world-views and related philological or hermeneutical strategies are even more rational, systematic and coherent wholes), but its, partial at least, devaluation of images and adherence to the reasoning in abstract categories and "naked facts" of logic. However, the main task of this philosophy remains essentially the same: to change perverted human nature, to transform it, eventually leading it to happiness and to a restored divine identity. This task is in fact directly inherited from the ancient "philosophies", that is, from the mysteries of death, transformation, and spiritual rebirth, and the related cosmogonical theories, systems of archetypal symbolism, and ritualized exercises of the "normative divine life".

The conventional story of "Western philosophy", established and canonized in the 18th and 19th centuries, tells us that philosophy consists in replacing myth by reason and thereby raising a rational society with rational laws. For the European Enlightenment, it means the elimination of religion and of all irrational superstitions. Here "philosophy" is identified as a secular and rationalistic enterprise, directed against the "idols" of religious imagination and faith, or, if a compromise should be involved, as a rational apology for Christian sentiments, morality, and the "natural" right of world dominion. This very compelling post-Kantian identification of philosophy with an abstract philosophical discourse still dominates both scholarly and popular consciousness and provokes different reactions, especially those raised by Traditionalists from one side and by Postmodernists from another.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, one of the leading expositors of contemporary Traditionalist thought, nonetheless defines philosophy as "a wisdom about knowledge", maintaining that "the problems of philosophy are evidently those of rationalisation", aimed at correlating the data provided by empirical experience through a reduction of particulars to universals. He says:

"Beyond this, however, philosophy has been held to mean a wisdom not so much about particular kinds of thought, as a wisdom about thinking, and an analysis of what it means to think, and an enquiry as to what may be the nature of the ultimate reference of thought. In this sense the problems of philosophy are with respect to the ultimate nature of

reality, actuality or experience; meaning by reality whatever is in act and not merely potential... Knowledge is not then of individual presentations, but of types of presentation; in other words, of things in their intelligible aspect, i.e., of the being that things have in the mind of the knower, as principles, genera and species. Insofar as knowledge is directed to the attainment of ends it is called practical; in so far as it remains in the knower, theoretical or speculative".⁴

In addition to being abstract, philosophy must be systematic so as to make one logical whole.⁵ Now it is fairly clear that any of the great mythological and religious systems constitutes a closed logical whole, based on strictly metaphysical premises. Therefore A. K. Coomaraswamy, partly following the Peripatetic example, actually speaks of two philosophies. The First Philosophy, which stands in accord with "revealed truth" (or simply serves as its rational vehicle), is "no longer in the first place deductive and secondarily inductive, but inductive from first to last, its logic proceeding invariably from the transcendental to the universal, and thence as before to the particular. This First Philosophy, indeed, taking for granted the principle 'as above, so below' and vice versa, is able to find in every microcosmic fact the trace or symbol of a macrocosmic actuality, and accordingly resorts to 'proof' by analogy; but this apparently deductive procedure is here employed by way of demonstration, and not by way of proof, where logical proof is out of the question, and its place is taken either by faith (Augustine's *credo ut intelligam*) or by the evidence of immediate experience (*alaukikapratyaksa*)".⁶

Accordingly, the subject of metaphysics is described as being that "of the Supreme Identity as an indis-severable unity of potentiality and act, darkness and light..."⁷

The definition of metaphysics as invariably related to the monistic concept of an absolute Supreme Identity is not self-evident without a considerable hermeneutical attempt to explain it or construct such universal meta-theory which would be able to satisfy one's "philosophical mind" in accord with particular speculative premises. Those premises include certain specific notions of immortality and eternity, death and rebirth, as well as an elaborated (often mythologized) hierarchy of being and a more or less explicit theory of divine archetypes.

All these philosophical concepts, albeit expressed in a language of myth, symbol, and ritual, are attested in the ancient Egyptian civilization and stand at the roots of Hellenic modernization of that ancient "philosophy" which is based on identifications with the divine names and qualities that imply alchemical transformations within the officially established frame of the theurgic semiotics and royal iconology. In this respect, Franz Rosenthal speaks about "a common variation of the I-am-you concept" which (as the paradigmatic mystical assertion "I am you") is widespread in the ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, and Indian spiritual milieu. F. Rosenthal, being a faithful modernist, attributes its origins to "the murky world of magical longings" and argues as follows:

“Magic identification was a kind of standard procedure for solving the mysteries of both the natural and supernatural worlds. It was stated that this god *is* that god, a *is* b, and immediately, power was gained and difficulties were removed. The Sanskrit Brahmanas are replete with statements of this sort: ‘All the deities are Agni; all the deities are Vishnu...’ The newcomer who is examined by the Brahman with the question ‘Who are you?’ is supposed to answer ‘I am yourself’... Gnostic religions, in particular, are characterized by the fact that they reconstruct the power system that holds the world together or may tear it apart by means of an intricate series of mutual identifications of all known physical and historical data and metaphysical abstractions. The understanding of the system is the first and decisive step toward salvation”.⁸

Knowledge of the divine becomes possible only through identification with it, and this identification (or gradual transformation and moving through the series of identities), culminating in union, is the ultimate goal of the Egyptian philosophical way of life. This is a path which implies purification, correct performance of hieratic rites, moral perfection, contemplation, and knowledge which proved to be the main driving force of illumination, alchemical transformation and restoration of one’s true divine identity.

Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy, though operating on a different level of epistemology and dialectic, reveals the same hidden patterns. Therefore our aim is to explore these patterns and (as far as possible) indicate the ways of esoteric transmission, although the latter question is always secondary and rather marginal, mostly important for those naïve enthusiasts of historical research whose scope is limited to supposed empirical or mechanical “influences”. In short, certain aspects of Hellenic (especially Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic) metaphysics consist in designation and philosophical description of the same divine principles and cosmogonical manifestations (the same in a universal sense of *philosophia perennis*, not of exact coincidence in the realm of historical facts) which are already explicitly or implicitly presented in the hieroglyphic images and symbols employed by the Egyptian priests.

The Greek philosophers themselves traced the seeds of their *haireseis* back to the Egyptian hieratic tradition. The Neoplatonists recognized the divine origin of *philosophia* and compared it to metaphysical rites, or mysteries, aimed at the ascent of the soul and its final reunion with the demiurgic Intellect (*Nous*) and the One. This mystical task (the pathway of gods, *devayana*, in Upanishadic terms) implied just such an ontological, cosmological, and imaginal context of human existence which was inseparable from the overwhelming noetic network of divine energies. The word and image, or any other theurgic symbol, were taken as essential to the process of joining the human soul to its paradigms. The universe itself was regarded as a kind of multi-dimensional text written by the divine *sophia*. Therefore “to philosophize” means to be in accord with this world-governing providence and employ certain sacramental esoteric

hermeneutics for the correct reading of the ontological hieroglyphs. As Pierre Lory says:

“By naming a thing of the world, the human being awakens because the name brings forth the internal reality which corresponds to what exists in himself”.⁹

Since human languages, in certain ideal respects, are taken in traditional societies to be the refraction in the human mind of the noetic cosmos and its organization, the correct creative and ritualized cultic use of sacred language itself (along with all possible riddles, puns, metaphysical etymologies, associations, and exegetical twists) may be regarded as tantamount to “philosophizing”. The end of this transforming speech and this “reading” is one’s transformation, awakening, and rebirth.

Accordingly, even moving across the qualitative and symbolic days of a sacred calendar is no less than following the “philosophical way” towards the desired integration by imitating the circumambulation of the Year. This both demiurgic and theurgic circle of the Year not only represents the individual’s pilgrimage to the archetypal principles (and his dramatic experience of the sacred), but serves as an actual model of one’s philosophy in all its mystical, social, political, economical, ethical, and aesthetic aspects. If this traditional way of participation, of direct mythical experience and “surrender” (which, nonetheless, may involve the heroic aspect of initiation and trial) should be called “philosophy”, then to philosophize means not to belong to the case of an extraordinary exception, but to follow one’s own “predestined” path – as if moving through the archetypal Text of theophanies, masks, and changing ranks of identities to the polarities (those of Horus and Seth, of *deva* and *asura*) which transcend all duality.

When radically formulated in terms of metaphysical “identities”, this final goal of philosophy – like the final goal of the ascent accomplished by the golden Horus in the *Pyramid Texts* – may be regarded as the building up of the tomb or the altar of sacrifice. Thus A. K. Coomaraswamy says:

“What metaphysics understands by immortality and by eternity implies and demands of every man a total and uncompromising denial of himself and a final mortification, to be dead and buried in the Godhead... For the Supreme Identity is no less a Death and a Darkness than a Life and a Light, no less Asura than Deva... And this is what we understand to be the final purport of the First Philosophy.”¹⁰

To call this hieratic enterprise – initially related to the particular trends of ancient thought – by the term of the “First Philosophy” is a matter of mere convention inherited from the tradition of Western scholasticism. However, the same idea of spiritual rebirth and final union dominated both Egyptian cultic practices and sophisticated Neoplatonic thought.

It is no wonder that Modernism (partly based on the Protestant legacy) rejects altogether this kind of sacramental philosophy and, instead, presents as philosophy its own way of explaining things and of imposing reductionist ideological fantasies. It is even more interesting, however,

that so-called Postmodernism enjoys breaking with the entire philosophical tradition (classified, idolized, and cherished by Modernism) which, presumably, runs from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and Hegel.

Certain critics of modern social institutions describe this breaking as a rebellion against the totalitarian tendency in Western philosophy, thereby affirming as salutary the mind's powerlessness to "think" the so-called Other and, consequently, instead of negative theology promoting all kinds of sheer irrationalism and stupidity. Michel Foucault argues:

"The death of God sent all the stable forms of previous thought up in flames and used their charred remains to draw strange and perhaps impossible faces."¹¹

Richard Rorty, another influential writer, speaks of the utter bankruptcy of traditional philosophizing and of what he calls "epistemologically centred philosophy".¹² His ruthless criticism is mainly directed against the whole epistemological project of modernity, initiated by the followers of Descartes and Kant. However, at the same time and by the same stroke, the Postmodern relativists ridicule all traditional metaphysical systems (especially those belonging to the Neoplatonic stream), viewing their claims for divine truth and beauty as being utterly groundless ideological fictions. Philosophy itself is said to be coming to its unglorious end, since the "post-philosophical" attitude finds its solipsistic pleasure in rejecting any form of universal theory.

The world is turned upside down. Therefore it would be rather incorrect to think that one of the main characteristics of Postmodern thought consists of its insistence on the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. The *praxis* of self-indulgence, forgetfulness, deviation, and sin (if not an actual crime in the name of pseudo-humanism and democracy) is surely not the same as the spiritual *praxis* of purification, *askesis*, contemplation, self-sacrifice, remembrance, and virtue. The Postmodern fighters against the metaphysical order of things and against any *shari'ah* (that is, the sacred law) think that the dragon represents the values of the modern administrated and disciplinary world; therefore "these values must be destroyed if the spirit is to become the value-creating, life-affirming child".¹³

When spiritual sanity itself is turned into a fantasy, one thing is forgotten and neglected, namely, that, as Frithjof Schuon pointed out:

"Intelligence has, on the one hand, no effective worth unless its contents are the fundamental and saving truths; on the other, intelligence must be in balance with virtue and faith".¹⁴

Accordingly, the philosophical relativism of the "life-affirming child" (to whom wisdom is tantamount to a seductive and wild public woman) is capable only of laughter and irony with their compelling logic of theatre. And the crazy Postmodern theatre is not that which presents the mysterious story of al-Khidr and Moses (even if seen through the eyes of Mulla Nasreddin), but that which shows the ugly traits of a trivial sado-

masochist play. This is because “an intelligence devoid of truth remains beneath itself”, according to the apt remark made by F. Schuon.¹⁵ As Gary B. Madison says:

“We are inevitably condemned to relativism when, rejecting like Rorty the metaphysical notion of Truth, we reject also all metanarratives, when, that is, we reject the legitimacy of theory, which always seeks some form of *universal* validity. And, similarly, we find ourselves in a state of nihilism when, rejecting the metaphysical notion of Reality, we go on to assert as well that everyone’s ‘truths’ are merely their own private ‘fictions’, when, that is, we equate fiction with mere semblance (*simulacrum*) and deny it the power to recreate or refigure, and thus enhance, what is called ‘reality’.”¹⁶

Our present task is not to argue against the mental acrobatics of those who follow R. Rorty or to claim that we are in possession of certain exclusive “formal” truth, whatever this word may mean for different audiences. On the contrary, our purpose is quite humble: to discuss certain parallels between ancient Egyptian and Hellenic thought, and to show that *philosophia* (apart of other important aspects) is directly or indirectly based on the hieratic patterns of ancient cults and may itself be regarded as a rite of transformation and noetic rebirth. This hermeneutical rite of “philosophizing” (which partly consists in moving through the ontological text, that is, through the cosmic maze of ideas, thoughts, words, images, symbols, and deeds) is not simply a playful metaphorical enterprise that belongs to the realm of rhetoric, but involves the restoration of one’s right mind and promises the final reunion with divine principles. The metaphysical discourse thereby produced is based on noetic intuitions, ambivalent terms, and paradoxical images, thus constituting the closed “hermeneutical circle” of its own. It cannot be simply rendered into the positivistic language of “facts” or turned into the “merely dead fiction” of the contemporary historical museum, without losing its hidden theurgic dimension, imaginative appeal and transformative *barakah*.

Although every hermeneutical perspective constructs and reconstructs more or less coherent and meaningful pictures of the past, always based on the particular spiritual needs and expectations of their real or imagined audiences, it would be unwise and incorrect to disregard most of them or to neglect them altogether simply because one’s mental horizon is ruled by learned “scientific” tales of a different kind. Always keeping in mind the larger metaphysical picture and accepting that different variations of hierarchy, far from being simply Platonic or Neoplatonic “inventions”, are valid for their wider ontological contexts, one can equate *par analogiam*, for example, the solar Atum-Ra to the Neoplatonic *Nous*, or one can use the terms *sekhem*, *shakti*, and *dunamis* as being, in certain cases, interchangeable. However, such rather loose comparisons are not meant to claim the strict coincidence of their objects (figures of thought, literary

forms, underlying symbols, myths, and philosophical categories) in every respect or to “prove” that, historically speaking, any particular concept of a certain tradition straightforwardly “derives” from another one which is similar but belongs to a foreign culture.

To quote J. Hillman again (despite his persistent wish to reduce and transfer noetic realities to the level of psychic imagination):

“The mind from the beginning must be based in the blue firmament, like the lazuli stone and sapphire throne of mysticism, the azure heaven of Boehme, *philos sophia*. ...it is a mythical place that gives metaphorical support to metaphysical thinking. It is the presentation of metaphysics in image and form.”¹⁷

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1 *The Essential James Hillman. A Blue Fire*, ed. by Thomas Moore, London: Routledge, 1994, p.3

2 *Ibid.*, p.82; p.83

3 See: Pierre Hadot *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1995

4 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy *On the Pertinence of Philosophy*.- What is Civilization? And Other Essays, Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1989, p.14; p.13

5 *Ibid.*, p.15

6 *Ibid.*, p.17

7 *Ibid.*, p.18

8 Franz Rosenthal “*I am you*” – *Individual Piety and Society in Islam*.- Muslim Intellectual and Social History. A Collection of Essays, London: Variorum, 1990, ch. IX, p.34; p.36

9 Pierre Lory *Know the World to Know Yourself*.- The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn et al., Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2001, p.721

10 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *ibid.*, p.28

11 Michel Foucault *The Order of Things*, New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1973, p.263

12 Richard Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p.357

13 Deborah Cook *Amor Fati and Spirit of the Lion*.- Joyful Wisdom: A Post Modern Ethics of Joy, ed. by M. Zlomislic et al., St. Catharines, Ontario: Joyful Wisdom Publishing, 1991, p.101

14 Frithjof Schuon *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, tr. by J. Peter Hobson, London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976, p.72

15 *Ibid.*, p.86

16 Gary B. Madison *Coping with Nietzsche's Legacy: Rorty, Derrida, Gadamer*.- Joyful Wisdom: A Post Modern Ethics of Joy, ed. by M. Zlomislic et al., St. Catharines, Ontario: Joyful Wisdom Publishing, 1991, pp.74-75

17 *The Essential James Hillman. A Blue Fire*, pp.34-35

UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

1. Philosophy and Eternal Wonder

One must be careful in thinking that *philosophia* first appeared with Pythagoras (who visited all the Egyptian priests, acquiring all the wisdom each possessed, according to Iamblichus in *De vita Pythagorica* 4)¹, simply because he invented this term, according to the ancient Hellenic tradition. For Pythagoras, philosophy, associated with the way of Apollo, consists in a purification, in becoming aware of the divine principles and in assimilation to God. This Pythagorean way of life (*bios Puthagorikos*: *Rep.*600ab) cannot be opposed to sacred rites, because the true and immortal divine nature is achieved not only by means of *theoria*, or contemplation of the universal principles of harmony, but through *praxis* which is both *askesis* and *therapeia*. Pythagoras himself conducted the hieratic rituals behind a veil, but only those who had passed all five-year tests, initiations and necessary purifications were privileged to see the face of the Philosopher, their divine *begemon* (spiritual guide and leader). Thus, with certain subtle reservations, we should accept the claim made by David R. Fideler:

“Yet while Pythagoreanism remains closely related to the Orphic thought of the period, the clearly distinguishing factor between the two is that for the Pythagoreans liberation from the wheel is obtained not through religious rite, but through philosophy, the contemplation of first principles. Hence, *philosophia* is a form of purification, a way to immortality. As others have observed, whereas the Eleusinian mysteries offered a single revelation, and Orphism a religious way of life, Pythagoras offered a way of life based on philosophy”.²

However, *philosophia*, or rather philosophizing – understood in the ancient sense as a special way of life and *paideia*, as seeking of truth – is modelled on the inner theurgic patterns and cosmic rhythms. It is a grave mistake to regard “ritual” (*telete*, or *ritus*, the last word being closely connected with the Vedic concept of *rta*, the universal order maintained by the constant *theia erga*, divine works) merely as an external ceremony which injures the Protestant and Modern iconoclastic sensibilities.

Perhaps the “wonder” which, according to the ancients, provokes the “birth of philosophy” has nothing arbitrary and “spontaneous” as understood in the Modern liberal sense, because this secondary wonder repeats the primeval cosmogonical wonder. In Pharaonic Egypt, the wonder hymned by the Eastern *Bau* (the spiritual manifestations of Thoth) at the rise, or rebirth, of the Sun reflects the eternal wonder which constitutes the blissful divine Self-consciousness at the appearance of the noetic Sun, of Atum-Ra, who stems from the abyss of ineffable waters. And this wonder at sunrise is not complete without the wonder at sunset

2 *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth*

when the mystery of death is revealed and Anubis leads to the tomb and the inner Osirian temple of alchemical transformation.

If human wonder (*thaumazein*), when facing life and death, divine glories and terrestrial miseries, is the true origin of philosophizing, then we should agree with Ch. Evangeliou that philosophical speculation can go as far back as the appearance of *Anthropos*.³ But the related passage from the *Theaetetus* of Plato proves that this wonder is discussed along with the concept of initiation:

“This sense of wonder is the mark of the Philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris daughter of Thaumas... Then just take a look around and make sure that none of the uninitiated overhears us. I mean by uninitiated the people who believe that nothing is real save what they can grasp with their hands and do not admit that actions and processes or anything invisible can count as real” (*Theaet.*155dc).

Plato clearly states that philosophical wonder is wonder raised by things real and invisible, i.e., the Forms, or noetic realities, and this “miraculous” philosophical knowledge regarding the ascent to the Intelligible realm is not arrived at or learned at random, but constitutes the essence of initiation.

In addition to initiation and guides, philosophy requires leisure, understood as a necessary condition for the contemplative life, as long as this “leisure” does not consist of the regular toil of the “liturgic life”, conducted in the Egyptian temples nor, by extension, the daily life dictated by pious ascetic attitudes. According to the testimony provided by Aristotle:

“That philosophy is not a science of production is clear even from the history of the earliest philosophers. For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize... And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders)” (*Metaph.*982b11-19).

“Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which aim neither to give pleasure nor to procure the necessities of life were discovered, and discovered first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure” (*ibid.*, 981b 19-24).

Those contemporary scholars who have a strong ideological bias (especially when the academic scepticism itself becomes a sort of sinister ideology), a bias based on the Modern and Postmodern “scientific” mythology, are condemned to blindness and may quickly dismiss the following claim of Isocrates about Pythagoras:

“On a visit to Egypt he became a student of the religion of the people, and was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy, and more

conspicuously than others he seriously interested himself in sacrifices and in ceremonial purity..." (*Bousiris* 28).

According to Isocrates, the ancient Egyptians, who are strong in their piety and in practical wisdom (*eusebeia kai phronesis*), introduced the practice of philosophy (*philosophias askesis*) for the soul, "a pursuit which has the power, not only to establish laws but also to investigate the nature of the universe" (*ibid.* 21ff). This perspective shows Pythagoras as merely the inspired and gifted imitator who played a role of philosophical avatar for the young Hellenic civilization and built up his philosophy on the already firmly established tradition.

To assert that philosophy (and it has many different forms beyond that of discursive Western rationalism) begins with wonder means to trace it back to the *tep sepi* (the Egyptian "first time"), to the noetic revelations and the archetypal Ancestor of humanity itself. In fact, philosophy deals with just a few essential questions: (1) Who we are, and (2) What we ought to do, in order to improve our being and escape the threat of perdition. Knowledge of our identities and relations to the archetypal realm is not necessarily produced by fluctuating human opinions and fancies: more frequently it is regarded as God-sent from the beyond, revealed from above or from within. It is therefore no wonder that for Arabs and Muslims in general Adam is the first among prophets.

This theme is elaborated and developed by the eminent Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-'Arabi (sometimes called Ibn Aflatun, Son of Plato) who regards Adam as the very first principle of reflection and the spirit of the reflected form. For the *shaykh al-akbar*, Adam is equivalent to the archetype of humankind, the principle of the creative process, close to the Plotinian Intellect (*Nous*) or, perhaps, its image at the level of the universal Soul. Adam integrates in himself all cosmic realities and their individual manifestations, and all the Names of God; therefore he is an agent of eidetic knowledge. Ibn al-'Arabi says:

"Were it not that the Reality permeates all beings as form [in His qualitative form], and were it not for the intelligible realities, no [essential] determination would be manifest in individual beings. Thus, the dependence of the Cosmos on the Reality for its existence is an essential factor... You are now acquainted with the Wisdom involved in the corporeal formation of Adam, his outer form, as you have become acquainted with the spiritual formation of Adam, his inner form, namely, that he is the Reality [as regards the latter] and that he is creature [as regards the former]. You have also learned to know his rank as the all-synthesizing [form] by which he merits the [divine] Regency".⁴

According to Neoplatonic philosophy, the divine Intellect thinks of the totality of the universe of Forms to which it itself has given rise. He is the eternal creator and sustainer of all subsequent ontological manifestation, therefore at any specific time and any place one by necessity can glimpse

the same truths and construct similar metaphysical doctrines, though expressed in different terms, styles, and images. Such perspective provides a firm foundation for the “perennial philosophy” in its countless outflows. The boundless noetic world (*kosmos noetos*) consists in complete non-spatiality and contains in itself the principles of any possible wisdom, regardless of their sometimes distorted earthly reflections and historical trajectories.

The only problem is that most of the so-called Modern thinkers cannot accept the “hypothesis” of the Forms or the divine Intellect. According to their presumption, any philosophy that approaches or claims to approach the divine presence, unity, or wisdom, ends in the struggle of absolute truths and confronts only its own deadly violence. Positivistic optimism gives promise for salvation through ever increasing information, sometimes worthless and even harmful for spiritual integrity. In a certain sense J. Derrida may be correct in describing violence as the ideological dominance exercised by metaphysics (in the Modern distorted sense of this term), but his own linguistic grammatology exercises a similar, if not greater violence.⁵ With permanent cynicism and laughter one cannot cope with contradictions which are present at the level of discursive thought, and so eventually one may depart from “philosophy” altogether. However, our present task is to analyse ancient ways of thought which are inseparable from noetic certainty, revelation and ascent to the divine.

2. Learning to Live and Learning to Die

The traditional Egyptian *paideia* (education) consisted in energizing superior and integral wisdom for the good of the entire body-like state (permeated and sustained by the royal *ka*, the vital principle) and for the soul (*ba*), both governed by the sacred principle of *maat* (truth, right measure, justice). This *paideia* had been under the rulership of the priests, or philosophers, as Isocrates maintained, because the priests had a leisure (*scholē*), which allowed learning (*scholē*), aimed at producing the contemplative man (*aner theoretikos*). If we accept the fact that the ancient Hellenes (not only the Pythagoreans) revered the Egyptian form of government and imitated their teachings regarding the soul and their spiritual exercises, there is no reason to doubt that *philosophia* (at least in a certain special sense) is indeed a product of Egypt. The term itself (Isocrates is among the first of those who started to use it) may simply be a rendering of an analogous Egyptian term, now unknown, but probably related to some compound of *meri* (love) and *rekh* (knowledge).

It is not necessary to be a cultural hero to understand that the term “philosophy” may cover and include different ways of thought which cannot be reduced to the “monomythic” Hellenic rationalism, praised by

those who thereby try to conceal their own intellectual crimes and excuse some Modern superstitions. As John P. Anton observes, while discussing the philosophical trust in *eros* and in the power of *logos* (which cannot endure without the divine language of Being and sacred Mythology):

“I feel certain that the right to philosophize, to gain access to this intellectual virtue is not something one secures by paying annual dues to the American Philosophical Association”.⁶

It is difficult to decide whether the Greek term *nous* (intellect, intuition, perceiving, essential and non-discursive understanding) may really be derived from the Egyptian verb *nu*, *nua* (see, look), related to the Greek *noeo* (see, perceive, observe), or the Greek *sophia* (wisdom) – from the Egyptian *seba* (teaching, learning, star), as Martin Bernal boldly asserts.⁷ However, such philological uncertainty cannot prevent us from recognizing the Egyptian “philosophy”, or love of wisdom and learning. The term *sebayt*, teaching, employed by the Egyptians themselves, was used to designate various texts of instructions, complaints and praises, including those belonging to the wisdom-literature. Such ancient sages (sometimes turned into the archetypal authorities) as Hardjedet, Imhotep, Neferty, Khety, Ptahemdjehuty, Khakheperresonbe, Ptahhotpe and Kaires, mentioned by the Papyrus Chester Beatty IV of Ramesside date, may be regarded as spiritual guides and philosophers. Also we suspect that some kind of “philosophy” may be deduced from the symbolism of sacred art and the temple rites, because the later Platonic philosophy is consciously or unconsciously modelled according to the hidden ritualistic patterns.

The wisdom-literature as such constitutes only a small and perhaps “modernized” part of the abundant writings produced in ancient Egypt. It assigned the central position to Neter (“God” as an anonymous term), regarded as Creator and Sustainer of all things, the sovereign Lord, supreme Judge and ever-present Helper, the invisible and omnipotent Shepherd of mankind. Man’s responsibilities towards Him consist of worship, obedience and trust, especially emphasized in the Ramesside age, when personal piety becomes an exemplary virtue. The ideal of the truly silent man (*ger maa*), first found in early wisdom-literature and developed by the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.) theologies, is really the Pythagorean ideal. This concept of silence is not only the prerogative of initiates who face the ineffable Principle, but includes the proper attitude before a deity in the temple and in the worshipper’s heart, good manners in the presence of teacher, higher official and friend, self-control (*ger*) and subduing of passions, exercised by the “rational soul”, to put it into the later Hellenic terms. Sometimes this ruling principle is understood and represented as the overwhelming *ka* of the Pharaoh, who himself is the Son of Ra.

The ancient Egyptian texts not only deal with the fate of the soul (*ba*) in the Netherworld, but provide the motivation for the good life here and now by doing the will of God (*sekheru en neter*). The admonitions inscribed in the tomb of Petosiris, the renowned sage and priest of Thoth (around 4th century B.C.), appeal to the living:

“O you who come afterwards, O every man who reads writing, come and read these inscriptions which are in this tomb that I may guide you to the path of life and tell you your conduct, [in order that you may moor at the harbour of the city of generations. Should you hold firm to my sayings, you will discover their value and will thank me for them.”⁸

This one and other similar texts (*sebajt*) advise the reader to follow truth and wisdom in every pursuit, i.e., to live and depart to the beautiful West (to die) according to the established patterns of a pious and righteous servant of God.

A student of ancient civilizations must remember constantly that even in Graeco-Roman antiquity philosophy was regarded as spiritual guidance toward a happy life as well as initiation, successful transformation and integration into the “divine chorus” after death.

I. Hadot describes it briefly as characterized by two paradigmatic formulas: learning to live and learning to die, where the latter formula can be regarded as the logical presupposition of the former.⁹

Seen in this light, *philosophia* is a method aimed at the elimination of irrational fears, ambitions, and passions, at transformation and recovering of our essential identity. It requires the aspirant to act in a pious and holy fashion (*eusebos kai hosios*), realizing that all initiations and visions are conferred on intellect by the hidden powers within the immense temple of the gods, which is the universe itself. “Everything is full of gods”, according to Thales of Miletus (fr.22DK); therefore in order to philosophize it is necessary to be pious.

Since a parallel is established between (1) a temple of initiation like that of Eleusis and (2) the cosmos, the most holy of temples, human beings observe many wonders and initiatory spectacles (*mustika theamata*) in both of them. For this reason, the ancient Egyptians present the image of the stability of principles in “the holiest of temples which is the world” (Proclus *In Tim.* I.124.16-19). The time between birth and death is an uninterrupted feast and liturgy which must be properly performed:

“For the world is a very holy temple and most worthy of God; man is introduced into it by birth and there he does not contemplate statues (*agalmaton*) made by the hand of man and deprived of movement, but the sensible realities which the divine Intellect has brought into being in imitation of the intelligible realities, as Plato says... Our life which is an absolutely perfect admission and initiation into these mysteries (*muesin onta kai teleten teleiotaten*) must be full of confidence and joy... But these feasts which God offers to us and in which he is the mystagogue are profaned if we spend the best part of our lives in lamentation, recriminations and exhausting anxieties” (Plutarch *De tranquillitate animi* 20.477cd).

In antiquity, the theoretical side of philosophy, if this specific side existed at all apart from the general theological and mythical outlook, was subordinated to the practical side. This practical side (which included contemplation) was regarded as “philosophizing” proper, and applied to all aspects of life - political, ethical, liturgical and mystical. Being considered as spiritual guidance and education toward all goodness, beauty, and wisdom, ancient philosophy was only secondarily seen as a theoretical explanation of the world. And this explanation itself, along with the knowledge of epistemology and logic, served as an icon in order to provide the necessary intellectual conditions for a happy life, and for spiritual transformation and ascent (*anagoge*), or return (*epistrophe*), to the first Principle, the source of all being, life, and intelligence. However, the philosophical schools which emerged in the 4th to 3rd centuries B.C. and introduced a new type of spiritual guidance (“an organized work of love”, aimed at rationalization of thought and conduct) considered that moral and ontological self-knowledge must precede all spiritual progress in the philosophical discovery of the hidden truth (*aletheia*).

But every philosophical tradition expected to teach its adherents how to die. This aim was achieved through the critical analysis of phenomena, self-examination, and *askesis*, largely derived from Egyptian and Pythagorean sources. The different kinds of commentary, allegorical explanation and symbolic interpretation were used – some found in the privileged texts written by the founders of *hairesis*, others in divine oracles and sacred rites. Such hermeneutical practices were thought to lead to inner transformation and spiritual rebirth. Nevertheless, the written texts and logical systems of thought, constructed using powers of discursive reasoning, were regarded only as a temporary measure in place of personal instructions of the spiritual guide (*kathēgemon*, *hegemon*). He shows the way and therefore must be trusted and treated as a godlike father. Thus, according to this line of traditional thinking, the Stoic Epictetus presents an acute and revealing question:

“Do I go to my teacher prepared to obey him like an oracle? Or am I not also one of those, who in their folly only go to school in order to learn the history of philosophy, to understand books which they did not understand before and to explain them to others should the occasion arise?” (*Discourses* 2.21.10).

3. Ancient Practices of Wisdom

Contrary to current opinion, expressed as rationalistic dogma which holds ancient philosophy (or philosophy as such) to be an exclusively intellectual, theoretical, system-building or system-demolishing activity, recent investigations are able to show that it consists primarily in

contemplation of cosmic beauties and noetic archetypes of being as well as in fulfillment of the *telos* which is present in the human soul. As Ch. Evangeliou emphasizes, for Plato and Aristotle, the genuine Hellenic philosopher is most beloved of the Hellenic gods (*theophilestatos*). This author cites the assertion made by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan that “the Upanishads speak to us of the way in which the individual self gets at the ultimate reality by an inward journey, an inner ascent” and adds: the same goal pervades the Hellenic philosophical tradition from Pythagoras to Proclus, if correctly understood.¹⁰

A. H. Armstrong also insists that, for ancient philosophers, philosophy as preparation for death was an extremely demanding way of life requiring the intense study of the whole of reality, not simply “scientific” understanding of things.¹¹ Philosophy is concerned not only with human well-being, but with the search for soul-transforming wisdom. For Plotinus, this means to recover the soul’s “ancient state” (*archaian katastasin*: *Enn.* IV.7.9.31; cf. Plato *Rep.* 547b 6-7). It is the same as to be illuminated by the truth from the Good, which radiates truth over all the intelligibles. The soul, purified and cleansed by philosophy, resembles the “living gold” (*chrysoi empsuchos*: *ibid.*, IV.7.10.48):

“This soul does make it clear that its evils are external accretions to the soul and come from elsewhere, but that when it is purified the best things are present in it, wisdom and all the rest of virtue, and are its own. If, then, the soul is something of this kind when it goes up again to itself, it must surely belong to that nature which we assert is that of all the divine and eternal. For wisdom and true virtue are divine things (*phronesis gar kai arete alethes theia onta*), and could not occur in some trivial mortal being, but something of such a kind [as to possess them] must be divine (*theion*), since it has a share in divine things through its kinship and consubstantiality (*dia sungeneian kai to homousion*: *Enn.* IV.7.10.11-20).

Having ascended to the divine the philosopher-sage can pronounce, following Empedocles: “Greetings, I am for you an immortal god” (*chairet, ego d’ humin theos ambrotos*). The great Sufi masters, such as Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d.874) and al-Hallaj ibn Mansur (d.922) clearly follow the same stream of “spiritual drunkenness” (*sukr*) and ecstatic outbursts (*shatahat*).

According to Pierre Hadot, who thoroughly investigated the very nature of ancient *philosophia*, its literary genres, rhetorical rules, exegetical strategies, and spiritual exercises, an implicit distinction between philosophy and philosophical discourse is already evident in Plato’s definition of philosophy as a training for death (*Phaed.* 67cd). It means that philosophy consists in liberating the soul from passions. This liberation is achieved through the practice of the virtues and knowledge, that is through a lived concrete exercise, stripping away everything that is not truly itself. The ancient philosophy, which cures the soul’s illness by teaching a radically new way of life, removes forgetfulness and is not

simply “a discourse about objects, be they even the highest, but it wishes actually to lead the soul to a living, concrete union with the Intellect and the Good”.¹² Therefore *philo-sophia* – the love of wisdom, is an art of loving, seeing, understanding, and living, not simply of constructing a technical jargon reserved for specialists. It is a method of purification and spiritual ascent which demands a radical transformation of one’s thought and existence in order to reach the *telos* described as “wisdom”. And the real wisdom does not merely cause us to know discursively: it makes us “be” in a different way¹³ by uniting knowledge (*gnosis*) and being (*ousia*).

Although this wisdom is regarded as the knowledge of causes and principles, i.e., as *prote philosophia*, “first philosophy”, by Aristotle (*Metaph.* 981b 25-982 ab), some of the ancient philosophers viewed it as ineffable and unspeakable. Thus, in order to be a lover of wisdom, to live a philosophical life, to “philosophize”, it is not necessary to develop a philosophical discourse in the sense of an elaborate scientific system and to carry out academic research. Rather, every person who lives according to the rules of intellect (*nous*) or to the precepts left by the founder of any particular school (*hairesis*) is considered a philosopher.

But what about those who consciously lived according to the revealed divine patterns, mythical paradigms and sacramental rituals? May they be regarded as philosophers and why? Of course, if the definitions of *philosophia* and philosophizing are restricted to certain historical forms of rationalism and logic, the attitude of *philosophia perennis* may rightly be labelled as uncritical and even silly. Why must one be captured by the term *philosophia* and try to expand its meaning in order to cover so many different forms of religious thought, devotional and cultic practice?

However, our position, which recognizes the universality (but not uniformity) of human love and longing for wisdom, itself constitutes one of many possible philosophical perspectives, which are not limited to spurious postmodern fiction. Therefore the widened application of the term “philosophy” is approved, despite the negative attitude and scorn of those modern thinkers who themselves usurped the right meaning of this term, claiming it exclusively for their narrow one-sided use. And in many cases the opinions of the ancients (especially of those who followed the Pythagorean tradition) provide considerable support for our perspective. So now let us turn to the numerous historical testimonies.

The spiritual and intellectual traditionalism of the late Roman world made no distinction between the truth revealed by oracles and those stated by divinely possessed or inspired philosophers. The only reservation regarding an unequal validity of different “philosophies” is made by the emperor Julian in the following assertion:

“Only philosophy is suitable for us (priests), and of philosophers only those who acknowledge the gods as the guides of their *paideia*, for example, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and those who follow Chrysippus

and Zeno. For we should not occupy ourselves with all philosophers, or with all doctrines, but only with those philosophies that imbue us with piety and teach us about the gods..." (*Ep.*89b).¹⁴

According to Julian and other Neoplatonists, famous for their cultic preoccupations, Plato is the authoritative expositor of the divine mysteries, but even his doctrines must be read, interpreted and followed only in the proper esoteric manner. They need to be harmonized with the oracles and revelations granted by the gods to different nations. In his letter to the philosopher Theodorus, the high-priest "of all temples in Asia", Julian says:

"For I certainly am not one of those who believe that the soul perishes before the body or along with it, nor do I believe any human being but only the gods (*tois theois de monon*); since it is likely that they alone have the most perfect knowledge of these matters, if indeed we ought to use the word 'likely' of what is inevitably true; since it is fitting for men to conjecture about such matters, but the gods must have complete knowledge" (*Ep.*20).

Real knowledge about divine matters cannot stem from discursive human reasonings. It may only be sent "from above", from the realm of Ideas, or revealed by the divine Intellect to the human intellect, as long as it is purified (this is the aim of philosophical exercises) and able to receive a glimpse of the supreme Light. Therefore for the true philosopher, as Damascius maintains, it is not enough to be skilled in the externals of philosophy, concerned with a multitude of theories and brilliant syllogisms. If a person is "inwardly barren of soul and lacking in true knowledge (*Isid.*33), he cannot be reckoned among those who belong to the holy race (*hiera genea*) and cannot be regarded as a true philosopher. Hence, not only Sceptics or Epicureans, but even those Platonists who are characterized merely by external learning (which may be very impressive indeed) are excluded from the circle of true philosophers. They are not "divine men" (*theioi andres*), since true divine philosophers are the winged souls who have accomplished (or at least started) their ascent and dwell in "the plain of truth".

The philosophers belonging to the holy race are described as possessing intrinsic sanctity: they live apart, "leading the blissful life which is pleasing to the gods, devoted to philosophy and worship of divine beings" (*Isid.*95). Against this lofty ideal merely accurate discursive learning and human culture are not regarded as sufficient: divine possession (*enthousiasmos*), separation of the soul from the body (*ekstasis*) and the ascent (*anagoge*) into the realm of the divine are required:

"Those who apply themselves to things perishable and human, or who seek too hastily to gain understanding, or who are too eager for knowledge (*philomatheis*), obtain little of the wisdom that is great and divine. Among the ancients, Aristotle and Chrysippus were immensely

gifted, but they were extremely avid for knowledge and hard-working, so they did not complete the whole ascent" (*Isid.*36)

The "knowledge" mentioned in this excerpt by Damascius is not something such as the Hermetic *gnosis* or Plato's *episteme*, but rather a passion for learning without practising the spiritual elevation, equally characteristic of contemporary Western philosophers and scientists. The Neoplatonists made a distinction between (1) conventional philosophy concerned with abstract philosophical contemplation and ordinary *paideia* and (2) priestly, or divine, philosophy, practised "by certain true priests (*bupo de tinon hiereon alethinon*) who had adopted the manner of life appropriate to initiation into the mysteries" (Proclus *Plat. Theol.* I.1), and this philosophy leads to union with the gods. The priestly philosophy is partly inherited from the ancient Oriental civilizations and related to pious sacramental actions, theurgic initiations and divine names.

Therefore the emperor Julian praises the ancients as "not possessed of a wisdom acquired and fabricated like ours, but philosophizing in a natural manner" (*all' autophuos philosophountes: Or.* III.82b). In this case, the "natural" means closer to the divine origin, to the Golden Age, "naturally" revealed, not acquired through discursive training and system-building. It is almost certain that these "ancients" are not the "first Greek philosophers", known to us from the current Western histories of philosophy, but more probably the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Phoenician, or Indian sages.

4. True Ancient Philosophy and the Way of Pious Living

The Platonic philosopher Celsus around AD 180 wrote a book against Christians entitled *Alethes Logos* which did not survive. However, Origen's *Contra Celsum* preserved certain fragments, one of which runs as follows:

"There is an ancient doctrine which has existed from the beginning, which has always been maintained by the wisest nations and cities and wise men" (*Contra Celsum* I.14).

The wisest nations are those famous for their philosophy or mysteries, i.e., Egyptians, Assyrians, Indians, Persians, Odrysians, Samothracians, and Eleusinians. J. C. M. Van Winden argues that *alethes logos* really means "true wisdom", instead of "true doctrine" as it is held by H. Chadwick and other scholars.¹⁵ But this academic controversy is not very important for our subject. Celsus simply states the common belief of his time that religious and philosophical truth shines more brightly at the beginning. In other words, he speaks about the primordial tradition, be it a tradition of "wisdom" or "philosophy". He even makes no distinction between the philosophy proper and the mystery cults, because he speaks in the same breath of Eleusinians (who are not a "nation" in any normal sense) and

the Assyrians (who built a huge empire and whose name in Roman times was used rather loosely).

Clement of Alexandria also affirmed the existence of an ancient philosophy which may be found all over the civilized world, because every nation had its own philosophers and sages. Therefore he argues:

“I think that it was in the realization of the great benefit accruing from the sages that all the Brahmans, the Odrysae, the Getae, and the people of Egypt honoured these men and made philosophy a public institution and examined their words as sacred texts, together with the Chaldeans and the inhabitants of Arabia Felix (as it is called), and of Palestine, and a considerable section of the Persian people, and countless other peoples in addition” (*Stromateis* I.68.1).

For the modern scholar it is quite uncomfortable to find some “ancient philosophy” even in the south of Arabia; therefore he is happy to dismiss this and other similar accounts as crazy tales. But it is well attested that early Christianity, for instance, regarded itself as a prolongation and fulfillment of an ancient philosophy. Therefore let us see how the true philosophy is described by the early Christians themselves. According to Justin the Martyr who wrote the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* at about AD 160:

“Philosophy is really the greatest and most honourable thing man can possess. It alone brings us to God and unites us with Him and truly holy are those who apply themselves to philosophy. What philosophy really is and why it was sent down to men has escaped the masses. Otherwise there would be no Platonists, Stoics, etc.” (*Dialogue* 2.1).

It follows that philosophy is sent down to men and ultimately based on a divine authority, because true philosophy “alone brings us to God and unites us with Him”. Being the knowledge of being (*episteme tou ontos*), philosophy is knowledge of God, of what is true and truly exists. To see God is the aim of Plato’s philosophy (*ibid.*, 2.6). So, Platonism is viewed as being close to revelation: surely “sent down” to Plato. In Justin’s *Dialogue* Trypho the Jew raises the following question:

“Do not all philosophers in all their discussions discuss God? Do they not investigate His sovereignty and providence on every occasion? And is inquiring about the divine not the task of philosophy?” (*ibid.*).

For Clement of Alexandria, philosophy is a form of the practice of wisdom, and wisdom is the scientific understanding of things divine, human, and their causes (*Stromateis* I.30.1). Since the Lord himself says, “I am the truth” (John 14.6), philosophy, being a direct gift of God, includes questions concerning truth and the nature of the universe. Those philosophers who receive their knowledge from the supreme Truth, God himself, are the true initiates (*ibid.* I.32.4). Clement of Alexandria says that

“there is only one way of truth, but different paths from different places join it, just like tributaries flowing into a perennial river” (ibid., I.29.1).

He is not very impressed by Hellenic philosophy which, in his opinion, shows a skill in sophistry and in many cases seems to him to be simply a power operating on the imagination, using arguments to implant false opinions. Therefore, along with Hellenic philosophy, likened to a little fire (stolen as it were by Prometheus) which blazes up helpfully into a useful light, a trace of wisdom, Clement discerns a non-Hellenic philosophy which comes directly from God and is based on divine knowledge and faith. Following already established tradition, he argues that the Hellenes themselves borrowed much of their wisdom. With great satisfaction Clement quotes Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus I to India (about 350-290 B.C.) who wrote in the third volume of his *History of India*:

“However, all that has been said by the ancients about nature is also said by philosophers outside Greece, the Brahmins in India, and the people called the Jews in Syria” (ibid., I.72.5).

Drawing necessary information from Alexander Polihystor’s book *On Pythagorean Symbols* and other unknown Hellenistic sources, Clement also claims that Pythagoras was the disciple of Sonchis, the “highest prophet” of the Egyptians, Plato of Sechnupis of Heliopolis, and Eudoxus the Cnidian of Chonupis (*Strom.* I.69.1). In addition, Pythagoras is claimed to be a pupil of the Assyrian Zaratus and even of the Brahmins (ibid., I.70.1).

For Clement, truth is one and under the sole charge of Wisdom. But the philosophic schools, whether Hellenic or not, “are like the Maenads scattering the limbs of Pentheus, each boasting their own limited claim as the whole truth” (ibid., I.57.1). Clement cannot deny that the term “wise” is applied to “sophists” in the Scripture, so as to describe their excessive concern for language and technique: “they labour throughout their lives over distinctions between words and the appropriate combination and grouping of expressions” (ibid., I.22.4). Are they real bearers of wisdom? Clement cannot provide a clear response. Perhaps they are, if they belong to Clement’s party and if wisdom is regarded as the inherited property of Jews and Christians only. For “the truth vouchsafed to the Greeks is not the same as ours, even if it does share the same name” (ibid., I.98.4).

The Christians’ attempts to present themselves as adherents of true ancient philosophy (supposedly deviated from and partly corrupted by the Greeks) were caused by concrete historical and theological circumstances. This early dialogue and contest with Hellenism was a prolongation of the Hellenized Jewish tradition which tried at all costs to show its superiority over Hellenism proper. All possible rhetorical and mythological tricks were used in order to demonstrate that Plato is simply a thief and imitator of Moses.

Since Christianity stands between Hellenism and Judaism, it is not too surprising that the followers of Christ-Logos sometimes described Socrates and Heraclitus as “Christians” (Justin *I Apol.*46.3). The seeds of truth which they cultivated are owed to the sowing *Logos*, the *Logos spermatikos*, to whom all truth found in mankind should be ascribed.¹⁶ The *Logos* doctrine itself has Egyptian roots, as is attested by the so-called *Memphite Theology* and other texts.

According to the Christian writer Eusebius, every nation has a guardian-angel who is responsible for sending down certain knowledge, which is not, however, always complete or correct, because some of those guardian-angels can neither see the invisible, nor ascend to the supreme Truth. Thus, for example, the Phoenicians and Egyptians were taught to worship the heavenly elements, the visible heavenly bodies.

For Eusebius, religion (or devotion, *eusebeia*) and philosophy are not separated but constitute a unity. Christianity is simply the restoration of the true ancient philosophy, because even before Moses’ time human beings had their pious philosophy. Therefore Christianity is, in fact, a very ancient way of pious living (*palaiotaton eusebeias politeuma*), and a very ancient form of philosophy (*archaiotate tis philosophia: Demonstratio Evangelica* I.2).¹⁷

However, Eusebius cannot refrain from exoteric particularism in his assertions about the deficiency of “pagan” philosophy and religion: wherever it contains the truth, it has been stolen from the holy books of the Jews. This widespread opinion is a sheer fantasy, but it stems from the mythical belief in the exceptional status of Jews. Thus, their holy Scripture becomes the only source of wisdom and the very handbook of philosophy. Neither Egyptians or Assyrians, nor Persians or Indians could share such an extremist claim and opinion.

The Greeks had their own political and cultural myth which consists in asserting the superiority of Hellenism: once the Hellenes were pupils of the ancient civilizations in matters of science, religion and mysticism, but they were also able to give a rational foundation to the doctrines of ancient nations (e.g., those of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians), so as to transform and develop them. Origen expresses this idea as follows:

“Celsus praises the barbarians for being capable of discovering doctrines; but he adds to this that the Greeks are better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered and to establish the doctrines and to put them into practice by virtue” (*askesai pros areten: Contra Celsum* I.20).

5. Understanding of Ancient Philosophy by Porphyry and Augustine

Porphyry the Phoenician, that is, the 3rd century Neoplatonist Malchus from Tyre, provides us with further testimonies that *philosophia* and analogous forms of spiritual life and wisdom were not confined to the Graeco-Roman world. Though Plato is the exemplar spokesman of philosophy, Porphyry also speaks of “the ancient philosophy” which includes Persian and Indian thought. The widespread and long-standing opinion that Zoroaster was a precursor of Hellenic philosophy seems to be acceptable to Porphyry, although he ardently fights the anti-cosmic Gnosticism which consciously subverted the cosmology of Plato’s *Timaus* and relied upon forgeries on Zoroaster. The hypothetical relationship between Hellenic and Persian philosophy J. Igal describes as groundless and adds:

“Plotinus too had in his schooldays been fascinated by the Persian mirage.”¹⁸

Used in a rather loose sense, which is normal practice in antiquity, the term *philosophia*, as we have said, covers all forms of religious thought and hermeneutics, all theological attitudes and related ways of life. Therefore the “Persian philosophy” might mean religious, political and moral wisdom.

Talking about “the Persian mirage”, J. Igal follows A. J. Festugiere who in the first volume of his fundamental research work *La Revelation d’Hermes Trismegiste* says (perhaps following F. Cumont) that the Graeco-Roman world in Porphyry’s own time was smitten by the *mirage oriental*.¹⁹ This assertion means that the Romans and Greeks were wrong when they viewed Oriental forms of wisdom as older and better, more suitable for spiritual realization and containing purer ideas of the deity, based on direct revelations which transcend the narrow rationalism and pragmatism of their own attitudes. Thus being under the sway of some irrational dreams and in a weakened state of mind, flooded by the seductive imagination, they turned to the East in their search for the ancient ways of life and divine wisdom. It is more likely that A. J. Festugiere himself is wrong in his judgement, because otherwise we would be forced to regard the Hellenic philosophers and men of aristocratic culture as idiots who cannot know what they really want and what is worthy of pursuit. However, our concern is not to criticize the brilliant Catholic scholar, but to show that for the Graeco-Romans the existence of ancient or simply foreign philosophies (albeit different from their own) was a self-evident fact.

Relying on the testimonies collected by the Babylonian Bardesanes, i.e., Bar Daisan of Edessa, Porphyry in *De abstinentia* depicts Indian philosophers who worship the deity with pious reverence, setting apart the whole day and most of the night for hymns and prayers to the gods. They are the theosophists, or gymnosophists, divided into Brahmins and

Samanaeans. Both are concerned with divine wisdom. According to Porphyry:

“Of these philosophers, some live on the mountains, and others on the banks of the river Ganges... And neither among those Samanaeans nor among the Brahmans whom I have already mentioned, has any sophist come forward, as have so many among the Greeks, to perplex with doubts by asking where would we be if every one should copy their example” (*De abst.* IV.16-18).

From the Hellenistic age onwards the constant view prevailed that Indian gymnosophists “philosophized”, and “philosophizing” here means to live in silent solitude and devotion, engaged in prayer and trying to free the soul from the body. The aim of this philosophy, also called the *mores ac disciplina Indorum* by Porphyry, consists in achieving immortality. The Indian gymnosophists had philosophical doctrines about the immortality of the soul, righteousness and purification, the duty of worshipping Deity and the possibility of the soul’s deliverance from the cycle of existence. As Megasthenes already claimed, some Indian Brahmans held that:

“God was light, but not such light as we see with the eye, nor such as the sun or fire, but God is with them the Word – by which they mean... the discourse of intellect, whereby the hidden mysteries of knowledge are discerned by the wise. (fr. LIV).

“On many points their opinions coincide with those of the Greeks, for like them they say that the world had a beginning, and is liable to destruction, and is in shape spherical, and that the Deity who made it, and who governs it, is diffused through all its parts. They hold that various first principles operate in the universe, and that water was the principle employed in the making of the world. In addition to the four elements there is a fifth agency, from which the heaven and the stars were produced. The earth is placed in the centre of the universe. Concerning generation, and the nature of the soul, and many other subjects, they express views like those maintained by the Greeks. They wrap up their doctrines about immortality and future judgement, and kindred topics, in allegories, after the manner of Plato” (fr. XLI).

Thus nobody in the Graeco-Roman world would doubt the existence of Indian philosophy as such. But the problem, posed by Porphyry, arises from the awareness that only a tiny minority is able to follow the way of philosophy seriously. Porphyry (who partly misunderstood the soteriological functions of any integral sacred tradition which has both exoteric and esoteric dimensions) is in search of some universal way of liberation, following which every soul could escape from the cycle of existence.

Permanent escape with no return was not the right Platonic ideal, but Augustine perfectly understood Porphyry’s dream, thinking that Christianity is that single universal way which Porphyry did not find.

According to Augustine's reports, Porphyry held that only the Principles (*principia, archai*), i.e., (1) the One, or the Father, and (2) the Father's Intellect (*Patrikos Nous*) are able to purify souls to such an extent that they could escape rebirth (*palingenesis*) within the cycle of transmigration and abide forever with the Father.²⁰

According to Augustine, Porphyry maintained that an exclusively philosophical ascent is reserved just for a few. Therefore this pupil of Plotinus, not always faithful to the doctrines of his master, tried to find "a universal way for the liberation of the soul, deriving from some true philosophy, or the *mores* and *disciplina* of the Indians, or the ascent of the Chaldeans, or any other way".²¹ At this point Augustine becomes angry and reproaches Porphyry (who admitted the use of theurgy only for the minor pneumatic ascent, contrary to Iamblichus and other later Neoplatonists) with ardent Christian zeal:

"You did not get this doctrine from Plato. It was your Chaldean teachers who persuaded you to bring human weakness up into the exalted heights of universe, into the ether and empyrean, up to the heavenly firmaments, so your gods might be able to give supernatural revelations to the theurgists. Yet you consider yourself superior to such supernatural knowledge, in virtue of your intellectual life. You, of course, feel that, as a philosopher, you have not the slightest need of the purifications of theurgic art. Yet as a kind of repayment of your debt to those masters of yours, you prescribe such purgations to others... The result is, naturally, that since the vast majority have no taste for philosophy, you collect far more clients for those secret and illegal masters of yours than candidates for the Platonic schools. You have made yourself the preacher and the angel of those unclean spirits who pretend to be gods of the ether; they have promised you that those who have been purified in their pneumatic soul, by theurgic art, although they cannot, indeed, return to the Father, will have their dwelling among the gods of the ether, above the levels of the air" (*Civ. Dei* X.27).

Despite the negative attitude towards the Chaldean theurgy and its "fantastic illusions", as well as "all the baseless opinions of all the philosophers" (*ibid.*, VIII.1), Augustine is quite sympathetic to his former teachers, the Platonists and their master Plato, "who went to Egypt to acquire all the highly prized teachings given there" (*ibid.* VIII.4). He argues as follows:

"If Plato says that the wise man is the man who imitates, knows and loves God, and that participation in this God brings man happiness, what need is there to examine the other philosophers? There are none who come nearer to us than the Platonists" (*ibid.* VIII.5).

"The same concepts may have been held also by Italian philosophers, because of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, and perhaps by some others of the same way of thinking and from the same part of the world. There

may be others to be found who perceived and taught this truth among those who were esteemed as sages or philosophers in other nations: Libyans of Atlas, Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Scythians, Gauls, Spaniards. Whoever they may have been, we rank such thinkers above all others and acknowledge them as representing the closest approximation to our Christian position" (ibid. VIII.9).

A long time before Augustine, Diogenes Laertius stated that philosophy was diffused among the nations of North Africa, the gymnosophists of India, the Magi of Anatolia, the Druids and so on. But for Augustine only those are true philosophers whose teachings are close to those of Plato and the Platonic tradition. The list of them (which includes Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, etc.) is really impressive. The true philosophers have conceived of the supreme God as the Creator of all things. They argue that we are created in His image and derive from this one God all goodness and knowledge.

Philosophy understood in this way leads to the light of knowledge (knowledge of God and of ourselves), happiness and the blessedness of life. Therefore forgetting for a while all reservations regarding "polytheism" and the "daemonic intermediaries between men and gods", Augustine approves Plato's definition of the Sovereign Good and the life in accord with virtue which is possible only for those who strive to imitate God:

"Plato has no hesitation in asserting that to be a philosopher is to love God, whose nature is immaterial. It immediately follows that the seeker after wisdom (which is the meaning of *philo-sophos*) will only attain to happiness when he has begun to enjoy God" (ibid. VIII.8).

6. From Egyptian Soil to Hellas

Isocrates insisted that philosophy is a product of Egypt brought to Greece and Italy by Pythagoras, and one of the earliest attested uses of the term *philosophia* comes from *Bousiris* of Isocrates. Contrary to the convictions maintained by the ancient Hellenes themselves and regarded by them as a self-evident truth, modern scholars dismissed Egypt as the initial cradle of philosophy. This opinion was established during recent centuries and can be viewed as a consequence of the sustained attack on the "wisdom" of Egypt pursued by certain radically disposed Christians and modern positivists. The denial that Egyptians were capable of developing any kind of philosophical thought is a result of the grave ideological errors and superstitions which have prevailed in the modern Western world since the Enlightenment and have almost destroyed (or grossly deformed) the Christian tradition itself.

Though the Hellenic philosophers and scientists credited the Egyptians with achievements in all sciences and practical wisdom, regarding them as the model to be imitated and surpassed in almost every field of learning and art, modern scholars reject all these testimonies as groundless. The Egyptians could not have influenced Solon, Thales, Pythagoras and Plato, they say, simply because they did not have philosophy. Why? Because they are morbid and lifeless, not sufficiently rational and creative; because the Aryan Model (to use M. Bernal's term) "better" explains the "progress of civilization"; because they are pleasure-loving people, lacking all deep religious feeling, idealism and spirituality (in sharp contrast with Winckelmann's and Wilamovitz-Moellendorf's Greeks, who have all possible positive qualities, creative energies and virtues in abundance). In short, because the Egyptians belong to the undeveloped, lower and exotic race and represent by themselves the so-called "mytho-poetical" level of thought. A. Gardiner's sentence delivered in 1927 is almost generally accepted as axiomatic:

"Despite the reputation for philosophic wisdom attributed to the Egyptians by the Greeks, no people has ever shown itself more averse from speculations or more wholeheartedly devoted to material interests; and if they paid an exaggerated attention to funerary observances, it was because the continuance of earthly pursuits and pleasures was felt to be at stake, assuredly not out of any curiosity as to the why and whither of human life".²²

Similarly W. K. C. Guthrie in *A History of Greek Philosophy* says:

"Yet the torch of philosophy was not lit in Egypt, for they lacked the necessary spark which the Greeks possessed so strongly and embodied in their word *philosophia*".²³

Another influential modern thinker and scientist, B. Russel, gives an equally dogmatic and superficial assertion:

"Philosophy begins when someone asks a general question, and so does science. The first people to evince this kind of activity were the Greeks. Philosophy and science, as we know them, are Greek inventions... Philosophy and science begin with Thales of Miletus in the early sixth century B.C." ²⁴

M. Bernal, despite his shortcomings and sometimes eccentric "afro-mythology" (which is disputable in many respects) raises the opposite point of view arguing that:

"After the crushing of Neoplatonism, the Hellenic, pagan descendants of Egyptian religion, and Gnosticism, its Judaeo-Christian counterpart, Christian thinkers tamed Egyptian religion by turning it into philosophy".²⁵ "The three schools of thought that emerged from the debris of Egyptian religion were Hermeticism, Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. The Hermeticists remained defiantly Egyptian, the Neoplatonists were more Hellenized and focussed their devotion on the

‘divine Plato’, while the Gnostics saw themselves as Christians... There is little doubt that Hermeticism was the earliest of the three and had a critical influence on the formation of the other two movements.”²⁶

The question regarding the origins of Hermeticism, Platonism, and Gnosticism is not as simple as this schematic picture would like to suggest. But in certain respects this straightforward perspective is a reinterpretation and reestablishment of the ancient views firmly held, among others, by Plutarch, the Middle Platonist and Delphic priest, who, following Herodotus and other Hellenic historians, argued that much of Hellenic philosophy had been introduced from Egypt. Plutarch believed in an essential unity between Egyptian and Hellenic religion, despite their different styles of expression:

“Nor do we think of the gods as different gods among different peoples, nor as barbarian gods and Hellenic gods, nor as southern and northern gods” (*De Iside et Osiride* 67).

At the same time he maintained that the Egyptian religion is older, purer and more profound, because when “men make use of consecrated symbols”, some employed symbols that are obscure, but others those that are clear, “in guiding the intelligence toward things divine”. Further discussing this subject Plutarch adds:

“Therefore in these matters above all we should take as a guide into mysteries the understanding which philosophy gives (*logon ek philosophias mustagoga*)... The fact that everything is to be referred to understanding (*epe ton logon*) we may gather from the Egyptians themselves” (ibid.68).

In short, Egyptian hermeneutics (which explains religious myths and rites) itself constitutes a part of philosophy. It is not by accident that this assertion is followed by the remark about the festival in honour of Hermes (Thoth) during which the Egyptians eat honey and figs, saying the while “sweet is truth” (*gluku he aletheia*: ibid.68).

“Truth” is a key word here, because evidently it is the Egyptian *maat*, related to the divine scribe Thoth, god of all wisdom, philosophy, mysteries, sacred rites and creative “magic” (*heka*). The sensible and noetic parts of philosophy, guided by Thoth, may be likened to the robes of Isis and Osiris respectively. The robes of Isis are variegated in their colours, “for her power is concerned with matter which becomes everything and receives everything, light and darkness, day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and end. But the robe of Osiris has no shading or variety in its colour, but only one single colour like to light” (ibid.77). Therefore the noetic understanding, or the Osirian intellection (when Osiris and Ra constitute the unity, because without the intelligible light of Ra Osiris lies in the psychic darkness) is pure and simple, “shining through the soul like a flash of lightning”, and it affords an opportunity to touch and see at once.

In order to show a relationship between the Egyptian symbols and philosophical exegesis we should provide another excerpt from *De Iside et Osiride*. Plutarchus writes:

“For this reason Plato and Aristotle call this part of philosophy the eoptic or mystic part, inasmuch as those who have passed beyond these conjectural and confused matters of all sorts by means of reason (*to logo*) proceed by leaps and bounds to that primary, simple, and immaterial principle; and when they have somehow attained contact with the pure truth abiding about it, they think that they have the whole philosophy completely, as it were, within their grasp.

“This idea at the present time the priests intimate with great circumspection in acquitting themselves of this religious secret and in trying to conceal it: that this god Osiris is the ruler and king of the dead... But he himself is far removed from the earth, uncontaminated and unpolluted and pure from all matter that is subject to destruction and death; but for the souls of men here, which are compassed about by bodies and emotions, there is no association with this god except in so far as they may attain to a dim vision of his presence by means of the apperception which philosophy affords (*plen boson oneiratos amaurou thigein noesei dia philosophias*). But when these souls are set free and migrate into the realm of the invisible and the unseen, the dispassionate and the pure, then this god becomes their leader and king, since it is on him that they are bound to be dependent in their insatiate contemplation and yearning for that beauty which is for men unutterable and indescribable. With this beauty Isis, as the ancient story declares, is for ever enamoured and pursues it and consorts with it and fills our earth here with all things fair and good that partake of generation” (ibid.77-78).

This text is no less than a clear example of the Egyptian “Platonism” – not just a reading of Plutarch. Isis, the mistress of “transformative magic” (or rather of blissful theurgy) itself stands as a Lady Philosophy, enamoured of the immaterial Principle.

Modern scholars, deprived of all theurgic imagination and grace, may still insist on their rejection of Egyptian philosophy, but the fact remains that Pythagoras and Plato brought something important from Egypt, connected with the theory of Ideas, the divine Archetypes and their images or symbols, the mathematical sciences, regarded in a mystical sense, and the conception of the immortal winged soul (*ba*) wandering in search of her true identity and thereby following the precept of Horus-Ra (Apollo): Know Thyself. The soul seeks to know truth (*maat*) and live by it. When her ascent is completed, the soul, turned into the luminous intellect (*akh*), contemplates the Forms in the solar barque of Ra. It is not too difficult to find the prototypes of images used in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Most probably the *Republic* is also based on the Egyptian models. According to Krantor (as related by Proclus) “Plato’s contemporaries

mocked him, saying that he was not inventor of his *politeia*, but that he had copied Egyptian institutions”.²⁷ The Egyptian form of government was imitated by the Pythagoreans, along with the methods of philosophical askesis, aimed at purifying the human soul and harmonizing with the perfectly arranged state regarded as an *imago* of the divine cosmos, both sensible and noetic.

Ch. Evangeliou maintains that the Pythagorean pursuit of mathematical sciences and care of the soul are brought from Egypt:

“Through Plato and the Platonic tradition this type of philosophy more than any other contributed to shaping the Hellenic view of man, as an ignorant captive whose true liberator is Lady Philosophy”.²⁸

However, we must remember that certain selected ideas and elements, brought from Egyptian soil to Hellas, were removed from the context of integral sacred civilization and put into the foreign “barbaric” environment where these elements (though synthesized and artificially united in the new compound) inevitably stood outside of the main stream of life. They could function only as a sort of Pythagorean “esoterism”, as a clearly defined “philosophy”, rationalistic exceptionalism, quite strange and even dangerous for the rest of society. Maybe this is the reason why Pythagoreans were persecuted and Socrates sentenced to death. It was quite different in Egypt, where every “philosopher” belonged to the state-staff and had no need to define himself as an exceptional case. It is possible that the nickname *philosophos* itself betrays this tension between the distant wisdom (still the possession of Egypt) and the local socio-political and psychological climate in Greece and Italy, the mental structures of which were organized according to the different value patterns. Perhaps this radical tension “revolutionized” the Hellenic thought and, partly at least, can explain the rise of independent philosophical discourses, aimed at the fundamental questioning of everything.

In a sense, this unnaturally mutated “beast”, a hybrid fuelled by the powerful enthusiasm of sophists, physiologists, and rationalists, betrayed both Egypt and the archaic past of Greece. For this or some similar reason P. Kingsley claims that Plato had killed his “father” Parmenides, arguing as follows:

“What would soon be covered over and rationalized in Greece was preserved and developed in India. What in the West had been an aspect of mystery, of initiation, became classified and formalized in the East”.²⁹

The great Traditionalist writer F. Schuon makes an acute observation in the same vein:

“On the whole, Plato expressed sacred truths in a language that had already become profane – profane because rational and discursive rather than intuitive and symbolist, or because it followed too closely the contingences and humours of the mirror that is the mind – whereas

Aristotle placed truth itself, and not merely its expression, on a profane and 'humanistic' plane."³⁰

Neither P. Kingsley's, nor F. Schuon's claims can be accepted straightforwardly – they require further discussion, because Plato's language may be regarded not as "profane" but simply as "different", more suited to the contemporary milieu of Hellenic thought which required rational argumentation and definition. In a sense, we can speak of Plato as Parmenides *redivivus*: the vehicle of pedagogical persuasion was transformed (and thereby Parmenides, like the archetypal Osiris, was ritually "killed"). However, the Parmenidean spirit "resurrected" was reinforced and strengthened by the divine Plato.

7. Translatability of Divine Names in Ancient Civilizations

The question why so many distinct forms of spirituality and intellectual life may be named and understood as "philosophy", should perhaps be answered by involving the so-called "principle of translatability", discussed by Jan Assmann in respect to Egyptian and Near Eastern religions.³¹ The conviction that God or the gods are universal led to the semantic dimension that makes names translatable. This means that every nation has essentially the same gods. Therefore the basic structure of the spiritual path leading to first principles everywhere must be analogous, though different in style and details. According to Aristotle (*De philosoph.*, fr.8), wisdom (*sophia*) covers any ingenious invention and conception (all of which ultimately are gifts, sent down by the gods); therefore to do any thing well, skillfully, according to the divine paradigms and models, is to follow the way of "wisdom" which finally leads to the highest metaphysical goals, to the noetic realm where Wisdom itself, the graceful goddess, dwells. No wonder that every nation loves wisdom and has certain "lovers of wisdom", be they goldsmiths, artists, healers, singers, priests, or magicians.

The practice of translating and interpreting foreign divine names is found already established in the Sumerian and Akkadian glossaries dated from the third millennium B.C. In ancient Mesopotamia one can find countless lists of gods in two or three languages. For example, the explanatory list *Anu sha Ameli* gives not only the Sumerian and Akkadian names of the gods, but also the functional definitions of every deity, i.e. those attributes which serve as the main criteria for equation and translation. In the Kassite period (about 1730-1155 B.C.) such explanatory lists are expanded to include the divine names in Amorite, Hurrite, Elamite and Kassite languages. This theological interpretation, aimed at making explicit the underlying "meaning" of divine names, is based on

universal metaphysics (covered by the mythical images, qualities, symbols) and international law. According to Jan Assmann:

“The names, iconographies, and rites – in short, the cultures – differ, but the gods are the same. This concept of religion as the common background of cultural diversity and the principle of cultural translatability eventually led to the late Hellenistic mentality for which the names of the gods mattered little in view of the overwhelming natural evidence of their existence”.³²

This kind of comparative hermeneutics is not explicitly developed in the early pharaonic Egypt due to its closed and self-sufficient character, but Egyptian metaphysics are even more overwhelmingly based upon evident reality and can serve as a firm theological ground for such practices as flourished especially in Hellenistic times. In the *Coffin Texts* of the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 B.C.) it is unequivocally stated: all names are those of one God (CT 4.10). God is both transcendent and immanent. In his immanent aspect of the creative theophany, God is “million” (or infinity, *heb*) into which he has transformed himself. Therefore the intelligible solar Deity is *hehu* whose limits are not known, scarab (*keheper*) whose body is not known, for he is like the boundless Light (*Leiden stela* V.70). The One who transforms himself into the totality of manifestations (*keheperu*), divine forces (*sekhemu*), all of the gods (*neteru*) and levels of being, nonetheless remains intact in his transcendence.

All gods are comprised in the One, “the One Alone who created what is, the illustrious *bau* of gods and humans” (*Pap. Berlin* 3030.8-9). Therefore this One God, who became two “at the beginning” of noetic creation, is praised in a Ramesside magical papyrus of the XIX Dynasty (1295-1188 B.C.) as follows:

“Hail, the One who makes himself into millions,
Whose length and breath are limitless.
Power in readiness, who gave birth to himself,
Uraeus with great flame;
Great of magic with secret form,
Secret *ba*, to whom respect is shown...
Amun, who remains in possession of all things,
This God who established the earth by his providence”.

The later Neoplatonists could easily find Pythagorean and Platonic principles in the Egyptian theologies, because these theologies operated within the same system of religious and philosophical translatability, in addition to the plausible premise that Platonism itself (in its rather concealed essential form) directly or indirectly derived from Egyptian lore.

One is tempted to argue that so-called “ancient polytheisms” functioned as a technique of translation, but ought to be careful when dealing with terms. Derogatory terms, such as the Latin *paganus* (peasant,

rustic, unlearned, along with additional connotations of idolatry and *superstitio*), ironically become the opposites of supposedly “learned”, “advanced” and therefore “progressive” Jewish or Christian zealotry, or such concepts as Greek “polytheism” (*polutheia*) and “idolatry” (*eidolatria*), used to describe Graeco-Roman religion and even highly articulated mystical philosophy, are very inaccurate, pejorative and simplifying slogans, if not merely ideological stamps.

From the third millennium B.C. onwards the ancient theologies held that the Principle of all there is, is one, or that the One God may wear different ontological “masks” and have multiple hidden and revealed powers. The plurality of gods is not supposed to affect the unity of God from which all the noetic and psychic manifestations come forth. However, the Christian Apologists established a superficially simple model, according to which mankind had progressed from heavily demonized polytheism to the highly idealized monotheism under the aegis of Christianity. This seductive idea of straightforward progress (from which the modern idea of progress derives) is rather anachronistic, but still captures the Christian and secular Western mentality. And this is despite the fact that “not only philosophers, but a very substantial portion of late antique pagans was consciously monotheistic”.³³ According to P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede:

“Far from arising as a reaction to Christianity, pagan monotheism was a deeply rooted trend in ancient philosophy which developed under its own momentum, broadening sufficiently to embrace a good part of the population. Indeed we are inclined to believe that Christian monotheism is, historically speaking, part of this broader development. Christianity did not convince because it was monotheistic, rather it would appear that in order to convince, it had to be monotheistic...”³⁴

The Jewish and Christian religions (labelled as counter-religions by J. Assmann, because they reject and repudiate everything that went before and what is outside themselves as “paganism”³¹) act as a means of intercultural estrangement and untranslatability. They are “exclusive” monotheisms, according to the classification provided by J. P. Kenney.³⁶ Their exclusiveness is built more on the mythical dissociation from *ethnikos*, those who are not God’s chosen people, than on the affirming oneness of God. Therefore they were in need of a special esoteric dimension which would at least allow them to accept elements of Hellenic mysticism and philosophy. One cannot claim that esoterism is simply constituted by the “remains of translatability” (i.e., by the remains of certain *philosophia perennis*) put into the underground, due to the general intolerance in the name of revelation. However, one ought to remember that most of the Christian thinkers, who tried to introduce a translatability (albeit with great reservations), themselves sooner or later felt under suspicion of their co-religionists. Therefore Dionysius the Areopagite was

forced to perform a magnificent trick by using clever deception in order to integrate the Procline metaphysics and theurgy into Christian theology and then to create the Neoplatonic sacramental mysticism within Christian civilization.

When Christian “monotheists”, who articulated their theology in Platonic terms, accused somebody as being “polytheist” or *paganus*, it was because they would not tolerate any other version of truth. Therefore Olympiodorus, the Alexandrian philosopher of 6th century A.D., applied to the Christians as follows:

“We too are aware that the first cause is one, namely God; for there cannot be many first causes. Indeed that first does not even have a name” (*In Gorg.*32).

For those Christians who emerged from the radicalized Jewish tradition and suddenly acquired a huge power it was difficult to accept that “the God is no less a philosopher than a prophet” (Plutarch *Moral.*385b). According to the apt remark made by Frithjof Schuon:

“Those who champion an unreserved hostility to Hellenism and a reduction of all wisdom to a voluntarist and emotional perspective strangely lose sight of the overwhelmingly obvious fact that conceptualizing and speculative metaphysical thought is in the theomorphic nature of man, and that such thought cannot therefore by definition be ‘carnal’ and ‘vain’, as opposed to the penitential and mystically experimental ‘wisdom’ which they themselves advocate.

“History and experience teach us that there is one thing human nature finds particularly difficult, and that is that to be just; to be perfectly objective is, in a way to die... Religious zealots are the first to know the meaning of spiritual death, and one of the motives for their zeal is precisely their ignorance of the presence of this mystery among their adversaries; but there are different ways of dying and different degrees of death...”³⁷

8. Heracles and Philosophical Ascent

The Pythagoreans kept their doctrines secret. However, as is often the case, true esoteric teachings are not intended to “teach” some fascinating secret theories and ideas, but to provide a spiritual method and guidance in order to actualize these ideas. They are designed to heal and transform the soul. If Pythagoras was coming not to teach but to heal, according to the ancient account (Ael. *VH.*4.17), thus playing the role of Asclepius, or Asgelatas (Gula of Isin, the “great physician”, *azugallatu*), or of the Egyptian Imhotep, adopted son of Ptah, then he stands in the long tradition of divine avatars, spiritual masters and healers who not only provide a means for purifying the soul, but show the way to regain one’s

true identity and immortality. This is the ultimate aim of Pythagorean philosophy, not simply doing science and studying mathematics.

In this regard Plotinus clearly states:

“Our concern is not to be free of sin, but to be god” (*Enn.* I.2.6.2-3).

Thereby he repeats the ancient Egyptian theurgic ideal of becoming “like a god”, assuming the role of one of *neteru* (since all *neteru* are aspects, functions, masks, and names of the supreme Principle), and sharing in the demiurgic activity and care of the world. Like the idea of becoming a god (similar to the Platonic admonition found in the *Theaetetus* 176b), an *imago dei* doctrine is held in the *Instruction for King Merikare* which belongs to the Middle Kingdom wisdom-literature. This text describes the established link between God and humanity through *maat*, sacred kingship, and cultic activities:

“Well provided are the humans, the herd of God.

For their sake He created heaven and earth...

They are his images (*snn*), they have come forth from his body.

For their sake he rises in the heavens,

For them he created the plants and the animals,

Fowl and fish, so that they might eat...

He created for them rulers “in the egg”

[i.e., still in the archetypal realm]...

He created for them *beka* as a weapon...

God knows every name.”³⁸

For the image to be returned to its archetype, certain theurgic rites or their philosophical counterparts are required. Therefore the early Pythagorean philosophy (which appeared more than 1500 years after the *Instruction for King Merikare* was composed) aims at restoring the human being as an *imago dei* through the philosophical mysteries which consist in (1) ritual purification (*katharmos*), including purification through virtues and reason, (2) initiation, or transmission of *paradosis* (“tradition”, an esoteric doctrine) and power from the spiritual “father” to his “son”, and (3) the opening of the spiritual eye (due to the inner alchemical transformation of the soul) and mystical vision (*epopteia*) of truth, or union with the deity.

The *epopteia* is tantamount to the seeing of the true “form of a god” (*aru en neter: jrw n ntr*), or contemplating the Forms, speaking in Platonic terms. The Forms, or Ideas, are the archetypal Stars, and “stars” in the hieroglyphic script may stand for *neteru*, “gods” (Horapollo *Hier.* I.13). The word which means a star, *seba*, is phonetically the same as that which stands for teaching, learning, wisdom, consequently an “idea”, something that belongs to the realm of Intellect, to the supervision of Thoth. Like the knowledge of Thoth, Pythagorean knowledge is carefully and silently guarded in the breast (Porph. *Vita Pyth.*57). This knowledge concerns the

doctrine of intelligibles, world order, right living, punishment, purification, and rebirth which means attaining immortality at the level of Osiris-Ra, i.e., in the noetic realm of the gods, numbers, or divine lights.

The main Pythagorean hero in this pursuit of immortality and divine status is Heracles, the Phoenician Melqart. Therefore the imitation of Heracles stands as a paradigm for becoming like a god through initiation, spiritual labours, death and final *apotheosis*. For this reason Apollonius of Tyana modelled himself on the ideal image of Heracles, and Milo of Croton (according to the testimony of Diodorus: *Bibl. hist.*12.9.2-6), who himself belonged to the first generation of the Pythagorean school, is portrayed as dressed in the costume of Heracles and leading the people of Croton against their enemies in 510 B.C.

Heracles initially is the Babylonian Nergal, usually regarded as the husband of Ereskigal, queen of the underworld, and identified with Erra, Erragal, the god of pestilences and plagues. If he causes an ill, he may equally avert it, be it physical or spiritual illness. Therefore the amulets of Heracles *alexikakos*, the averter of evil, are used in everyday life. The Pythagorean hero Heracles no less trusts in his own strength, thus being an exemplar Philosopher, the paradigm of spiritual *askesis* and combat with passions. The mythical motifs and images, such as the combat with the lion and with the seven-headed snake clearly are of the Mesopotamian origin. The slayings of various monsters are modelled on (1) the slaying of Humbaba by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and (2) the motifs from the Babylonian cosmogonical epic *Enuma elish*.

The widespread iconographic image of the club-bearer Heracles, who is not only the paradigmatic hero of Pythagoreans, but (along with Socrates) the first teacher and archegete of the Cynic tradition, may be related to the Indian Pasupata teacher Lakulisa, the Lord of the Club. Heracles' lion skin recalls Shiva's leopard skin and similar skins of the Egyptian sem-priests. Like the Sumero-Akkadian Gilgamesh (*Bilga-mes*, "youth-old-man", a ruler of Uruk at circa 2600 B.C. (later divinized as a form of dying god Dumuzi and made a judge in the realm of the dead) he seeks to overcome the structures of destiny and death by force. Gilgamesh fails in overcoming his humanity, but finally becomes a model for sage and philosopher, a man with the task of harmonizing himself with the great rhythms of cosmic destiny and order, for he builds the wall of Uruk, the sacred enclosure of holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse. This *temenos* and sacred building constitutes a well measured *mandala* which reflects the divine prototypes, "a measure of immortality" man can seek.

The walled city is a symbol of the universe and its microcosmic counterpart, Perfect Man. The seven wise men laid its foundations. It has a defensive magic circle for the seeds of life, thus preserving the cosmic order, holiness, and wisdom. In its role as an exemplar *politeia* this semi-imaginary city may symbolize the Pythagorean political philosophy.

As a ruler of Uruk Gilgamesh had the title *en* which united in his person (paradigmatic mask) two aspects of that office: magical and martial. The magical powers of the *en* are not limited to his ritual role, but continued to be effective after his death: from them emanate powers which sustain “tradition” (*paradosis*) and even make orchards, fields and pastures grow green and thrive. The same *ka*-power is attributed to the dead Egyptian pharaoh who becomes Osiris and repeats his divine destiny.

The Middle Platonist Plutarch (despite his conviction of the essential identity of Egyptian and Hellenic religions) did not accept the idea about the foreign origins of the Hellenic hero, Heracles, because neither Homer nor Hesiod ever mentioned an Egyptian or a Phoenician Heracles. Therefore Plutarch attacks the claim of Herodotus:

“He says that the Greeks learned about processions and national festivals from the Egyptians as well as the worship of the twelve gods; the very name of Dionysus, he says, was learnt from the Egyptians by Melampus, and he taught the rest of the Greeks; and the mysteries and secret rituals connected with Demeter were brought from Egypt by the daughters of Danaos... Nor is this the worst. He traces the ancestry of Heracles to Perseus and says Perseus, according to the Persian account, was an Assyrian; ‘and the chiefs of the Dorians’ he says, ‘would be established as pure-blooded Egyptians...’; not only is he anxious to establish an Egyptian and a Phoenician Heracles; he says that our own Heracles was born after the other two...” (*De malig.*13-14).

Recent investigations have proved that Plutarch was wrong about Heracles. Even worse: Homer and Hesiod themselves faithfully followed the Eastern poetical, mythological, and generic paradigms, also incorporating the related ideas. Those who are the most challenging among the contemporary writers even try to establish as plausible the Egyptian derivation of Homer’s name (or title), linking it with *hemuter* (*hmwt-t*), later Coptic *hmr*, meaning spell, act or actor of speech.³⁰ According to the Hellenic tradition itself, the so-called Dorian invasion was simply “the return of the Heraclids”: the Dorian kings regarded themselves as divine descendants from Heracles through the Egyptian and Phoenician ancestors. The Egyptian “Heracles” is Montu (*Mntn*), the god of archery and war, pictured as a falcon-bull, or perhaps also Horus in his hypostasis of the avenger-warrior and hero who restores *maat*, the world order.

Like the Hellenic club-bearer Heracles, the Indian god Shiva of the Pashupatas has both the feline skin and the club. Therefore it is easy to see why on the Kushan coins the figure of Heracles is replaced by the similar figure of Shiva. On the other hand, Heracles is identified with Dionysus. For this reason to imitate Heracles is tantamount to imitating Dionysus and Shiva – to seek the divine identity through the Dionysian

frenzy, behaving like madmen or animals (for animals are wise: not only the ancient hunters, but even Ibn al-‘Arabi talk about a certain “animal wisdom”) often seeking after dishonour in the same manner as the Muslim dervishes and malamatis have sought.

According to Herodotus, “the so-called Orphic or Bacchic rites... are really Egyptian and Pythagorean” (*Hist.* II.81). In both cases the attaining of wisdom, salvation, and enlightenment is accomplished not through discursive reasoning and cultivation of sciences, but through the inner passage (philosophical ascent) leading upwards to the royal crown mounted on the sacred pillar, that is the central cosmic column or *axis mundi*. This essentially invisible macrocosmic and microcosmic axis is represented by the sacred tree, the spinal column of Osiris (*djed* erect pillar), the body of the goddess Nut (Heaven) or the theurgic ladder constructed by the rays of divine light. This ladder constitutes the way towards union (*henosis*).

G. Zuntz rejected such unity with a god, thinking it may have been acceptable in Egypt, but not in Greece: “no Greek cult of any kind ever aimed to achieve identity of god and worshipper, alive or dead”.⁴⁰ E. Hornung rejected this aspiration for the Egyptians as well, claiming that they “never experienced a longing for union with the deity.”⁴⁰ Such blind assertions stand contrary to the evidence provided by the texts and the sound metaphysics itself, showing how brilliant modern scholars try to project into the ancient mysteries their own prejudices and states of mind. They are adherents of a persistent mythology, so dear to all sorts of rationalists and functioning as if it were their main magic talisman – a mythology which holds that the ancient philosophy and the world itself are moving from so-called “irrationality”, monkey-like backwardness, to “rationality” (which by now is elevated to the status of the scientific, schizophrenia, terrorism, and tyranny), i.e., from *muthos* to *logos*.

9. From Akhenaten to Thales

At the beginning of the second millenium B.C., under the influence of the increasing unification and organization of the Near Eastern states, every one of which was regarded as the mirror-image of the macrocosmic state of the gods or its prolongation, the priests and sages became increasingly concerned with questions of universal order and its ruling principle, of divine archetypes and their images, of the One and the Many. It would be incorrect to think that all these questions and subjects were not explored much earlier, but at that time they provoked and suggested slightly different answers, due to the monistic tendency of thought. The approached problems were investigated and dealt with by mythological

and theological means, taking mythology to the limits of its expressiveness. According to Thomas McEvilley:

“What would emerge from the dissolution of myth was the birth of philosophy – and its first great topic was Oneness”.⁴²

The author is incorrect in speaking about “the dissolution of myth”: it is more likely that myth simply changed the imaginal form of presentation. In a certain sense, *logos* (a rational discourse, speech, discursive reason) is only one particular instance of the great ontological Meta-myth (close to the Hindu *Maya*, the Egyptian *Heka*) which governs the whole realm of becoming, that of moving images and reflections. Within this overwhelmingly magic frame, which introduces something like a mythical fundament of ontology, *logos* simply means significant and meaningful speech (that which is in accord with the archetypal Ideas), the multi-dimensional human mind with all of its images, concepts, thoughts, feelings, and visions which can be symbolically expressed orally or in writing and has an open or hidden coherence. Therefore, as Ch. Evangeliou pointed out:

“In this broad sense, not only great Hellenic philosophers, but every human being, who is unimpaired and prepared to make careful and meaningful use of the innate *logos*, is naturally a logical and rational being, peripatetically speaking”.⁴³

The Hellenic tradition insists that almost all of the first Greek philosophers, mystagogues, and scientists were pupils of the Egyptian priests. As Diodorus Siculus says, not only Orpheus took part in the feasts of the Dionysian (i.e., Osirian) mysteries in Egypt (*Bibl. hist.* I.23.2), but also Homer himself visited the country (*ibid.* I.69). Behind the Greek obsession with geometry (which Thales is said to have brought from Egypt) stand the Egyptian methods of measurement along with the mystical theory of forms and numbers which grounds the use of geometry in the demiurgic cosmogony, repeated after the annual flood, when the primordial hill, the noetic “stone” of light, emerges from the waters of Nun. Geometry and astronomy are the two disciplines to which the Greek authors most often refer, though Hellenic astronomy derives from Mesopotamia. Be that as it may, geometry and astronomy (both understood in the ancient sense of divine sciences) became pillars of an emerging cultural synthesis in Greece which marked the appearance of a distinct rational, philosophical and scientific discourse.

Theology is also mentioned among the things learned abroad, though the Egyptian priests were reluctant to reveal the mysteries to their guests. For example, Plato is credited with having learned geometry, theology and priestly knowledge in general during his stay in Egypt probably around 390 B.C. In his later works Plato praised Egyptian art and music, arguing for their adoption in Greece. For Plato, the return to the ideal ancient institutions means return to Egypt, as if the deeper one goes towards the

true and primordial Hellenic roots, the closer one approaches the sacred pharaonic Egypt. The tradition of Plato's theological studies in Egypt was so persistent through the whole of antiquity that it cannot be spurious. According to the geographer Strabo (about 64 B.C.-A.D.23):

"We saw there the buildings dedicated formerly to the lodging of priests; but this is not all: we were shown also the dwelling of Plato and Eudoxus, for Eudoxus accompanied Plato to this place [Heliopolis], and they established themselves here and both resided there 13 years in the society of the priests: the fact is affirmed by several authors. These priests, so profoundly versed in the knowledge of celestial phenomena, were at the same time mysterious people, seldom communicative, and it was only due to time and adroit management that Eudoxus and Plato were able to be initiated by them into several of their theoretical speculations. But these barbarians retained the best part in their own possession" (*Geogr.* XVII. I.29).

Some may argue that if "these barbarians" were really so lavish as to reveal "the best part" of their wisdom, Plato would have been a Neoplatonist more like Plotinus and Iamblichus than like Socrates, the insatiable seeker of quarrel. The Socratic attitude, however, may be regarded as an external veil (in accordance to the ancient traditions of "ritual quarrel" and dramatic performances of tricksters which conceal the inner layers of esoteric wisdom). Therefore it is not clear to what extent Plato is either "Egyptian", or "Neoplatonic", though one should remember that Platonism cannot be viewed as entirely "ahistorical." The different historical contexts dictate different rules of the game and reflect different kinds of mentalities, while the underlying metaphysical principles remain the same.

The undeserved philosophical hero of all modern histories, whose reputation of the "first philosopher" is largely based on rather distorted or misinterpreted records of Aristotle, is Thales of Miletus, also credited with visiting the priests and astronomers of Egypt. He learned geometry from the Egyptians, according to Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae philosoph.* 43-24). Before approaching Thales and his controversial teachings, as they are attested to by later and not always credible writers, we should discuss the particular theological perspective which started the "disenchantment of the world" by rejecting sacramental symbolism (labelled as "idolatry"), theurgy and traditional mythological imagery.

In the 18th Dynasty (1550-1295 B.C.) of the New Kingdom in Egypt, two "antipolytheistic", or rather monistically oriented, but essentially different movements appeared: (1) the so-called New Solar theology which was attested before Amenophis IV and continued after his fall into the Late Period, and (2) the Amarna theology of Amenophis IV (Akhenaton) who ruled 1352-1338 B.C.

The solar monotheism, suddenly introduced by Akhenaten, the heretic pharaoh, restructured the world and reduced it to a restricted human point of view. In traditional Egyptian imagery both macrocosm and microcosm were regarded from the divine point of view: the observing human eye was almost excluded and the magnificent sacred spectacles of the cosmic state along with its permanent archetypes and unending dynamic processes were viewed not from below, but from above and from within. The reality was depicted as the sum (diversity in unity) of divine actions which constitute metaphysical constellations at different levels of being. Not the visible phenomena (separated from the sacred prototypes), but their inner meaning was the main concern of the Egyptian priests. Their texts describe certain imaginal and noetic topographies which no average human observer has ever seen here below, because "it is not just the visible, but the intelligible world that counts as reality".⁴⁴

During the short revolutionary period introduced by Akhenaten everything was turned upside down. The multi-dimensional theophany (the pantheon of *neteru*) and mythical imagery which emphasized transcendence were replaced by visible reality. At the same time metaphysical concepts of hidden meaning and the archetypal picture of divine semiotics were replaced by physical concepts of function and causality. Akhenaten's monotheism, centred on the optics of Aten, the visible solar body, eliminated the metaphysical notion of the "first time" (*tep sepi*), crucial for theurgic rites, temple liturgies, and mystical ascent. The Egyptian concept of *tep sepi*, to which corresponds the later Hebrew *be-re-shit*, "in the beginning", means the principal beginning, the emergence of the divine Intellect, Atum-Ra, along with *kosmos noetos*, and this beginning transcends the sensible realm, being "everywhere and nowhere". As the eternal presence it constitutes the vertical henadic axis of return to the source and liberation.

Instead, Akhenaten's world-view is based on the sensual apprehension of time. Spatial visibility is regarded as the dimension of physical light. When the eternal presence (usually touched through the hieratic rites and intellection) is replaced by past and future, then cosmogony becomes embryology and God himself begins to be equated with time which unfolds everything. This is the exact inversion of traditional Egyptian doctrines.

In the new established monotheism, God is revealed to the physical eye as the visible sun disk, but hidden from the heart, except the heart of Akhenaten, who becomes the sole intermediary between his Aten and disenchanted reality here below. Contrary to this innovation, the theology of the New Kingdom emphasized the necessity of "taking God into one's heart": the possibility of mystical knowledge is open to every pious man and woman. Although this knowledge is carried in the depths of the heart, God himself is invisible. Therefore seeing God is possible only for those

transformed souls who are “dead” both in the literal and the initiatory sense. Only the soul (*ba*) who passed through the Osirian transformations in the Duat and is turned into the luminous spirit (*akb*) can meet the gods face to face and itself become a god.

In Amarna religion, however, although knowledge of God is reserved for the pharaoh only, the ability to see God is granted to everybody. But this God is no longer the transcendent Amun, the hidden God, whose symbols, images, and names are the many gods, but the visible body of the sun, the One as the rational cause of material generation. Claiming that the meaning of the world (or its “scientific truth”) is only accessible to the heart of the sole expert, Akhenaten himself (the prototype of the modern scientific experts who promote the same claims), is virtually saying that reality has no mysterious divine meaning at all. Therefore, as J. Assmann pointed out, in the Amarna period explanation (scientific search for causality) replaced interpretation (symbolic hermeneutics):

“The more there is that can be explained, the less there is to interpret. Thus we may perhaps say that, instead of founding a new religion, Akhenaten was the first to find a way out of religion”.⁴⁵

Though he did away with Osiris and the ritualized and temple-like Osirian Netherworld (which functioned as an alchemical vessel of transformation), the concept of the immortality of the soul remained intact. However, Akhenaten rejected the traditional pantheon, and destroyed or damaged temples, statues, and images of the Egyptian gods in the name of Aten who is not even a personal God in the theistic sense, but represents Nature. Therefore the visible world is nothing but an endless becoming, a transformation (*keheperu*) of God-Nature himself. The term *keheper* usually means manifestation, coming forth from the hidden dimension, something invisible becoming visible. But in the Amarna texts the meaning of this term is altered, because Akhenaten did away with any idea of invisibility or hiddenness. There is nothing but nature, and this nature ought to be investigated, held in wonder, praised and lived in. In sharp contrast to this monotheistic doctrine, the traditional Egyptian world is not “nature”, because it is not natural.⁴⁶

In the Amarna religion, God is not regarded as a jealous lord who requires total loyalty as in the early Biblical tradition which in many respects is the heir and rather indirect prolongation of Akhenaten’s monotheism. Though the new theological and physiological perspective, introduced with the utmost compulsion and terror, was experienced by the pharaoh as a religious revelation, it is not, strictly speaking, a theology of will. Instead of pious servanthood, knowledge and truth are emphasized, though they are privileges of the king. The clear-cut distinction between true and false in matters of religion (inseparable from state policies) marked the idea of orthodoxy with its intolerance of any

beliefs which deviated from or opposed the single doctrine regarded as unquestionably true.

In the ancient Near Eastern civilizations, all theologies, cosmogonies and their related divine names were translatable. They were not absolute at the level of myth and polysemantic hermeneutics. Therefore not the question of orthodoxy, but that of orthopraxis, the correct performance of sacred rites, based on the distinction between right and wrong in human action was thought to be important. If the Amarna religion had existed for longer, it would surely have produced a corpus of canonical sacred texts. The fall of Akhenaten's rule prevented a shift from rites and "idols" to scriptures, as happened in the later Semitic monotheisms. However, Akhenaten's revolution (though not long-lasting) marks a period which is described by modern scholarship as the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age.

It is no mere accident that both Homer's epics (which probably belong to the late Assyrian period, 8th century B.C.) and the Biblical Exodus (the mythical and symbolic narration of Moses, who is the Egyptian priest Osarseph in Manetho's account of the departure from Egypt), are traditionally set in the 13th century B.C. After the end of the Egyptian New Kingdom (the XX Dynasty lasted until about 1069 B.C.) and the collapse of political unity, the theology of will and personal piety accelerated in Egypt, officially proclaimed by Herihor. This high priest of Amun pronounced the age of "rebirth" and established a new representative theocracy, based on the oracles of Amun.

However, the unifying idea in this period of ancient history was that of a world-state, programmatically embodied by the neo-Assyrian empire, followed by the neo-Babylonian and Persian empires. In such complicated conditions the Biblical tradition of the Chosen People (the tribal myth of promised success and world dominion) is developed. According to J. Assmann:

"The report of the Exodus stems from an authentic account of a sojourn in and departure from Egypt, but those events were experienced not by the Hebrews but by the Hyksos, whose traditions the Hebrews inherited. Israel elevated these transmissions to the rank of a normative past and made them an integral part of its cultural memory only at a time when the Hebrews as a people needed to draw on this past to master their present. That 'present', however, could not have predated the first appearance of the prophets. Hence, the literary version of the Joseph legend, the Exodus, and all other biblical references to Egypt are derived from Late Period Egypt, not the Egypt of the Bronze Age, in which the version known to us sets the Exodus".⁴⁷

The transformed and reinterpreted legacy of Akhenaten is also partly inherited by the Hebrews who regarded Egypt as a sort of mythological monster and a depository of the hated idolatry. The Egyptians' and

Hebrews' abhorrence of each other was intense and permanent, perhaps due to the legacy of ideas and memories inherited by the Hebrews from the expelled Hyksos and the banished Akhenaten's rebels. Even in the time of the Renaissance, Giordano Bruno, the partisan of the spurious "Egyptian religion", regarded the Jews with contempt.⁴⁸

The religion of the enlightener-iconoclast Akhenaten was a puritanical cult devoid of theurgy and metaphysical symbolism, restricting the knowable universe to the world accessible to the senses. Therefore J. Assmann argues that "as a thinker, Akhenaten stands at the head of a line of inquiry that was taken up seven hundred years later by the Milesian philosophers of nature with their search for the one all-informing principle..."⁴⁹

Of course, this line of inquiry differs considerably from the Biblical theology of the divine will which arranges and plots world history (centred on the moral and political adventures of his chosen tribe) according to the unpredictable intentions, plans, and wishes of Yahweh, the jealous personal God of Israel.

10. Thales and the Egyptian Myths

Being partly of Phoenician background, Thales lived in Miletus from 624 to 545 B.C. Until his middle age, Miletus was a part of the Lydian empire, ruled from the court at Sardes, and Thales himself was a member of this "Oriental" power structure, living with the ruler of Miletus at his court and visiting Egypt, presumably under the royal wardship. His assertions recall many Egyptian texts and his main ideas are no more than the Egyptian mythological and theological motifs released from their initial theological contexts for the purpose of philosophical *paideia* among the less educated Milesians.

Ever since the Enlightenment modern scholars have tried to convince us that mythology does not satisfy the desire to know the causes of things. They suppose that the only positive function of myths and traditional tales is to make us feel at home in the world, as if sacred myths were devoid of any metaphysical content and serve simply as a pleasant intoxicant. However, it is incorrect to maintain that myth is related to the demythologized rationalistic account as opinion (*doxa*) is related to scientific knowledge (*episteme*). To regard "wonder", from which philosophy begins, as ignorance and as the confusion which arises when the mythical world-view is radically questioned, is to fail completely in the understanding of myth and its symbolic and transformative power. The variety of world-representations found in different religious-mythological traditions are providential veils, not arbitrary fictions which would compel poor Thales to reject all of them in the name of one single "physiological"

world-picture, naively held to be the only one which was both true and adequate. The many different world-representations cannot prevent the apprehension (through direct intellectual intuition or contemplation of symbols) of the invisible realm beyond all representations.

To say that Thales moves “beyond representations to the underlying, intelligible reality”,⁵⁰ amounts to saying that the creators of mythological world pictures were extremely ignorant and unable to comprehend pure noetic reality which transcends all words and images. However, the symbolism of ancient hieratic myths and rituals shows this opinion to be both shaky and ungrounded. If Thales really tried to strip away the stage and see the playwright, he was doing such deconstruction either in search of the transcendent ruling principle (say, Amun or Zeus), or for desacralized and impersonal “nature”, as it is understood by the moderns. Since the trivial concept of “nature” (and the related “ontology of death”, to use the term coined by Hans Jonas, for if matter is the primary reality then life itself could only be a “disease of matter”⁵¹) is rather a recent invention, it seems that Thales ultimately regarded reality as theophany, the fabric of the ordered and beautiful cosmic unity, that is, the magnificent divine mask through which shines the essential light of first principles, namely, the gods.

According to Thales, “the world is the most beautiful (*kalliston kosmos*), for it is God’s making (*poiema gar theon*). Something intangible that permeates all things is operating within or through the visible cosmos, and this principle cannot be reduced to a simple material substratum. Hence, a plenitude of gods (*theoi*) is hidden behind the cosmic veils. But in this respect Thales says nothing new, nothing that had not been already and better said by the Egyptians and other ancient nations a long time before. The world is a living being, a divine body (like a statue) in need of the animating principle, the soul and the spirit which appear as the descending and ascending life-giving forces. According to Aristotle:

“And some say that it (soul) is intermingled in the universe, for which reason, perhaps, Thales also thought that all things are full of gods” (*panta plere theon einai: De anima* 411a7).

This doctrine is the same as the Egyptian one: the gods (*neteru*), who bring life (*ankh*) and animate all bodies, are manifestations (*keheperu*) of the supreme transcendent Principle and constitute the different levels of reality. For Greeks, the gods (*theoi*) are ever-living and everlasting principles. Though supporting evidence is insufficient, W. K. C. Guthrie boldly asserts that Thales “rejected the anthropomorphic deities of popular religion” while retaining its language to the extent of saying that the whole world is filled with gods.⁵² It is a commonly held modern mistake to assume that the ancient Hellenes really worshipped the “anthropomorphic gods” conceived in the image of human beings. As J. P. Vernant clearly demonstrated, rather the opposite is true:

"In all its active aspects, in all the compounds of its physical and psychological dynamism, the human body reflects the divine models as the inexhaustible source of a vital energy when, for an instant, the brilliance of divinity happens to fall on a mortal creature, illuminating him, as in a fleeting glow, with a little of that splendor that always clothes the body of a god".⁵³

To think that Hesiodic genealogies or Homeric accounts were accepted at face value by the Hellenes, even by the initiates and the educated minority, would be to indulge oneself in rationalistic naïveté instead of trying to explore the metaphysical exegesis and symbolism of the sacred. Despite the supposed shift of traditional thought, inaugurated by Thales, it is evident that the gods retained their force. Perhaps his interpretation of unity and nature (if one is ready to believe poor testimonies) in certain respects followed Akhenaten's line of inquiry, but it is difficult to accept, as W. K. C. Guthrie argues, that "at the conscious level, he (Thales) had made a deliberate break with mythology and was seeking a rational account".⁵⁴

Due to this "deliberate break" Thales is regarded as the "first philosopher" in the contemporary Western sense, though, unlike the modern "research fellow", the genuine ancient philosopher is a noetically enlightened person who follows his lived *philosophia* as a model way of living and dying, or of becoming "like a god". For him there is not any sharp division between the inspired sacred myth (which requires an esoteric interpretation) and logical accounts or discursive reasonings (*logos*), between *sophia* (revealed or inherited wisdom) and *theoria* (contemplation), or between philosophy as a commentary on certain privileged canonical texts and philosophy as an individual dialectical inquiry.

However, most contemporary Western scholars, shaped by the reality-distorting and tendentious modern *paideia*, insist that Thales wished to speak according to reason (*logos*), and his choice of reason over imagination marks the turning point in the history of thought. Such a point of view itself constitutes a "mythology" of sorts.

When Aristotle mentioned Thales, "the founder of this type of philosophy" (*alla Thales men ho tes toiautes archegos philosophias: Metaph.* 983b6), arguing that water is the original source of all things, he actually means not of all philosophy, but only of "this type" and does not say that Thales' principle (*arche*) or natural substance, namely water, is some material fluid brought from the neighbouring lake. This water may equally be understood as the ineffable primordial "water" (symbol of the One) which transcends even the noetic realm of Intellect. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven have already raised a doubt regarding the Aristotelian interpretation:

"Are we justified in inferring from the Peripatetic identification of Thales' water as 'material principle' that he believed the visible, developed

world to be water in some way? This is the normal interpretation of Thales; but it is important to realize that it rests ultimately on the Aristotelian formulation, and that Aristotle, knowing little about Thales, and that indirectly, would surely have found the mere information that the world originated from water sufficient justification for saying that water was Thales' material principle or *arche*, with the implication that water is a persistent substrate".⁵⁵

It is more likely that Thales had in mind the Egyptian Nun, trying to translate the ancient metaphysics into the slightly different, but no less "mythical" language of the universal and divine *phusis* which is not necessarily a material substrate. According to F. Schuon, "when Thales saw in 'water' the origin of all things, it is as certain as can be that Universal Substance - the Prakriti of the Hindus - is in question and not the sensible element".⁵⁶ But if Thales himself was partly neglected and misunderstood by subsequent generations, can one boldly assert (as the contemporary scholar does) the following statement:

"With Thales we are encountering, possibly for the first time in Western thought, a theology divested of provincial beliefs and poetic fabrications. Thales does not speak of the cultic god of the Milesians among whom he lived, the pantheon of the Egyptians whom he visited, or the splendid fictions of Hesiod which he had very likely heard at celebrations".⁵⁷

Putting aside the disturbing question in what sense Thales is a representative of "Western" thought, or to what extent modern Westerners (moulded by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and by Romanticism) have an exclusive right to the inheritance of ancient Mediterranean traditions, it is not necessary to speak of the Egyptian pantheon (*psdt*: Ennead, the gods) in order to follow one or another line of an esoteric exegesis, reading the meaning beyond the iconographical structure of images and symbols. The only danger is to misunderstand the essence of cosmogonical myth and to view the "ineffable" (the first Principle) as the "natural" (the substantial ground of all material manifestation) and thus to "mythologize" in a crude and opaque "scientific" manner.

The concept of the primordial Waters (Nun as the ineffable God, the Neoplatonic One) reflects the Egyptian cosmogonical picture of the noetic universe as a sphere of the divine light or the life-giving air (which stands for the spirit of Shu). Nun, or Nu, may also mean "inert" in the sense of a certain unspeakable condition existing before the manifestation of Being represented as the rising of the noetic Sun (Atum-Ra), i.e., before an appearance (*kheper*) of the archetypal pleroma and all subsequent irradiations. The hidden, dark, and inert state of the ultimate divine transcendence is described in the *Coffin Texts*:

“I am the Waters (*nm*)
 I am inert” (*njnj*: CT V.312)
 “I am a baby (*nm*) of his mother.
 I am a child, son of Hathor.
 I am an inert one (*njnj*) in the Waters” (*nm*: CT IV.182)

In the ordered universe, understood as theophany and the interplay of different divine forces, Waters are represented by the Osirian Netherworld, Duat, and the Nile: the psychic “waters” flow through the Duat inside the goddess Nut’s body (her name, *nm*, being a feminine adjective meaning “of the Waters”) and the Sun god Ra (equivalent to *Nous*) is pictured travelling on them at night.

Since Thales studied philosophy in Egypt, his doctrines surely reflected the Egyptian prototypes. According to the Hellenic tradition:

“Thales came to Miletus an old man having spent a long time studying philosophy in Egypt” (Aetius 1.3.1).

“They (Egyptians) say that the sun and moon do not use chariots, but boats in which to sail round in their courses; and by this they intimate that the nourishment and origin of these heavenly bodies is from moisture. They think also that Homer, like Thales, had gained his knowledge from the Egyptians, when he postulated water as the source and origin of all things (*budor archen hapanton kai genesin tithesthai*); for, according to them, Oceanus is Osiris, and Tethys is Isis, since she is the kindly nurse and provider for all things. In fact, the Greeks call emission *apousia* and coition *sunousia*, and the son (*huios*) from water (*budor*) and rain (*busai*); Dionysus also they call Hues since he is lord of the nature of moisture; and he is no other than Osiris.

“... They call him up out of the water by the sound of trumpets, at the same time casting into the depths a lamb as an offering to the Keeper of the Gate. The trumpets they conceal in Bacchic wands, as Socrates has stated in his treatise on *The Holy Ones*. Furthermore, the tales regarding the Titans and rites celebrated by night agree with the accounts of the dismemberment of Osiris and his revivification and regeneration (*tais anabiosesi kai palingenesiais*)...

“Not only the Nile, but every form of moisture they call simply the effusion of Osiris; and in their holy rites the water jar in honour of the god heads the procession. And by the picture of a rush they represent a king and the southern region of the world, and the rush is interpreted to mean the watering and fructifying of all things, and in its nature it seems to bear some resemblance to the generative member” (*De Iside et Osiride* 34-36).

The Hellenic philosophers, starting with Plato and Aristotle, constantly refer to the Iliad of Homer where Ocean is called the father of Gods (Il. XIV.201) and the source of all beings (*Okeanou hos per genesis, pantesi tetuknai*: ibid. XIV.246). Julian even equated Helios, the father of the

seasons (who, being “the genuine son of the Good”, “is One and proceeds from one God, even from the noetic cosmos which is itself One”: *Or.* IV, p.386), with Oceanus, “the lord of two-fold substance”, saying as follows:

“My meaning here is not obscure, is it, seeing that before my time Homer said the same things? ‘Oceanus who is the father of all things’: yes, for mortals and for the blessed gods too, as he himself would say; and what he says is true. For there is no single thing in the whole of existence that is not the offspring of the substance of Oceanus (*tes Okenou pepbuken oucias ekgonon*: *Or.* IV. pp.404-405 Wright).

It seems, as Julian himself suggests, that such doctrines (or their proper interpretations) are kept in silence, because ultimately they have been “taught by the gods or mighty daimons” to “the priests of the mysteries” (*ibid.*).

Perhaps the only difference between Homer and Thales is that while Thales, like other so-called Pre-Socratic philosophers, regarded his own dogmatic assertions about the ultimate nature of the universe as an accurate (but no less “mythical”) account approved by reason (though even in this respect we cannot be sure), Homer (or several singers who partly followed examples of the Akkadian and Ugaritic epic traditions) playfully presented the same teaching using poetical and mythological images. Therefore Ch. Evangeliou rightly remarks that “Homer’s poetry would have the advantage over the dryness of philosophic prose”.⁵⁸ And the Egyptian myths, used in the sacred rites, would have a clear advantage over Homeric “literature” which provoked such a turmoil in the minds of those purists and “enlighteners” who were unable either to understand the logic of a sacred myth, or to delight in epic poetry, i.e., to enjoy its conventional and heroic aesthetics.

11. Water as Metaphysical Principle and Divine Substance

Aristotle’s attempt to explain why Thales chose *budros* (water) as the first principle (*Metaph.*983b ff) is incorrect, because this principle is not regarded by Thales in the manner of Aristotelian prime matter, but represents a certain permeating and ineffable identity that unites all instances of theophany. This is the permanent essence of divinity along with the Spirit, or Life, that is diffused through all created or manifested things. It is more likely that Thales is not a materialist who stands at the beginning of natural philosophy (as Aristotle and his ancient and modern followers understand it), but may be regarded as a metaphysician who used symbolic language to show that divine Life, as a genuine creative force, is diffused through the ordered cosmos which is ensouled and “full of gods”. In fact, this perspective is close to the Egyptian doctrine of

Water, Life, and Order, already attested in the *Coffin Texts* of the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 B.C.):

“O you Eight Infinite Ones – an infinite number of Infinite Ones (*heb en heb*),

Who encircle the Sky with your arms,
Who draw together the Sky and Horizon of Geb.
Shu has given you birth out of the Flood, out of the Waters,
Out of *tenemu*, out of the Darkness,
That he might allot you to Geb and Nut,
While Shu is Eternal Recurrence (*neheb*) and Tefnut is Eternal Sameness (*djet*).

I am the *ba* of Shu who is at the Great Flood,
Who goes up to the sky as he wishes,
Who goes down to the earth as his heart decides.
Come in excitement to greet the god in me.

I am Shu, child of Atum.

My clothing is the air of life” (CT 80.1-13)

“Then said Atum: My living daughter is Tefnut.

She will exist with her brother Shu.

Life (*ankh*) is his identity,

Order (*maat*) is her identity,

I shall live with my twins, my fledglings,

With me in their midst –

One of them at my back,

One of them in my belly...

It is my son who shall live,

He whom I begot in my identity,

For he has learned how to enliven the one in the egg, in the respective womb,

As mankind, that emerged from my Eye –

[the Eye] that I sent forth when I

was alone with the Waters, in inertness,

Not finding a place in which I could stand or sit,

Before Heliopolis had been founded, in which I could exist;

Before the Lotus has been tied together, on which I could sit”

(CT 80.30-50)

“I am Life (*ankh*), for whom the length of the Sky

and the breath of Geb were made:

It is from me that presented offerings emerge for the god”

(CT 80.91-92 Allen).

Shu, identified as the noetic Life (Atum's Light and Spirit), is the son of Atum who emerges from the Waters (Nun), or the Flood (*hehu*). Hence, Atum, Shu, and Tefnut constitute the first intelligible triad. The Life is diffused at different ontological levels of reality: Shu lives in the transcendent realm of Atum, but when sent down "to the Isle of Fires", his identity becomes Osiris, son of Geb. Finally, he reaches the material world and his function here is to "make firm his flesh every day", to enliven all creatures through his mouth, putting life in their nostrils: falcons, jackals, pigs, crocodiles, fish and "the crawling things on Geb's back". The initiate (the "dead" person, *ba* separated from *keha*) identifies himself with Shu in his animating and life-giving aspect. Shu's sister Tefnut stands for the archetypal intelligence, order, truth, and justice, the right measure for the Life's emanation.

As the above quoted texts clearly show, the archetypal Ogdoad (constituted by the eight proto-noetic and ineffable principles) is already contained "without place" in the potentiality of the hidden Monad. And since Atum (*j.tmm*) is a form of the verb *tem* (*tm*), meaning both "not be" and "complete, finish", Atum means both "non-being" (which transcends being as the Beyond-Being, Nun-Atum) and "plenitude of noetic being", the overwhelming fullness, *pleroma* of divine lights and intellects (Atum-Ra). He emerges from the depths of Nun as the primordial Lotus, the Holy City of Ra (Heliopolis), i.e., as the supreme intelligible principle (the Parmenidian and Neoplatonic One-Many) which "gave birth to Shu and Tefnut in Heliopolis, when he was one and developed into three" (CT 80.75-76).

In the light of Egyptian theological accounts, it seems that Thales, far from being a materialist reductionist, posited Water as the first principle from which stems the increasing multiplicity of the gods whose invisible presence sustains the measured arrangement of visible things under the aegis of unity. Thus the Water produces living Forms, and this Water, far from being lifeless "matter", is the unspeakable *theos*, the Father of the gods who transcends all Forms and all noetic Lights, and is therefore symbolized by the dark and inert Water.

The ineffable principle of manifestation, or the living divine substance, having its immanent aspect and called *budros* by Thales, is surely not a "material" cause. Likewise the ancient Egyptian theologies, while using material symbols for the immaterial realities, discuss not a "material" causality (as some contemporary scholars maintain) when they speak about the Waters, the Primeval Mound, Heliopolis, the First Sunrise, Atum and his archetypal Ennead which developed from the initial Monad. Instead, their sophisticated and paradoxical accounts, using carefully selected symbols and images, conceptualize the ultimate Cause of all creation which lies outside creation and is "hidden from the gods", since "no god knows His (i.e., Amun's who is hidden in the depths of Nun) true

appearance". Hence, "water" is an adequate symbol for the supreme One, the transcendent and infinite source of Being, envisaged as a swampy mire which contains the eight initial proto-noetic paradigms of the intelligible cosmos (*kosmos noetos* of the later Platonic tradition).

Aristotle was very hasty and without scruples in his attempt to reduce the "divine substances" of the early Hellenic theologians into the low status of mere material causes, though these "substances" are metaphysical symbols which stand for the supreme gods and the initial principles, both transcendent and immanent. When this unjust and intended misinterpretation is accomplished, the theologians (including Thales), labelled as the "Pre-socratics" by modern rationalists (who are lovers of historical fictions and rigid classifications), are criticized as incapable of making the correct use of these "material causes" which they have proclaimed as the material substratum and the ultimate source of reality. Therefore one should agree with the assertion made by R. K. Hack:

"If we bear in mind that the so-called physical doctrines of the Ionian philosophers were really to a great extent metaphysical – that is to say, these Greek philosophers believed that they were investigating, and had discovered, the nature of ultimate divine reality, and not of mere outer appearances – we shall be able to understand why the Ionians named one substance after another as the divine source of the universe".⁵⁹

R. K. Hack argues that when Thales proclaimed Water as the living and divine substance of the universe (we should add: the manifestation of Shu, the son of Atum, who himself stems from the Waters in more sophisticated Egyptian accounts), his main novelty lies in identifying the supreme divine power with the cosmogenetic divine substance, while introducing a non-anthropomorphic divinity.⁶⁰ This assertion cannot be accepted without reservations and is not correct, if viewed not against the traditional Hellenic "literature" – the poetic accounts of the Olympian gods – but in the light of Egyptian theology and metaphysics which cannot be accused of a lush anthropomorphism at all.

It operated with a strictly coherent system of symbolism open to several meanings at different levels of interpretation. The ambivalent Egyptian symbolism cannot be properly understood without considering all aspects of the divine iconography. This includes visible forms and the entire field of semantic associations. Also the countless puns and their magic function must always be taken into consideration. To see here something like the sadly famous "anthropomorphism" of the Hellenic epics (which are inspired poetry, anyway) is to be surprisingly naïve and contemptuous of the ancient myths and all symbolic modes of thought.

12. Metaphysical Meaning of Ancient Mythologies

The new wave of metaphysical, cosmological, and physiological inquiry which started in the 6th century B.C. among philosophers and sophists (at first there was no real difference between them) strengthened the intriguing opinion that the myths and hieratic accounts were unable to deal with reality without introducing certain fatal distortions and deformations. Being unable to understand the deeper symbolic meaning of ancient mythologies or to put the acquired fragments of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom into an integral and meaningful unity, they turned against their own lavish poetic tradition (also regarded at its face value) and argued for the need of a pure “scientific” theology and for a genuine worship of the invisible principles based on a proper comprehension of the divine order.

So it seems that “irrational” and often scandalous myths must be neglected in favour of the “semi-esoteric” *logos* which belongs to a few specialists in scientific knowledge. However, it may be that, as the remark made by Socrates at the end of Plato’s *Theaetetus* suggests, knowledge as a rational account (*logos*) is also unattainable. Socrates says to *Theaetetus*, the young pupil of the distinguished mathematician Theodorus:

“So, Theaetetus, neither perception, nor true belief, nor the addition of an ‘account’ to true belief can be knowledge” (*Theaet.*210b).

But, as a consequence of dialectical scrutiny, even if Theaetetus remains barren, he cannot any more fancy he knows what he does not know:

“For that, and no more, is all that my art can effect; nor have I any of that knowledge possessed by all the great and admirable men of our own day or of the past. But this midwife’s art is a gift from heaven; my mother had it for women, and I for young men of a generous spirit and for all in whom beauty dwells” (*ibid.*, 210c).

Though Rosemary Desjardin argues that Theaetetus’ amazement is philosophical wonder “because such reflection opens him up to the philosophical issues” in searching for a solution to problems of irrationality (the incompatibility of incommensurables),⁶¹ one may suspect that this “feeling of wonder” (*to thaumazein*) which shows “that you are a philosopher” (*Theaet.*155d), is really a wonder induced by facing the mystery of the divine intelligence and the ineffable Waters.

Accordingly, “true knowledge” is not a property of human beings as mortals, be they scientists or rationalists, and cannot be acquired by discursive thought, because it concerns the intelligible realm and objects of the divine order which can only be grasped by the transformed soul through noetic insight and epoptic vision akin to revelation or mystical union with the divine.

Contrary to the ancient traditions of wisdom, many contemporary thinkers in their unending quest for certainty turn not to the sacred myths, revelations, and symbols which lead to integral piety, illumination, and inner vision, but to trivialized mathematics and epistemology which cannot transcend the realm of discursive reasoning and secular pragmatism. Therefore the main area of philosophy (by this term meaning an academic discourse) is that of epistemology: the pursuit of *scientia* (instead of *sapientia*) “turned out to be a major pastime for the modern philosophers” who “regard Plato’s *Theaetetus* (perhaps along with the *Meno* and Sextus Empiricus’ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*), as containing the primal sacred doctrines (*dissoi logoi*) revered by the devotees of modern epistemology”.⁶² This rather ironical remark made by Daryl L. Hale is aimed at the endemic failure of contemporary thinkers to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. They take their only task to be that of elucidating the conditions of human knowledge, classifying countless opinions and instigating sceptical attacks on those who disagree with their premises based on barren secular rationalism and humanism.

Seeing from this special standpoint, the earliest Greek philosophers (starting with Thales) divorced philosophy from mythology, poetry, and traditional genealogies. Since “reason sought and found truth that was universal”, the earlier age of “mythology and superstition” was replaced by the age of science, according to F. M. Cornford.⁶³ This discovery of Nature is accompanied by the tacit denial of the distinction between experience and revelation:

“The conception of Nature is extended to incorporate what had been the domain of the supernatural. The supernatural, as fashioned by mythology, simply disappears; and all that really exists is natural.”⁶⁴

At present we are not so sure about such straightforward conclusions. And even if the essence of Ionian philosophy and science (which is credited with denying the spiritual, as distinct from the material) is not misconceived and misunderstood, i.e., if Thales really introduced something new – the so-called “Western science” as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake – nevertheless, this idea of the crucial turning-point is fabricated and maintained with some infantile enthusiasm and magic hyperbolism.

According to Rene Guenon, in the 6th century B.C., commonly viewed as the starting point of “classical” civilization, something of which there had been no previous example appeared: that special form of thought which acquired and retained the name of “philosophy”.⁶⁵ R. Guenon recognizes that this word can be regarded in a quite legitimate sense, because it is simply an initial disposition required for the attainment of wisdom. Only the perversions which substitute “philosophy” for “wisdom”, taking the transitional stage for the end itself and introducing a “pretended wisdom” which is purely human and entirely of the rational order, should be neglected.⁶⁶

However, R. Guenon follows too closely the assumptions of those whom he is ready to criticize, thus assuming that *philosophia* really begins with Thales. It is more likely that Thales simply readapted and reinterpreted (perhaps, in a one-sided fashion) some aspects of the Egyptian *mere rekhu* (*mre rhw*), the “love of knowledge”, “striving for wisdom”, i.e., “philosophy” in its etymological and anagogic sense whose archetypal guide and divine patron was Thoth (*dhwtj*: Djehuty). This divine scribe and demiurgic *Logos*, the heart and tongue of Ra, himself represents and embodies the beginning, the middle, and the end of the way towards the noetic identity of *ba* (the winged soul), since every wise man ultimately is united with Thoth and his energies.

The Neopythagoreans and Middle Platonists inherited and accepted the tradition which presented Plato as a disciple of Hermes Trismegistus – that means not as a historical person but as an archetype which stands for all wisdom preserved and practised in the Thothian Houses of Life. So, if certain Platonic doctrines are the same as those of Hermes, it is obviously because Plato had copied Hermes, not the other way round. As Zosimus of Panopolis asserted in his alchemical work *On apparatus and furnaces*, the Egyptian priest Bitys (or Bitos), the thrice-great (*trismegas*) Plato and the infinitely great (*meriomegas*) Hermes are the authors of the mysterious tablet (*pinax*) which views Thouthos (Thoth) as “the first man, the interpreter of all that exists and the giver of names to all corporeal beings”.⁶⁷

It follows that Bitys, Hermes and Plato stand on the same spiritual level, represent the same tradition, and profess the same philosophical and theurgical teachings. Such opinion was firmly maintained by the hellenized Egyptians and late Hellenic philosophers themselves. Hence, according to Proclus, Plato derived some of his doctrines from the Egyptian Hermes, for example, the teaching about matter:

“Orpheus produces matter from the first hypostasis of intelligibles. For there perpetual darkness and the infinite subsist. And these indeed, subsist there in a way more excellent than the successive orders of being. In matter however, the unilluminated and the infinite are inherent, through indigence, and not according to a transcendency, but a deficiency of power. Moreover, the tradition of the Egyptians (*he ton Aiguption paradosis*) asserts the same thing concerning it. For the divine Iamblichus relates that according to Hermes materiality is produced from essentiality (*ek tes ousiotetos ten huloteta paragesthai bouletai*). It is probable therefore, that Plato derived from Hermes an opinion of this kind concerning matter” (*In Tim.* I.386 Taylor).

Since philosophy is a pursuit of *ba*, inseparable from its destiny, namely, descent and ascent, manifestation and reintegration (through the *paideia* of cosmic life: embodiment and disembodiment), Proclus in his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* (III.298.27-29/330) discusses three *ochemata*, or vehicles, of the soul: (1) the first *ochema* which is natural to the soul and puts it inside the manifested reality; (2) the second one which

makes the soul a citizen of the world of becoming; (3) the third one that is like a shell and makes the soul an inhabitant of the material world.

This division is analogous to the hierarchy of *akh*, *ba* (in a narrow sense of the soul separated from the mortal body, *khat*), and *ka* of the Egyptians. In the ontological hierarchy of being and the related esoteric path of ascent, *ka* represents the source of a person's vital energy connected with the ancestral spirits and the pharaoh whose *ka*, as the vital power of Horus, permeates the whole country and is felt as a presence in every heart. The concept of *ba* goes beyond the level of life energy, fertility, and well-being. *Ba* (the after-death consciousness, also revealed for the initiates) is the "soul" (or manifestation) moving between Earth and Heaven, though its real home is the intelligible realm, *kosmos noetos*. According to the Old Kingdom sage Ptahotep: "The wise feed their *ba* with what endures".⁶⁸ As the vehicle of ascent, it is depicted as the human-headed falcon or the jabiru bird.

The awakening of *ba* is a consequence of becoming aware of the physical body as a corpse. It means the soul must be "philosophically" (through initiation, contemplation, and death) separated from the body. When the ascending *ba* "comes to the places it knows, it does not miss its former path".⁶⁹ The realm through which *ba* moves belongs to Osiris (it is the intermediate *mundus imaginalis*, Duat, the body of Nut-Hathor, or the World Soul), while the realm of *akh* is that of Ra. Therefore *akh* means intelligence, spiritual light, "the shining one", represented by the crested ibis, the symbol of Thoth. The references to the *akh* are associated with the soul's homecoming, return to the divine source, the end of philosophical ascent, i.e., reaching the intelligible realm, *hyperouranios topos* of Plato's *Phaedrus*. When *ba* is transformed and its ascent is accomplished, it becomes an imperishable and immortal *akh*, a "shining spirit", a star irradiating intelligible light, a son of Ra. Thus the *akh* is the *ba* divinized, realizing the ultimate precept of self-knowledge: to become like a god.

If we compare this teaching with certain passages of Plato's *Phaedrus*, we should see that (1) *akh* (or the related body of light, *sal*) corresponds to *ochema* for the soul outside the cycles of material existence, (2) *ba* – to the winged soul when it is involved in a series of descents and ascents, (3) *ka* – with the vegetative or nutritive soul which is needed when the higher soul is actually embodied and which serves as an intermediary between the immortal immaterial soul and the material mortal body.

The upper vehicle is usually called *angoeides* by the Neoplatonists and clearly relates the substance this term describes to light, though at the same time distinguishes it from light as such. Most of the Neoplatonists regarded light as closest to the immaterial and purely noetic entities. In the *De anima* commentary, attributed to Simplicius, we have only one soul vehicle as a single substance described by three terms: *aitherodes* (aether-like), *angoeides* (light-like), and *pneumatikos* (being made of *pneuma*).⁷⁰

The Alexandrian Neoplatonist Hermias used the term *angoeides* to describe not the soul, but the upper Heavens (*hyperouranios topos*) to which

the divinely led procession of the *Phaedrus* myth aspires (*In Phaedr.*144.26-28). This is the realm of *akhw* described as being like light. The procession led by the royal boat of Ra is analogous to that depicted in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

It seems as if the early Hellenic philosophers (or rather "physiologists") who encountered traditional Egyptian thought were somehow unhappy with its symbols and images when they started to search for an unconditioned unifying ground of reality. However, this unifying ground cannot be simply reduced to "nature" understood in the banal modern sense. Being the cause of Intellect, the first Principle transcends the noetic realm of Ra, therefore it is unknown even to the gods and *akhw*. It is "nowhere", though figuratively described by such names as Waters (*mw*), Flood (*hbw*), Darkness (*kek*), and Chaos (*tnmw*). This Flood is tantamount to the ineffable "substance" of the universe that enveloped the primordial Monad, along with Shu, "the begetter to repeated millions, out of the Flood, out of the Waters" (*CT* 76.33-34). Therefore Atum, in the depths of the Flood prefigured as Nun-Atum, may proclaim as follows:

"I am the Waters, unique, without second.
That is where I developed (*hpr.n.jm*)...
So, the Flood is subtracted from me:
See, I am the remainder...
I am the one who made me" (*CT* 714).

13. Pythagorean Numbers and their Paradigms

P. A. Kwasniewski regards the disciples of Pythagoras as "bringing to completion the programme adumbrated in Thales and developed by the *phusiologoi* after him",⁷¹ though this "programme", far from being simply a physiological pursuit, is the creative adaptation and prolongation of Egyptian theological ideas of divine unity, order and harmony. According to Iamblichus, that "truly godlike (*ho theios alethos*) man, who ranks next to Pythagoras and Plato" (*Julian Ep.*2), Pythagoras, after going to Pherecydes and Anaximander, visited Thales of Miletus who

"laying stress on his advanced age and the infirmities of his body, advised him to go to Egypt, to get in touch with the priests of Memphis and Zeus (i.e., Ammun). Thales confessed that the instruction of these priests was the source of his own reputation for wisdom... Thales insisted that, in view of all this, if Pythagoras should study with those priests, he was certain of becoming the wisest and most divine of men" (*Vita Pyth.*2).⁷²

Iamblichus tells us that Pythagoras spent many years in the Egyptian sanctuaries of temples, studying astronomy and geometry, and being initiated in all the mysteries of the gods. Later Pythagoras introduced the

symbolical method of teaching, in a manner similar to that in which he had been instructed in Egypt.

The Pythagorean excessive concern with numbers (claiming that all is number at the level of principles) reflects their seeking for the ultimate source and eidetic structure of material forms through mathematical theology. By revealing a formal structure underlying all outward appearances, a hidden unity behind multiplicity, they turned towards the archetypes (*paradeigmata*) which transcend material things and function as intelligible and animating principles. The Syrian Neoplatonist Iamblichus, who in his doctrines followed “true philosophical tradition” that included not only Pythagoras, Plato and to certain extent Aristotle, but also Orpheus, Egyptians, and Chaldeans, introduced the Pythagorean *paideia* in his philosophical school (probably in Apamea by the 290’s A.D.). He sometimes identified the gods with *arithmoi* (numbers) arguing that arithmology, which is inseparable both from contemplation and hieratic ritual, serves the purification of the soul. Arguing that for Iamblichus the gods themselves were the administrators of theurgic rites, Gregory Shaw says:

“From the monad through the decad numbers were deities, each revealing specific characteristics and functions in manifestation. Since theurgy ritually imitated the laws of cosmogony, it necessarily imitated the laws of arithmogony... Thus to account for the differences in theurgy while retaining its universal transcendent effects as unification, the Pythagorean notion of distribution referred to in Plato’s *Gorgias* may be suggestive. Socrates mentions the ‘great power of geometric equality amongst gods and men’: that to each there was an appropriate measure, and that this proportionality was the law of justice and friendship, which gave order to the world and made it a ‘cosmos’ (508bc). Applied to theurgic experiences, this principle retains the transcendent sameness of the rites while taking into account their contextual difference. We may, then, speak of geometrically equivalent theurgies, bestowing proportionately the same degree of unification in each ritual. Such unifications could be represented arithmetically, using quantitative ‘differences’ to represent the degrees of involvement in multiplicity, while following a law of proportionate ‘sameness’ and thus preserving a geometric equality”.⁷³

In certain respects, the Pythagorean numbers and figures are the species of things: if not the Forms and the gods themselves, then their manifestations and symbols at the level of mathematical reality. As the first principles and their constructive irradiations, they are *neteru* and *bau* of the Egyptians. The word *neter* (*ntr*), feminine *neteret* (*ntrt*), plural *neteru* and *neterut* respectively, is often pictured by the sign of “staff wrapped with cloth”, or “cult flag”, perhaps originally related to (1) the practice of embalming (the process of becoming like a god), (2) the wrappings of a mummy which itself represents an ideal *sab* body turned into divine *eidōs*, and (3) the idea of unity. The *neteru* are the causes of phenomena and

preside over their forms, qualities and the modes which are revealed by number. Hieroglyphic writing used *rekhbet* for “number”. In this sense, number is the paradigm of the universe exemplified by the mystery of the One becoming Two and Three, thus constituting Unity in Trinity as Atum-Shu-Tefnut or Amun-Ra-Ptah.

The mathematical principle permits the derivation of forms of inequality from equality thus illustrating the divine process of manifestation from and return to the source. The paradigmatic relation between the arranged cosmos and numbers makes certain that what is true of numbers and their properties is also true of the structure of the cosmos. According to the Pythagorean tradition, initially based on the Egyptian hieratic teachings and sciences practised in the temples, the virtuous life consists in organizing the irrational, sensible, material by the rational, intelligible, immaterial thus producing perfect order. D. J. O’Meara summarizes the discussion on the formal properties of numbers, the Platonic Forms (the models of universe), and philosophical life, launched by Nicomachus of Gerasa, as follows:

“This ethical cosmology echoes in the soul that achieved by the divine demiurge in the universe. Not only do numbers then hold the keys to understanding the organization of the world; they also contain principles which constitute standards for the ethical life”.⁷⁴

Pythagorean and Platonic mathematics deal with realities that are intermediary between (1) immaterial and indivisible intelligibles and (2) material and divisible sensibles (the realm of *khat* which constitutes the visible body of Ptah, or Geb). Thus occupying the intermediate Osirian kingdom, mathematical objects are immaterial and divisible, higher than sensibles and lower than noetic lights, or demiurgic Forms. According to this tripartite ontological structure, the Platonic sciences are divided into (1) dialectic which leads to the noetic realities, (2) mathematics which investigates mathematical objects regarded as dim images of intelligibles, (3) physics that is concerned with sensibles which are images of mathematical. Therefore what is true in mathematics of the intermediate ontological level in a proper manner reflects what is true in the noetic cosmos; and what is true in mathematics is paradigmatically true in the sensible realm.

It follows that arithmology and geometry are related to discursive thinking (*dianoia*) and imagination (*phantasia*): they are inferior to non-discursive intellectual intuition (*noesis*), because *nous* surpasses *dianoia*, being its source and paradigm. Iamblichus argues that noetic realities are apprehended “by touch” (*kat’ epaphen*, perhaps analogous to *dhawq* in Sufism), whereas mathematical science is approached by reasoning (*dia logon*: *De communi mathematica scientia* 33.19-25). However, the syllogistic logic and mathematical method can lead up to non-discursive intuition thus preparing for union with divine Intellect.

For the Neoplatonists, the soul is the generatrix of mathematical forms and ideas. Therefore mathematical forms are projections (*probolai*) of

forms previously existing in the soul according to noetic patterns. The divine Intellect (*Nous*) is the ultimate source of knowledge, whereas *dianoia*, human understanding, is located at the same level as mathematical objects and images of *phantasia*. Though geometry (a gift of Hermes-Thoth) is coextensive with all existing things, this middle realm, as Proclus pointed out in his Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's *Elements*:

"contains likeness of all intelligible kinds and paradigms of sensible ones; but the forms of the understanding constitute its essence, and through this middle region it (the science of geometry) ranges upwards and downwards to everything that is or comes to be. Always philosophizing about being in the manner of geometry, it has not only ideas but pictures of all the virtues – intellectual, moral, and physical – and presents in due order all the forms of political constitution, showing from its own nature the variety of the revolutions they undergo. In these areas its activity is immaterial and theoretical, but when it touches on the material world it delivers out of itself a variety of sciences – such as geodesy, mechanics, and optics – by which it benefits the life of mortals" (*In Euclid*. II.62-63).

Therefore *Nous* measures the revolutions of soul as the One measures the life of *Nous* itself, for the One is the measure of all things. When the soul reverts to *Nous*, she is said to move in a circle, according to Proclus, because the first and simplest and most perfect of figures is the circle which corresponds to the Pythagorean Limit (*peras*), the number one and all the things in the column of the better, odd, right, light, good, square and so on (*ibid.*147.8-19). The main metaphysical concepts are depicted using geometrical imagination and the language of geometry: the circular form is assigned to the Heavens (Nut) and the straight line to the world of generation. Thus, through the geometrical exercises one can move towards the circle and its centre, since the centre (being at rest) is more honourable than any other non-central position, according to the Pythagoreans. The closer to the Intellect (the Sun god Ra moving round in a circle through the body of Nut, or the celestial Nile) the soul attains, the more it dances (*perichoreueian*) around it. Likewise, Intellect dances around the One (Procl. *In Parm.*1072.12). The One is beyond (*epekeina*) all intellective substances, as the intellective principle (or nature, *noera phusis*) is beyond all souls, and the soul's essence (*he psuches ousia*) is beyond all bodies.

Since the soul proceeds from *Nous* (Atum-Ra), she also returns to *Nous* through the intermediate levels of being governed by the Osirian rhythms. Just as Nature stands above her visible figures and shapes, so the Soul projects onto the macrocosmic and microcosmic Imagination, as onto a mirror, the Ideas of the noetic figures, thus offering to the human soul (the down and up moving *ba* which belongs to the Osirian realm of *mundus imaginalis*) an opportunity for transformation and turning inward to the kingdom of intelligible light.

14. Standing on the Solar Barque

Mathematics prepares the soul for the study of intelligibles; therefore Iamblichus provides the following interpretation of the Pythagorean cryptic utterance (*symbolon*) “Do not cut in two what is on the road”:

“Philosophy indeed, it seems, is a road. [The utterance] means then: choose that philosophy and that road to wisdom in which you will not ‘cut in two’, in which you will propound, not contradictions, but firm and unchanging truths strengthened by scientific demonstrations through sciences (*mathematon*) and contemplation (*theorias*), that is, philosophize in the Pythagorean manner (*Pythagorikos*)... That philosophy which travels through corporeal things and sense-objects, which more recent thinkers immoderately adopt (thinking god and the qualities and soul and the virtues and simply all prime causes in reality are body), is slippery and easily reversible – witness the very different accounts of it – whereas the philosophy which progresses through immaterial eternal intelligible objects that always remain the same and do not admit in themselves of destruction or change, [this philosophy], like its subject-matter, is unerring and firm...” (*Protrepticus* 118.7-26).

The aim of this firm and perennial philosophy consists in contemplating the One, the goal of all contemplation, thus being able to see “from here, as if from a watch-tower, God and all in this train of God” (*ibid.* 23.21ff). This train of God is analogous to the train of Ra who moves standing on the solar barque with his “entourage of flame”. The gods who are on the prow of the solar barque include Isis, Seth, and Horus, and those on the stern - Hu (creative Word, *Logos*), Sia (Wisdom, Perception), and Ra, or solar Intellect, himself. They are the models of imitation and objects of contemplation for those who approach the solar barque, moving in a circle, i.e., for those who are in a sense “philosophers”. The Roman Emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus describes philosophers (including the Egyptians, who “reckon up the names of not a few wise men among themselves”, the successors of Hermes, as well as the Chaldeans and Assyrians, the successors of Oannes and Belos, and Hellenes, the successors of Cheiron, the Centaur who taught Achilles and is a prototype of the true spiritual master) as follows:

“The philosophers bid us imitate the gods so far as we can (*mimēisthai keleuousin hēmas hoi philosophoi kata dunamin tous theous*), and they teach us that this imitation consists in the contemplation of realities (*en theoria ton onton*). And that this sort of study is remote from passion and is indeed based on freedom from passion, is, I suppose, evident, even without my saying it. In proportion then as we, having been assigned to the contemplation of realities, attain to freedom from passion, in so far do we become like God” (*kata tousouton exomoioumetha to theo: Kata Galilaion logos* I.171 de).

To become like God, for the Egyptian priests, is to become sun-like, to be transformed into *akh* and eventually to be identified with Ra himself. According to the *Book of Two Ways*, produced in the early Middle Kingdom by the XII Dynasty (c.1994-1781 B.C.) priests of the temple of Thoth in Hermopolis, at least 1400 years before Pythagoras, “this is the true mystery of Ra”, namely, to arrive at “the place of a perfect spirit who shall be a god himself” (CT 1116/87). The perfect sage, or rather his transformed *ba* which is analogous to the winged soul of the philosopher in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, is “a spirit who knows how to enter the flame” (ibid.), i.e., the intelligible realm. Such is the soul of one “who knows” and therefore is “a holy god in the suite of Thoth” (CT 1035/6): his is “the clear way” (CT 1135/5) and “his is light” (CT 1137/11).

The lover of Wisdom (of Sia, who stands on the prow of the solar barque) is a follower of Thoth, and the way of Thoth leads towards the house of *maat*. When the initiate restores his primordial noetic nature and is united with the archetypal source, he can proclaim: “I have inherited the horizon of Ra. I am Atum” (CT 1063/34). The deceased or the initiate (who is “dead” in relation to passions and his lower human self, including the fish-like material body) is united with Ra and now appears not as a separate individuality (which is “annihilated” by the spiritual flames during his ascent), but as the immortal solar Intellect, Ra, “the companion of Thoth”. As the traditional iconography depicts, he (as the universal hypostasis of the King, Son of Ra, who integrates and unites all multiplicities) stands before Hu and Sia, and other gods at the back of the solar barque. Being in the “entourage of flame”, he helps to guide the solar barque and “conducts the sacred writings to the god, Ra” (CT 1067/38).

The true gnostic, who knows truth and his own real identity, may also be designated as belonging to the entourage of Thoth which consists of *rhyt* (*rekhyt*) or *rhymt* (*rekhekhyut*), rendered by Leonard H. Lesko as “common folk” and “celebrated ones” respectively.⁷⁵ However, the term *rekh* means “knowledge”, and Thoth is no less than the supreme master and cause of any knowledge, especially that which concerns the liberation and elevation of the soul, thus putting her in the train of Thoth himself. The dark and mysterious text runs as follows:

“You have made the entourage from your common folk. I cause that they reach you. The one who shines in the night is Ra. As for any person who is in his train, he lives forever among the followers of Thoth. It is in the night that he is made to appear and Osiris is gladdened since he is the unique one who suffered more than he did, after having been placed among his followers in the entourage” (CT 1098/69). Another version is slightly different: “This is the great one from whom the sky came to be. As for any person who will be in his followers, he will live in the entourage of Thoth and he will be made to appear in the night in the joy

of Osiris. You are the son of the one who suffers alone. His father has been given to him in his entourage” (ibid.).

In Julian’s version of Neoplatonism, inherited from Iamblichus and his school, the undefiled and pure soul, that of Heracles for instance, is regarded as superior to the purest aether. It was in this perfect condition before the Demiurge sent it to the earth and again after its philosophical and theurgic return to the Father. Of Heracles, who serves as a model for the philosophical life and ascent, it is said that he “has returned, one and indivisible, to his Father one and indivisible” (*Or. V.*, p.467 Wright).

In the Egyptian *Book of Two Ways*, the All-lord (the Creator Atum-Ra who sets up the king on the earth as his living image, Tut) asserts that whereas the gods are created from his sweat (divine perfume), human beings are from the weeping of his Eye: like tears they fall down into the material bodies of flesh. However, after “making their hearts to cease forgetting the West”, i.e., introducing “philosophy” as a way of remembrance and homecoming, he opened the path of return leading upwards. Those who travel this path are able “to lift up their names to the rays of his face”, i.e., to be (1) like Osiris in the midst of the Duat and (2) like Ra in the sky. Since the epistrophic movement to the noetic realm presupposes appeasing, harmonizing, and transcending of all opposites, the initiate says:

“I come into the presence of the All-lord. I made the two warriors (i.e., Horus and Seth, the Pythagorean Table of Opposites) content” (*CT* 1125/96).

This harmonization, accomplished through the guidance of Thoth, corresponds to reaching the house of truth and justice (*maat*). The Pythagoreans and Plato inherited this idea of “setting one’s house in order” by self-mastery and bringing into tune all parts of the psychosomatic entity or dismembered Osiris who must be restored and attuned “like the proportion of a musical scale, the highest and lowest notes and the mean between them, with all the intermediate intervals” (*Rep.*443df). When all dismembered parts are united in a well-tempered harmony and animated by the theurgic power of Isis and Thoth, the initiate becomes like a living image of the temple-like “universal man”, instead of many scattered fragments (a “house-divided”). The knowledge which presides over such transformation is wisdom, accompanied by justice which ensures (according to geometrical proportion) that each part of the whole receives what it is due.

At the level of *anima mundi* the initiate, who died already before his actual death, i.e. who discovered, awakened, and separated his *ba* from the gross mortal body, is united with Osiris, the king of an intermediate realm:

“I stand with Osiris when he stands. O Osiris, your *ba* comes to you. Open your throat. Take Osiris to Osiris” (*CT* 1120/91).

He identifies himself with one of the gods who support the sky and announce the arrival of the solar barque of Ra. Finally he pronounces:

"I am a follower of Ra who receives his iron, who replaces (or adorns) the god in the shrine, Horus who ascends to his lord. The seat was hidden in the purification of the chapel of the messenger of the God to her whom he loved. I am the one who rescued Maat after he caused his image to ascend. I am the one who knotted the rope and bound his chapel. The storm was my abomination... I have not been opposed by Ra. I have not been repulsed by him who acts with his hands. I have not walked in the valley of darkness. I have not entered into the lake of criminals. I have not been in the heat of the striking force [of God]... The holiness of God is secret. The arms of Geb rise early in the morning. Who will lead the great ones and count children at his proper time? Thoth is inside the secrets that he may make offerings to the one who counted millions and who is counted, who opened the firmament and dispelled bleariness from him after I reached him in his seat... I adore Ra that he may listen to me and that he may remove an obstacle for me. I was not turned back from the horizon. I am Ra. I was not boatless in the great crossing. It is 'He-whose-face-is-on-his-knees' who extended his arm, since the name of Ra was in my belly and his rank was in my mouth. I say it to him and I am the one who hears his words. Adoration to you, O Ra, lord of the horizon. O Ra, hail to you for whom the sun-folk purify themselves and for whom the sky acts as controller rather than the great striking force [of God] which the courses of the rebellious pass. I have come among those who herald Maat..." (CT 1099/70).

Hearing this dark and inspiring account, one should remember, first, that the mythical discourse is woven by images and symbols which might be subjugated to different exoteric and esoteric interpretations and are regarded as being "revealed", because "the gods wished to teach us in symbolic fashion (*didaskonton hemas oimai ton theon symbolikos*), that we must pluck the fairest fruits from the earth, namely, virtue and piety" (Julian *Or.* V, p.473 Wright).

Second, that it is inseparable from the ritual which serves as a necessary means of elevation for those who "by nature belong to the heavens but have fallen to earth, to reap the harvest of our constitution here on earth, namely, virtue and piety, and then strive upwards to the goddess [i.e., the Phrygian Mother of the gods who may be equated also to Hathor, Nut, Neith or Isis of the Egyptians] of our forefathers, to her who is the principle of all life" (*Or.* V., p.473).

Third, that the noetic Ra is not identical with the visible Ra, the sun disk (*aten*) adored by Akhenaten. For Julian, who follows the ancient traditions of solar theologies, the visible disk of the sun is only third in rank, surpassed, as it is, by the second sun (Helios-Mithras, ruler of the intellectual gods), and the first intelligible sun which is often identified

with the Good, or the One, as it shows itself in the intelligible realm. The middle and intellectual Helios is regarded (Julian in this respect cites the divine Plato, *Rep.* 508b) as “the offspring of the Good which the Good begat in his own likeness, and that what the Good is in relation to pure *Nous* and its objects in the noetic world, such is the sun in the visible world in relation to sight and its objects”. Therefore “his light has the same relation to the visible world as truth has to the noetic world” (*pros to noeton aletheia*: *Or.* IV, p.361).

The third or visible Helios, nonetheless, is the cause for the visible gods of just as many blessings as the second Helios bestows on the intellectual gods and serves as an anagogic force leading upwards to the invisible principles symbolized by the visible divine form and light. According to the Egyptian New Kingdom theologies, the visible world is heliophany or manifestation (*keheperu*) of the solar God himself, whose name is substituted by the term *neheh* in the Amarna texts. Initially, *neheh* is the inexhaustible noetic plenitude out of which the sun allots individual portions of time to everything existing. By seeing the light (both intelligible and sensible), that is God, the eye (including the inner eye of the soul) is created which is, therefore, sunlike (*helio-eides*).

For the theologians of the XVIII Dynasty, as for Plotinus, the solarly of the eye (or the illuminated human intellect which is “light out of light”, *phos ek photos*) guarantees and reveals the inward presence of the divine, because seeing and knowing are one and the same. Seeing is to be understood in the sense of an intelligible vision, *epopteia*, as well. This possibility of proceeding from inward solarly to inward divinity, of reaching Ra through the solar *gnosis* is denied by Akhenaten for all except the king himself who, however, reduces the intelligible dimension of Ra to the visible *aten*.

As the Emperor Julian explains, light itself is a sort of incorporeal and divine form (*eidos estin asomaton ti theion*), a form coextensive with the heavenly bodies. He says:

“And of light, itself incorporeal, the culmination and flower, so to speak, is the sun’s rays. Now the doctrine of the Phoenicians, who were wise and learned in sacred lore (*ton Phoinikon doxa, sophon ta theia kai epistemonon*), declared that the rays of light everywhere diffused are the undefiled incarnation of pure Intellect. And in harmony with this is our theory, seeing that light itself is incorporeal, if one should regard its fountainhead, not as corporeal, but as the undefiled activity of Intellect (i.e., Helios) pouring light into its own abode...” (*Or.* IV, p.363).

While maintaining that the uplifting rays of the sun “are nearly akin to those who yearn to be set free from generation”, we ought then “to make these visible things proofs of his unseen powers” (*Or.* V., p.481). Since the souls of the blessed philosophers are led upwards by the agency of the invisible, wholly immaterial, divine and pure substance which resides in

the rays of Helios, we can speak of the “solar philosophy” (presided over and directed by Helios-Apollo, Atum-Ra, Amun-Ra, or Horus, along with the great consort goddess, be it Athena, Neith, Hathor, or Isis). This solar philosophy is the same as the most holy and secret mysteries of solar rebirth. So, Julian continues as follows:

“It has also been demonstrated that the god’s rays are by nature uplifting; and this is due to his energy, both visible and invisible, by which very many souls have been lifted up out of the region of the senses, because they were guided by that sense which is clearest of all and most nearly like the sun. For when with our eyes we perceive the sun’s light, not only is it welcome and useful for our lives, but also, as the divine Plato said when he sang its praises, it is our guide to wisdom. And if I should also touch on the secret teaching of the Mysteries (*tes arrhetou mustagogias*) in which the Chaldean, divinely frenzied, celebrated the God of the Seven Rays, that god through whom he lifts up the soul of men, I should be saying what is unintelligible, wholly unintelligible to the common herd, but familiar to the happy theurgists (*theourgois de tois makariois gnorima*: Or. V., p.483).

15. Celestial Nile as the Cause of Geometry

The Pythagorean claim that ten is “complete at four” refers to the Tetraktys, established on the natural sequence of numbers: $1+2+3+4=10$. The Tetraktys, arranged into the sacred triangle, represents both an archetypal unity of all reality and a model for the gradual procession from the indescribable light of unity to the level of sensibles. This means the coming forth from the One (though the One is not diminished and remains intact in its transcendent fullness) to the Many and the final return back to the One.

Since the procession (*proodos*) and reversion (*epistrophe*) are not chronological or temporal events in the usual sense, they constitute a single movement where each thing reverts in its own proper mode. There is no real distinction between procession and reversion, which are descriptions of the ontological status of any determinate being. Procession (descent) is the cause giving itself to the effect as the perfection by which it is; though the One, as universal cause being “everywhere and nowhere”, is both transcendent and causally present to all things. Reversion (ascent) is the effect receiving the cause as the perfection (*telos*) by which it is. To be is to be intelligible, to have the noetic paradigm or divine root. The One is both the beginning and the end, the *arche* and the *telos* of all things. Therefore:

“The entire Neoplatonic pattern of exitus and reditus, the emergence of all things from the One or Good and their return to him, is simply the

expression, in dynamic terms, of their participation in him as ‘measure of all things’”.⁷⁶

The same could be said regarding the manifestations (*keheperu*) of Amun (*jmnw*) who, despite the creative theophanies, himself remains hidden:

“The One who created himself, whose appearance (*qj*) is unknown.

Perfect aspect, which developed into a sacred emanation.

Who built his processional images and created himself by himself.

Perfect icon (*sekhem nefer*), whom his heart made perfect.

Manifestation of manifestation (*keheperu keheperu*), model of birth” (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.40.1-8).

“The Ennead is combined in your body: your image is every god”... (*ibid.* I.350.90.1-2).

This hymn, consecrated to Amun-Ra, is constructed as a series of plays on words and numbers, therefore its inner structure itself reflects the procession from the One to the ordered Manyness. The Pythagorean Tetraktys, whose nine strokes or dots represent the Great Ennead of Heliopolis grouped around the tenth or rather the first dot, the ineffable and incomprehensible One, is also derived from Egypt. In the temple of Amun-Ra in Karnak the Tetraktys is expanded into the Pentactys – from nine to fifteen hypostases of Amun-Ra – “twelve strokes encircling the divine creative triangle, and representing this triangle manifested”.⁷⁷ Amun-Ra emerges from Nun who stands for the hidden side of Amun himself. This noetically manifested Scarab, Amun-Ra, is the supreme paradigm of being and creator of everything. To put it in Procline terms, *Nous* is everything after the manner of intellect, and *Psuche* is everything after the manner of soul:

“If *Nous* is exemplar, soul is copy; if *Nous* is everything in concentration, soul is everything discursively” (*ET* 16).

The hypostasis of Intellect and that of universal Soul constitute the compound of Ra and Osiris, both at the cosmological level of divine macrocosm and the eschatological level of human microcosm.

To move from the sensible world of images and multiplicity of material bodies to the noetic multiplicity in unity is possible through the contemplation of geometrical figures, diagrams, and symbols (analogous to the Hindu *yantras* and *mandalas*), projected in the Imagination which occupies, according to Proclus, the central position in the scale of knowing:

“When it (*phantasia*) draws its objects from the undivided centre of its life, it expresses them in the medium of division, extension, and figure. For this reason everything that it thinks is a picture or shape of its thought” (*In Euclid* 52-53).

Since the geometer wishes to move from divisible figures presented in Imagination (passive *Nous*) to the partless, indivisible, unextended figures of divine *Nous*, he investigates the universal present in the imagined circle

(which is “one and many”, falling short of the purity and perfection of immaterial circles), bearing in mind that the universal is not merely a picture in the Imagination, but an archetypal reality which displays indivisible noetic unity. As the ascending *ba* must be transformed and turned into *akh* (thereby transcending the psychic realm of Osiris), so the geometer, as a follower of Hermes-Thoth, must leave aside the entire sensible realm and the Osirian Netherworld.

Various sciences serve as a means of ascending from the more partial to the more general until the science of being as being is reached, and this science contemplates the single form of being that belongs to all things. Therefore geometry working with the aid of imagination is able to bring about recollection of eternal ideas in the soul. *Mathematike* (or *mathesis*, learning) shows the innate knowledge and purges understanding, taking away forgetfulness and ignorance, setting the soul free from the bonds of unreason by the favour of Hermes-Thoth. This god, according to Proclus, “is truly the patron of this science, who brings our intellectual endowments to light, fills everything with divine reason, moves our souls towards *Nous*, awakens us as it were from our heavy slumber, through our searching turns us back upon ourselves, through our birth-pangs perfects us, and through the discovery of pure *Nous* leads us to the blessed life” (*In Euclid*. I.47).

Proclus does not forget to mention (probably basing his account on a history composed by Eudemus of Rhodes, a pupil of Aristotle) that Thales, traditionally counted as one of the Seven Sages, was the first to bring this science from Egypt to Greece, arguing that every true geometer should move from imagination to pure noetic understanding with each theorem laying the basis for a step upwards and drawing the soul to the higher world. Thus, following the Platonic division of knowing and being to 1) the highest, 2) the intermediate, and 3) the lowest grades of reality, Proclus says:

“But if it should ever be able to roll up its extensions and figures and view their plurality as a unity without figure, then in turning back to itself it would obtain a superior vision of the partless, unextended, and essential geometrical ideas that constitute its equipment. This achievement would itself be a perfect culmination of geometrical inquiry, truly a gift of Hermes, leading geometry out of Calypso’s arms, so to speak, to more perfect intellectual insight and emancipating it from the pictures projected in imagination” (*In Euclid*. II.55).

Proclus regards the Nile as a symbol of the life which is poured on the whole world (*In Tim*. I.96). Accordingly, “the Nile is the cause to the Egyptians of many and all-various goods, viz. of geometry, of the generation of fruits... Its water also preserves their bodies, and the divinity that connectedly contains this body, elevates their souls” (*In Tim*. I.118). If the Nile is the cause of geometry, primarily the celestial Nile is

meant, that which is equivalent to Osiris and, ultimately, to the rejuvenating primordial Waters of Nun. In its immanent aspect, this Water of life, immortality, and regeneration is manifested, in different fashions and manners, through all levels of being. Therefore the Egyptian priests knowing that “there are likewise divine mysteries, some powers initiating, and others being initiated”, regarded the destruction through water and fire as purification, not corruption (ibid. I.119). Geometry also serves this aim of purification leading the soul, likened to Odysseus, away from Calypso’s charms and tortures.

16. The Apollonian Road to Rebirth

The ancients held that there is nothing that cannot be cured by philosophy and theurgy. Philosophy serves to purify from all lower modes of life, habits, and desires, providing understanding and strengthening virtues. For the supreme virtue teaches souls to cling to the truth which is “most clearly manifest in the worship of the Divine Being” (Julian *Ep.*82). And the theurgic rites, bestowed by the gods themselves (“since it is evident that the gods gave them to us”: *Ep.*20), benefit both soul and body:

“The gods when they exhort those theurgists who are especially holy, announce to them that their ‘mortal husk of raw matter’ shall be preserved from perishing” (*Or.* V., p.499).

Therefore Julian, who faithfully follows tradition and avoids innovation in all things, but especially in what concerns the gods (*Ep.*20), describes the graceful power of the hieratic rites as follows:

“For when the soul abandons herself wholly to the gods, and entrusts her own concerns absolutely to the higher powers, and then follows the sacred rites – these too being preceded by the divine ordinances – then, I say, since there is nothing to hinder or prevent – for all things reside in the gods, all things subsist in relation to them, all things are filled with the gods (*kai panta ton theon esti plere*) – straightway the divine light illumines our souls” (*Or.* V, p.497).

Since philosophy concerns the contemplation of realities (*ta onta*) and elevating knowledge which prepares the soul for the divine vision and reunion with the archetypal principles, it is not at variance with the Mysteries performed for human perfection and salvation. The end and aim of the rite of purification is “the ascent of our souls” (*Or.* V, p.489), and this is the aim of philosophy as well, though achieved by rather different means and methods. But if philosophy is “knowledge of the things that are”, according to Ammonius, son of Hermeias, the Alexandrian philosopher of the 5th century, and the world which is (*panta ta onta*) presents itself as the harmonious play of divine powers (*dunameis*),

mysterious symbols and tokens (*sunthemata*), then the thirst for the marvellous is not incompatible with the strictly rational and logical inquiry.

Sosipatra from Ephesus became a “philosopher” not through conventional learning but because she, as a young girl, was initiated into the Chaldean wisdom by two old men who belonged to some divine race or were “gods disguised as strangers”. Eunapius, who exercised a high priestly function of hierophant at the mystery cult of Eleusis and was convinced that the ancient gods were not dead, but still walked on the earth and took care of chosen ones, says about Sosipatra as follows:

“As she reached full maturity, never having any other teachers, the works of the [great] poets, philosophers, and orators were [constantly] on her lips and texts that others had spent a great deal of painstaking trouble over [and] understood only dimly and with difficulty she could interpret casually, effortlessly, and with ease, making meaning clear with her light, swift touch”.⁷⁸

If Sosipatra and her son Antoninus, who “reached affinity with the divine, and applied himself to the wisdom that is unknown to the crowd”, are regarded as philosophers, what does “philosophy” mean for the ancients? According to Eunapius, Antoninus established himself at the mouth of the Nile, close to Alexandria, and devoted himself completely to Plato’s philosophy and the Egyptian rites as they were practised there:

“All the young men who were healthy in mind and thirsted for philosophy studied with him, and the temple was full of candidates of the priesthood”.⁷⁹

It is clear that philosophy, as understood by Antoninus (who died A.D.390), radically differs from the modern conception: it includes inner transformation and an approach to the divine. Mediterranean philosophy has developed within the chains of transmission kept by the priests of Apollo and Persephone. In its post-Homeric form, *philosophia* (not designated yet by this late Pythagorean term) reveals itself as the tradition of iatromantis (spiritual healers) and lawgivers, based on continuous revelations received from above, from the world of the *kourotropos*, “nurturer of the *kouros*”. The last term means “a young man” in the sense of an initiate, like *fata* in Arabic and *javanmard* in Persian. The *kouros* is not just a human figure, but the representation and reflection (*eikon*) of the divine *kouros*, Apollo. This is the charming glow of youth (*chariestate hebe*), of “eternal youth” proper to the gods. Therefore Athena, touching Odysseus (who is regarded as a model of philosophical life) with the golden wand, “gives him back his handsome bearing and his youth” (*Od.* XVI.173-183).

In certain respects, Apollo (from Akkadian *abullu*), the initiator into philosophy as a “solar way”, could be equated to al-Khidr of the Sufis. The Apollonian road is the road of the archetypal Sun, Ra-Osiris, who is the chief Mystagogue of the entire cosmos. Therefore a philosophical

journey is the mimetic and ritual-like journey of the hero, like Heracles and Orpheus, to the Netherworld, the Egyptian Duat, where all the opposites meet. This is the process of 'dying before death' and resurrection. Since Apollo shares his oracular powers with Night, the archaic "philosopher" is a priest and a prophet both of Apollo and Night. He is a spiritual healer who knows the words of power. As the initiate, the "philosopher" approaches the Sun (the symbol of the divine Intellect and the One) and through the Sun he is born again. This man is also a "physician" (*phusikos*), because he is concerned with the basic principles of being. According to P. Kingsley, "philosophy had developed as something all-embracing and intensely practical",⁸⁰ including a sort of *kundalini-yoga* and healing through dreams and oracles. Parmenides, the disciple of the Pythagorean Ameinias, who introduced a logic that questions everything, himself was an Ouliades, a priest of Apollo.

Philosophy should not be restricted to the analysis of language and logic as has happened in modern times. Until the end of the Graeco-Roman world, philosophy was regarded as a mystery into which one may be initiated. Plato himself uses the mystery-language, though in some respects he "betrayed" or at least "reclothed" the true Parmenidean and Orphic tradition. Proclus, who tried to harmonize *logos* and *muthos*, the Hellenic rational metaphysics and ancient mythologies, speaks of Plato's teaching as *mustagogia* (the guidance of the initiates into mysteries) and *epopteia* (the ineffable vision), viewing Plato himself as the leader and hierophant to the truest rites (*teletai*). The Middle Platonist Theon of Smyrna distinguished five stages in philosophical initiation: purification, communication of the ritual, mystical vision (*epopteia*), "adornment with garlands", and "the joy that comes from unity and converse with the gods".⁸¹

According to some modern scholars, the new way of thinking attributed to Thales involved the search for a non-mythical origin for the cosmos and required arguments supporting the conclusions reached. But the picture of Thales himself, stored in the imagination of later generations, stands at variance with the general ancient picture of the sage (*sophos*) who must be an extremely practical servant of the gods: the priest, magician, healer, lawgiver, teacher, and the guide of souls, at one and the same time. If philosophy is regarded as the emancipation of discursive reason (*dianoia*) from the previously integral structure of the whole traditional culture, deeming all things in the city (*polis*) to be trifling and of no value, then philosophy really comes to be equal to the abstract stargazing and discursive reasoning about ghostly principles.

The philosopher Thales is so caught up in contemplation that he takes no notice of the path ahead and falls into a well, making himself the laughing-stock of "a witty and attractive Thracian servant-girl who is said to have mocked Thales for falling into a well while he was observing stars

and gazing upwards, declaring that he was eager to know the things in the sky, but that what was behind him and just by his feet escaped his notice” (Plato *Theaetetus* 174a).

Iamblichus is ready to turn into virtue the ridiculous naivety of the philosopher who gets into all sorts of embarrassments because of his ignorance, and behaves so awkwardly that people look upon him as a madman:

“It is said, for example, that Thales astronomizing and looking intently upward fell into a well, and a bright and lively Thracian girl taunted him about the accident, saying that in his eagerness to know what was in heaven he could not see what was around him and under his feet. Now the same taunt is good for all students of Philosophy. They are indeed ignorant of what their nearest neighbour is about, and almost whether or not he is a human being”.⁸²

This view about philosophy is accepted not for the sake of a discursive rationalism. Rather there is a desire to show the anagogic and soteriological nature of philosophical theology: not simply contemplation but eventual “emigration” to the transcendental realm is regarded as the main philosophical task. The Middle Platonists and Plotinus already eliminated politics from philosophy and spiritualized the latter. But despite the unreal political dreams, even for Plato himself the ultimate task of philosophy (which involved all sorts of rational thought and logical argumentation) is not to learn dialectical methods for their own sake but to regain the soul’s wings and return to the celestial abode. The Platonic way leading to the archetypal star imitates the Egyptian way of ascent, once restricted to the king, equated with Horus, the son of Ra, and later followed by the initiated philosophers who tried to accomplish this spiritual ascent before actual physical death. This path conforms with the Orphic esoterism and with the archaic belief in the soul’s journey through the Milky Way (*kuklos galaxias*).

The aim of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy is a return to the habitation of the soul’s consort star and an experience of the subsequent bliss (*Tim.*41-42). Those who have devoted themselves to philosophy are able to ascend “to mansions even more beautiful than these” (*Phaed.*114bc) and to join the company of the gods gazing at the world of true Being. They contemplate the region which “belongs to Being as it really is – without colour or shape, untouchable, perceptible only to the soul’s pilot, the intellect, which is concerned with the genus of true knowledge” (*Phaedr.*247c). Though intellectual purification and recollection (*anamnesis*) are counted among the most important means to reach the aetherial home-star and the company of the gods, nonetheless, the inspired divine “madness” (*mania*) is regarded as surpassing all purely rational understanding.

Consequently, the hieratic arts cannot be understood as something incompatible with philosophy, when viewed as a stairway to the noetic cosmos constituted by Being, Life, and Intelligence. Since true Being is “visible to nous alone, the pilot of the soul” (*Phaedr.*247c), which is not discursive, dialectic cannot in principle grant the comprehensive understanding of reality (or union with the divine principles themselves), though both Socrates and Plato take the position that only dialectic is an appropriate medium for initial philosophizing. However, by making a distinction between *sophia* and *doxosophia*, between “truly understanding” and “seeming to be much knowing”, Plato strongly emphasizes that while the human soul aspires to the divine, its highest achievement is to follow Zeus, not to usurp him. In his most important cosmological speculations, Plato uses mythical accounts, because a myth, unlike a syllogism, has the capacity to act as a complex mirror in which we can recognize not only who we are but also who we might become beyond our restricted earthly existence. As Ch. L. Griswold argues:

“The message of the *Phaedrus* is clear: philosophy is a form of private eros, and it is essentially nobler and higher than the political concerns and the public rhetoric of the polis. Philosophical madness cannot double as political doctrine without losing its divinity.”⁸³

Neoplatonic theurgy is also based on the anagogic interpretation of the philosophical myths that provide the background of Egyptian, Chaldean, and Orphic esoterism. The regret of A. Charles-Saget that unlike Ionian philosophers, who moved from myth to philosophy, Iamblichus moves in the opposite direction,⁸⁴ depends on a too narrow and rationalistic apprehension of philosophy. Though the definition of philosophy as a mental activity or as a purely human reasoning process emerged from Hellenic sources, philosophy is part of a complex of much wider religious and aesthetic aspirations. When Iamblichus criticizes Porphyry for using one single method, called *philosophia*, to examine all subjects, including the inspired myths and theurgic arts, he accuses him of approaching divine mysteries by inadequate means. The problems of the soul’s embodiment and disembodiment, like those of theurgic unification with the gods, must be approached hieratically, not conceptually. They are not to be solved in a discursive mode.

In Iamblichean metaphysics, the human soul, as a particular complex of collected characteristics, is never saved. It can be turned to the gods only as the Egyptian Horus is united to Ra: not as a particular individuality, but as the entire mandala-like structure of irradiations, turned back to their noetic and henadic archetypes, when the divine power (as the immortal microcosmic *eros*) is joined with itself in prayer or theurgic ascent. The soul is only a mean between abiding and proceeding, the ungenerated and the generated. Though our knowledge concerning the gods is both inborn and acquired through the process of education, it

is still divided and cannot actually touch the undivided principles. Iamblichus makes a clear distinction between discursive reasoning (*dianoia*) and intellection (*noesis*), but even *philosophia* and *noesis* do not themselves lead to an actual union with the divine. Along with *noesis*, which acts at different levels of being, something more fundamental and ineffable is required. It is only with the theurgic virtues that the fullest henadic form of the subject-object unity can be achieved.

17. Philosophy as Divine Mystagogy and Beneficial Madness

At the beginning of philosophy as such we do not find a titanic inquiry and a sacrilegious doubt. Philosophy rather begins with 1) the inspired interpretations of divine oracles, epiphanies, and omens, 2) commentaries on the inner meaning of annual cosmogonical and anagogic rites, of sacred calendars, genealogies, and myths of origin. Such primordial “philosophy” is involved in conversation with the community of hieratic forces which permeate the universe. Accordingly, philosophical discourse starts as a mythical *hieros logos* and concerns theophanies and symbols of which the cosmos is woven. Therefore “philosophy” in its purest form is akin to liturgy which enumerates and praises various divine qualities or prototypes of human thought and action. The human being wonders at the face of unspeakable divine manifestations, truths, and beauties that constitute the complex of the visible and invisible worlds, thus proving the harmony between the microcosmic and macrocosmic orders (*taxeis*). This wonder shows the primordial unity of devotion, contemplation, and intentional “erotic” striving for wisdom (*sophia*), able to reveal the countless possibilities in the sphere of skills, arts, technologies, laws, and institutions which are open to different reflections, meditations, and explanations.

“Without philosophy it is impossible to be perfectly pious”, according to the Egyptian Hermetic writer (*Stobaei Hermetica*). In the Hermetic milieu, so inaccurately described as “the underworld of Platonism” by J. Dillon,⁸⁵ philosophy is regarded both as a human science (*episteme*) and divine knowledge (*gnosis*). Thus the successive course from the natural sciences, mathematics, astronomy and music towards the *pura sanctae philosophia* is emphasized. Despite the serious doubts of modern scholars, it is now clear that the so-called Hermetic texts contain authentic versions of the Egyptian theological lore, in agreement with Iamblichus’ assertion that the writings attributed to Hermes (who is the heart and tongue of Ra) contain Hermetic doctrines expressed in philosophical terms, because “they have been translated from Egyptian by scholars versed in philosophy” (*De myster.*265.13-17).

Adherents of different philosophical schools (*haireseis*) regarded philosophy as a mystery into which one may be initiated. This is not just an empty metaphor but rather an indication which reveals the real sources of ancient philosophy understood as a way of purification, interpretation of sacred rites and divine visions. Therefore when Proclus speaks of Plato's teaching as a *mustagogia* and *epopteia*, he is not introducing a startling innovation but simply following the ancient tradition (*paradosis*). At the time of Syrianus and Proclus, the Orphic, Chaldean and other rituals were a part of philosophical practice. Even if one prefers to regard the mystery-language used by Plato himself (*Symp.*209e, *Gorg.*479c, *Theaet.*156a) merely as an instance of his extolled "irony", nevertheless, the most influential philosophical insights of Plato reveal the affinity of true philosophical education with *arrhetos telete* – the "unspeakable initiation". Platonism is modelled on the experience of mysteries. The highest step of philosophy is analogous to *epopteia* – the beatific vision of the Eleusinian mysteries.

Not simply the exegesis of Plato's *Parmenides* but the actual mystical experience gives foundation for negative theology, and this mystical experience (in its original Hellenic sense) does not consist in learning something but in undergoing the initiation into divine epiphanies and preparation for the blessed afterlife. The traditional Hellenic religion sometimes presented the epiphany, or vision, of a particular god as a goal of mystical experience. The Eleusinian mysteries and, in later times, the mysteries of Isis, Mithras as well as the Chaldean rites of ascent (*anagoge*) and Orphic myths served as the models for philosophy. "The One is God" (*to hen theos*), according to Proclus, "for the Good is identical with God, God being that which is beyond all things and to which all things aspire" (*ET* 113). But if a plurality of gods exist, they must have the character of unity, since by the term "gods" here are understood the supreme archetypes or "the first and self-sufficient principles of being" (*tas protistas archas ton onton kai antarkestatas theois apokalousi: Plat. Theol.* I.3.13.6-7). Consequently, "every god is a self-complete henad" (*ET* 114), and "every god is above Being, above Life, and above Intelligence" (*pas theos huperousios esti kai huperzoos kai hupernous: ET* 115). And every god is participate, except the One (*ET* 116). Therefore everything reverts upon its cause and even inanimate objects aspire to imitate the Good: "all things pray except the One", according to Theodorus of Asine (Procl. *In Tim.* I.213.2-3).

There are different levels in philosophical inquiry, according to Syrianus: 1) first philosophy is concerned with intelligible substance; 2) on a lower level is a philosophical discipline dealing with heavenly bodies; 3) finally, there is the study of the sensible world of coming to be and passing away (*In Metaph.*55.13).

The first philosophy, or metaphysics, here is considered to be a theology, a study of divine substance. But since "mythology is a kind of

theology” (*he gar muthologia theologia tis estin*), as Hermeias pointed out (*In Phaedr.* 73.18), mythology is not excluded from philosophy. There is no clear distinction between “theologizing” by writing poetry in which truths about the gods are presented in a veiled form and “theologizing” by interpreting this poetry allegorically.

The aim of philosophy is to rearrange our whole life according to divine prototypes. Therefore philosophy as a “love of wisdom” cannot be reduced to philology – merely a “love of speech”. Philosophical discourse is just one (though the most distinct) among other means that justify our choice of a particular way of life and support us on the spiritual path towards the final truth and enlightenment.

In the traditional Hellenic sense, (1) theology deals with the names, genealogies, theogonies, mythical substances, and iconographies of the gods; (2) philosophical exegesis deals with their metaphysical structure at the same time providing the basis for contemplation of truly existing beings and promising a happy life in accord with intellect; (3) theurgy deals with the sacramental means of ascent towards and actual union with the gods. The relationship between theology (understood either as a theology of inspired poets and prophets, or as the ‘scientific’ post-Aristotelian metaphysics) and philosophy is not very clear. Both of them use the multi-dimensional *logos*, rational discursive reasoning and intellectual intuition (*noesis*), though the former stands much closer to the realm of myth and depends on certain divine revelations adapted to the particular human imagination and sensibility. When Porphyry argues that it is not rational knowledge that leads us to happiness and true contemplation, he makes a distinction between *dianoia* and *noesis*. The unifying, or henadic, power of the gods, however, is above all human intellection, according to Iamblichus, although *noesis* is a necessary element in human co-operation with the divine and in some respects may be regarded as a part of union itself.

Plotinus made a distinction between the “civic virtues” and the “purificatory virtues”. His famous follower, Porphyry the Phoenician, added two other grades: the “theoretic virtues” and the “paradigmatic virtues”, the former being that of the soul of a philosopher which turns to *nous* within itself and contemplates its noetic contents, the latter being the virtue proper to Intellect itself, not the aspiring observer. Iamblichus discerned two additional grades at both ends of the hierarchy: the “natural virtues” at the lowest level and the “hieratic virtues” at the highest. Within this sevenfold hierarchy of virtues, accepted by the later Neoplatonists, theological virtues are the same as the paradigmatic virtues. They are above the theoretic, or properly “philosophical”, virtues, if philosophy is regarded as the way from the realm of sense and lower imagination to the realm of *nous*, passing through the intermediate dianoetical and mathematical levels. But only with theurgic, or hieratic, virtues which

crown the hierarchy and transcend being (*ousia*) as such are we united with the ineffable God which stands at the beginning of one or another particular chain (*seira*) of ontological manifestations.

Porphyry retains an anthropocentric view of human relations with the divine and is convinced that pious actions and reverence for the gods accompanied by virtue and wisdom are enough for the ascent; Iamblichus proves the necessity of synthemata (*sunthemata*) which are *aporrheta symbola* – the ineffable symbols and attributes of the gods – sown by the Demiurge throughout the cosmos in order to serve as a support for mystical remembrance (*anamnesis*). They are the means (*organa*) which transmit the efficient anagogic and henadic power of the transcendental principles. According to A. C. Lloyd, there is no doubt that Iamblichus put theurgy, as liberation of soul, above philosophy:

“But while his philosophy is full of abstract processions and reversions, philosophy was nothing for him if not itself a reversion, a return to the One, though achieving only an incomplete union. Its place can be seen in an almost fantastically elaborated metaphysical system...”⁸⁶

The achievement of divine union (*henosis*) depends on the entire complex of divine causes and powers. They include the proper use of theurgic synthemata (*sunthemata*) and traditional cosmogonical rites, as well as intellectual intuition (*noesis*), rational education and virtues (*aretai*). Therefore Iamblichus tries to reveal the integral connection between sacred liturgies, rituals of cultic worship, interpretation of oracles and the intellectual disciplines of philosophical *paideia*. As G. Shaw pointed out, such an interpretation had been the goal of Plato himself,⁸⁷ since *theourgia* (the term originated among the Middle Platonists to describe the deifying power of Chaldean and Egyptian rites) fulfilled the goal of philosophy understood as a *homoiosis theo*, restoring the “likeness to God” (Plat. *Theaet.*176b). The “likeness to God” is the *telos* of our life and is to be attained by knowledge (*gnosis*), since “knowledge of the gods is virtue and wisdom and perfect happiness, and makes us like to the gods” (Iamb. *Protrep.* ch.3, p.11, 14f).

All Neoplatonic philosophers, including Plotinus, emphasized the ultimate dependence of man on the divine source both ontologically and spiritually, or intellectually. Both cultic practices (invocations, sacrifices, animations of statues) and philosophic education (*paideia*) are rooted in the ineffable power of the gods; therefore the concept of “grace” might be seen even in the Plotinian philosophical concept of *eros*. But whereas traditional Platonic *paideia* had traced an ascent to the gods (or the archetypal stars) through harmonious assimilation to cosmic orders, Plotinus and Porphyry (following the ancient Delphic maxim) transformed the Platonic *homoiosis theo* into a likeness to the inner Self, equated with the divine Intellect. They promoted purely philosophical

rationalism and mysticism, thus threatening to desacralize the traditional cosmos. According to Porphyry:

“In every respect the philosopher is the saviour of himself” (*De abstin.* II.49.2).

For him the philosopher is a priest and not the other way round.⁸⁸ Aristotle considers that self-reflectivity and knowledge of self coincide in God, because in thinking about thinking, God thinks about himself. But the self-knowledge of Intellect (*nous*) is the knowledge of Being (*ousia*), not the knowledge of a private self. For Plotinus and Porphyry our *nous* does not fall into body but ceaselessly operates in the noetic sphere (*Enn.* IV.8.8.1). Therefore by rejecting the Plotinian concept of the undescending noetic summit of our soul – which is always in active contemplation of the divine realities even though “we” (*bemeis*) might have fallen, Iamblichus also rejected the Porphyrian tendency to treat the lower levels of existence as a mere illusion.

Since the cosmos itself should be regarded as paradigmatic theurgy – imitated by the priests in various hieratic rites – *theourgia* is not a mere preparation for the philosophical life, suited to those incapable of philosophical liberation, as Porphyry thought. Rather it may be likened to the multi-levelled trunk of the mythological World Tree which displays theophanies as leaves and reveals the divine powers (*dunameis*) while connecting and uniting the realms of Earth and Heaven. Since Plato himself had acknowledged that his writings are to be regarded merely as a prelude (*propaideia*) to deeper mysteries (*Ep.* VII.341cd), Iamblichus not only argues that Plato’s philosophical teachings are integrally related to the hieratic traditions of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians, but also tries to explain Oriental wisdom using Platonic⁸⁹ and sometimes Aristotelian categories. He believed that Plato himself was initiated into Egyptian and Chaldean mysteries.

The divine origin and mission of Pythagoras (sent down into the material world as a sort of bodhisatva) Iamblichus interpreted in terms of the *Phaedrus* myth (246e-248c). Proclus’ master Syrianus also linked Pythagorean philosophy with the ancient theologians – Orpheus, Homer and the Chaldean sages – not failing to connect the decline in contemporary philosophical insight with the myth of the *Phaedrus* (*In Metaph.* 82.15-20). Since Pythagoras’ revelation with its concern for immaterial realities stands for all that is true in Hellenic philosophy, both Plato and Aristotle (to the extent that the latter remains faithful to the Pythagorean tradition) are regarded as Pythagoreans by Iamblichus. He not only adopted and Pythagoreanized Aristotelian logic, but also mathematized all areas of philosophy.⁹⁰ The traditional conceptions of the gods and the physical universe as well as various sciences (*mathemata*) and methods of contemplation (*theoria*) were mediated by Pythagoras and intended for purification and opening the eye of intellect. This opening

enables the soul to see true principles and the causes of all things. Philosophy is a road, according to Iamblichus, and those are really wise who join effects to their causes and contemplate the truth in all things. The contemplation of the universe must be preferred to all things which seem to be useful:

"To the philosopher alone is there a correct representation of those things which are of and from themselves accurate exemplars, immutable Ideas, for he is a spectator of things themselves but not of imitations of these. ... For he alone who looks to nature and the divine truly lives, just as a good ruler drawing from immortal and stable sources the principles of living advances and lives according to them himself. This science therefore is both theoretic and productive, as we do all things according to it."⁹¹

While recognizing a unity between the theologies of Egyptians, Chaldeans, Pythagoreans and Plato, Iamblichus emphasizes the dependance of Hellenic philosophers (including Plato and Pythagoras) on the Egyptian priests (*De myster.*: 2.2-3.5). Hellenic philosophy is systematically subordinated to ancient revelations. Iamblichus, according to M. J. Edwards, "did not wish to be a scholar, for the business of the philosopher is not with facts, but lives".⁹² However, he does not exclude or banish reason. Notwithstanding the fact that we cannot attain knowledge (*gnosis*) of the gods by reason (*logismos*), the role of reasoning is crucial. If correctly used, it provides a clear discrimination of what is possible and impossible, real and unreal. For Iamblichus "there is a distinction between the words science and knowledge: the one signifying the theoretic faculty by which we apprehend real beings, the other the practical faculty by which we acquire phenomenal facts and information".⁹³ But those who have intellect must philosophize:

"If therefore philosophy alone by reason of its nature causes perfect virtue and purification of the soul, that alone is worthy to be desired and sought. But to the company of the gods none may go who has not sought wisdom and departed in perfect purity; none but the lover of learning. And this is the reason why true philosophers abstain from the indulgence of all corporeal desires or passions..."⁹⁴

"For to cleanse the soul of every taint of generation, and to purify that actuality of it to which the power of reason belongs, is the chief function of Philosophy."⁹⁵

The *Phaedrus* of Plato exemplifies the mission of a superior soul sent down to save fallen souls and to recall them through philosophy to higher realities. Therefore Hermeias, the Alexandrian philosopher, whose commentary on *Phaedrus* depends both on Syrianus' lectures and metaphysical interpretations of Iamblichus, says:

"Socrates has been sent down to the world of becoming to benefit mankind and the souls of the young. Since souls differ greatly in character

and practices, he benefits each in a different way... turning them to philosophy' (*In Phaedr.* I.1-5).

Socrates, who receives his erotic power and anagogic energy from Eros, is referred to as a saviour who seeks to bring back souls who have fallen from the divine company of the gods. Philosophy and poetry are regarded as two different but integrally related forms of divinely-inspired madness (*mania*). Therefore the agreement between theologians (Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus), poets, and philosophers is based on their common divine sources of inspiration and their anagogic function for the benefit of mankind. Hermeias makes clear the revelatory and soteriological nature of philosophy.⁹⁶ True philosophers are divine-like souls who have not cut themselves off from participation in the vision of the heavenly retinue, or army (*stratia*), of the gods, described in the *Phaedrus*.

In this sense philosophy is a sort of divine mystagogy. It is also divinely-inspired beneficial madness. According to A. Sheppard, Hermeias distinguishes seven levels within the soul at which inspiration (*enthousiasmos*) can occur. These correspond to levels of reality in the universe as a whole, and they are: 1) the one within the soul (*hen tes psuches*), 2) intellect (*nous*), 3) discursive reason (*dianoia*), 4) opinion (*doxa*), 5) imagination (*phantasia*), 6) spirit (*thumos*, in the original Platonic sense of the word), 7) desire (*epithumia*).⁹⁷ Hermeias explains anagogically the four types of divinely-inspired madness, mentioned by Plato (*Phaedr.* 244a8-245a8) and integrally exemplified by Orpheus who had all types of inspiration, by drawing the following picture:

- 1) *poietike mania* brings the disordered parts of the soul into order and harmony through heaven-inspired poetry and music;
- 2) *telestike mania* is the state concerned with purifications, theurgic rites, and associated with the mysteries; it makes the soul whole and raises it to the level of Intellect (*nous*);
- 3) *mantike mania*, traditionally exhibited by the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona, is associated with Apollo and gathers the soul together to its own unity;
- 4) *erotike mania* takes the unified soul and joins the one within soul (*to hen tes psuches*), equated with the charioteer's head of the *Phaedrus* myth) to the gods and to noetic beauty (*tois theois kai to noeto kallei sunaptei*; *In Phaedr.* II.1-2).⁹⁸

The last *mania* brings about a mystical union. According to A. Sheppard,⁹⁹ Hermeias follows up Plato's distinction between two kinds of prophecy and two kinds of poetry, the inspired and merely skilled (*technike*), to make a parallel distinction between two kinds of *telestike*: (1) "human and merely skilled *telestike*" (such as priests use in the cults of statues and incantations according to the different local traditions) and (2) divinely-inspired *telestike* which not only makes our soul perfect, but also leads to mystical union.

Iamblichus' concept of inspiration is in agreement with Plato's concept of prophetic, or Apollonian (*Apolloniakē*), madness and with traditional Hellenic ideas of divine possession. It proves that Neoplatonic theurgy (though closely connected with Chaldean and Egyptian religious sources) is also modelled on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* when read in the light of traditional soteriological mysteries, post-Aristotelian metaphysics and Hellenistic astronomy. However, theurgy is not simply a fruit of spiritual hermeneutics, but rather a prolongation, or revival, of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian esoteric traditions, framed by cosmological myths and rituals.

Some scholars assume that Iamblichus simply translated the metaphysics and psychology of Plotinus into the terminology of Chaldean theurgy (and thus spoiled the purity of the former), but such a view is too naïve and shows a tendency to regard Plotinus' flight of the solitary soul towards the solitary One in terms of Western Christian mysticism and modern subjectivism, along with the post-Enlightenment hate or fear of any sacramental rites. Therefore we are inclined to think that philosophy and theurgy, in the late Neoplatonic tradition, are not to be regarded as two different ways to the same goal, as H. Lewy once suggested.¹⁰⁰ Rather both *philosophia* and *hieratike technē* are the indispensable elements that constitute an extensive and interlaced spiritual path ("not in space but through one's life", as Olympiodorus explains: *In Gorg.* I.2, p.240.20 Norvin), adapted to different types of men and leading through different heroes, daimons, angels and gods to the mysterious and ineffable One which transcends all things.

As Iamblichus pointed out, each man performs his service to the gods (who grant health of body, virtue of soul, purity of intellect, and elevation to proper principles) according to what he is, not according to what he is not. Therefore the sacrifice must not surpass the proper measure of the worshipper (*to oikeion metron tou therapeuontos*: *De myster.* 220.6-9). Different classes of soul proceed in different and unequal ranks, but in the last regard the soul's descent and self-alienation as well as its ascent and *henosis* are activities of the gods themselves on the stage of divine irradiations. When invocation, or prayer, arises from the realised human nothingness and awakens the divine presence in the soul, "the divine itself quite literally is joined with itself", according to Iamblichus (*De myster.* I.15; 47.9-11).

In the later Hellenic antiquity, disciples of Platonism surrounding their master compared themselves to a chorus. Iamblichus, the head of the Neoplatonic school in Syrian Apamea, is referred to by Libanius as the leader of a chorus of souls gathered to the gods. Hypatia of Alexandria is regarded as "a genuine guide in the mysteries of philosophy" (*gnesia kathegemon ton philosophias orgion*: Synesius *Ep.* 137). The members of her circle participated in the 'philosophical mysteries' open to initiates only.

Their community of *betairoi* was knitted together with strong ties and constituted a microcosm reflecting the laws of the universe.¹⁰¹ The characterization of philosophy as ‘the most ineffable of ineffable mysteries’ into whose sacred rites initiation is required, shows the close affinity between the Egyptian and Syrian Neoplatonic circles and the later Sufi brotherhoods in Islamic Syria and Egypt. To awaken the “intellectual eye” buried within us (Syn. *Ep.*137), to put our mind into a state of inspiration and contemplation of the ultimate Beauty and Goodness, is the goal of philosophizing in such communities of philosophers.

18. Philosophy and the Power of Faith: Towards the Final Union

The success of Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists was due to their adaptation of a more erudite and impersonal Platonism to contemporary aspirations for immortality and a blessed afterlife. Plato directed the philosophical vision towards the intelligible Form of the Good and the Beautiful. The Middle Platonists faithfully followed Plato’s advice to imitate God as far as it is possible for a soul and to become God (*Theaet.*176 b). This assimilation to God may be understood as following, or imitating, in all respects the divine patterns (*paradeigmata*), thereby restoring the perfect image of God both externally and internally. The Stoics understood it as “life according to nature”. But the more esoteric interpretation, related to the Egyptian mysteries, is concerned with actual union.

Early Christianity inherited the ancient *telos* of theurgy, though “assimilation to God” may be explained in many different ways, not always meaning making one closer to God. For Clement of Alexandria, assimilation means deification:

“The Word of God (*tou theou*) speaks, having become man, in order that you may learn from man how man may become god” (*theos: Protrep.*8.4).

It is not clear, whether *theos* here means a stage within God himself or an angelic rank. In the Biblical tradition, the sons of God may be called “angels”, and “Moses calls the angels gods”, according to Julian (*onomazei theous tous angellous: Kata Gallilaion logos* 290B). Perhaps Clement means that the gnostic draws nearer to God than the closest possible proximity, though this transcending never ends:

“The gnostic souls, transcending, by the magnificence of their contemplation, the citizenship (*politeia*) of every holy rank, in accordance with which [ranks] the blessed dwellings of gods, having been delimited, are allotted; having been counted as holy among the holies... arriving at better and better places; no longer cleaving to divine contemplation in mirrors or through mirrors, but hailing the most manifest possible and

absolutely unmixed sight... This is the grasping contemplation (*kataleptike theoria*) of the “pure in heart” (*Stromateis* 7.13.2).

The Middle Platonist Alkinous argues that Plato “made our good the knowledge and contemplation of the first Good which can be called God and the First Intellect” (*Didask.*179.36-37). In order to comprehend such statements we must remember that prior to Plotinus no clear distinction had been established yet between the divine Intellect (or the noetic realm constituted by the triad of Being, Life, Intelligence) and the ineffable One as the first Good which transcends Intellect and Being altogether. The aim (*telos*) of philosophy for the Middle Platonist consists in assimilation to God as far as possible. If the principal activity of God (in this case equated with the Aristotelian first Intellect) is displayed in contemplating Himself, then the human *telos* should be to contemplate God. Alkinous says:

The soul contemplating the divine and the intellections of the divine can be designated as in excellent condition. Such a condition of the soul is called wisdom (*phronesis*) – in fact, one should think of assimilation to the divine as nothing else” (*Didask.*153.4-7).

The fundamental feature of the Middle Platonic metaphysics is the fusion of the Platonic conception of Ideas and the Aristotelian conception of Intellect (*nous*). In their transcendent aspect, the Ideas were considered as thoughts of God and, in the immanent aspect, they were regarded as forms of beings. The Middle Platonists recovered the Platonic dimension of incorporeality and transcendence neglected by the New Academy and posited as the supreme end of man the imitation of God, or assimilation to the divine and to the incorporeal.

Numenius, the Neopythagorean predecessor of Plotinus, upheld the doctrine close to *philosophia perennis*: he tried to show the harmony and inner concord of the Pythagorean philosophy of Plato with various initiations and doctrines (*tas teletas kai dogmata*) shared by the Brahmans, the Jews, the Magi, and the Egyptians (fr.1a). The Pythagorean Platonism expounded by Numenius and Ammonius Sakkas “a charismatic purveyor of Numenian Neopythagoreanism”, according to J. Dillon,¹⁰² exercised the most powerful influence upon Plotinus and later Platonists.

In the writings of the Alexandrian philosopher Hierocles, Ammonius emerges as having accomplished the main Numenian task (insufficiently conducted much earlier by Antiochus of Ascalon), namely, the purification and restoration of Platonism betrayed by Plato’s successors in the Academy. Hierocles follows Iamblichus in regarding true philosophy as a revelation: Plato presents the earthly domain as a sort of “avatic” epiphany. Being the purifier of philosophy, Ammonius is instructed by the divine (*theodidaktos*: Photius *Bibliotheca* III.126, 172a).

According to Hierocles, the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, described as an “educational introduction” (*paideutike stoicheiosis*) written by those who had

already “ascended the divine way” contain the general and basic principles of all philosophy. By establishing the cultivation of virtues and contemplation of truth, they put the student of philosophy on the road to his final goal, namely, assimilation to God and return to the archetypal abode. Therefore repentance is the beginning of philosophy which itself is divided into “practical philosophy”, that is human virtue, and “contemplative philosophy” celebrated under the name of divine virtue.

In order to restore spiritual insight proper to the primordial “golden race”, to conduct the perfect and happy life full of knowledge, and to ascend to divine principles, not only various sciences, such as geometry and mathematics, are needed, but hieratic purifications of the soul’s pneumatic vehicle (*ochema*) are also required. As Hierocles concludes alluding to the *Phaedrus* myth (246a-256c):

“The end of the Pythagorean philosophy is that we may become all over wings to soar aloft to the Divine Good”¹⁰³

This Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy is based on oral and written instructions, commandments and exhortations (*parangelmata*) provided by the so-called “daimonic” men who belong to the *hermaike seira* – the Hermetic chain of transmission which is primarily vertical and only secondarily horizontal. This philosophy also is based on an elaborated symbolical exegesis, that is, on the metaphysical interpretation of oracles and certain inspired ancient texts such as the dialogues of the “divine” Plato and the poems of Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus. From the 2nd century A.D. the theological and metaphysical oracles (or “dogmas from Assyria” – *ta Assuria patria dogmata*: Procl. *In Parm.* I.647.7) were accepted as direct utterances and revelations of gods and archangels. These oracles combined with other sacred traditions, provided sufficient ground for the re-established unity of philosophy and religion.

For H. D. Saffrey, who regarded philosophy as “a mental activity which the Greeks had always laboured to render rational”, this turn to the supra-rational authorities, mythical evidences and hieratic arts proves to be a clear decline. “Plotinus alone appears to us as a heroic exception to this general crazy infatuation”- he sadly concludes. However, the Pythagoreans, Neoplatonists and Chaldeans themselves regarded theurgy and other hieratic practices not as the regrettable corruption of rational philosophy, but as the desired culmination of the entire philosophical programme. The acceptance of divine revelations and myths in no way presupposes the rejection of mind, of independent scientific research and logic. Therefore Platonism presented itself as the supreme defender of Hellenic rationality. The characteristic of a philosopher and of any intelligent person was felt to be his ability to explain in logical terms what he believed and he does not indulge in vulgar and irrational abuse of natural things which are, after all, the reflections of eternal archetypes and noetic paradigms.

Despite the confidence of H. D. Saffrey and other scholars who tried to dissociate philosophy (converted into purely mental activity) from any kind of revelation and initiation, the philosophy of Plotinus is not incompatible with hieratic traditions. The Plotinian ascent (*anagoge*) as a contemplative process which brings the soul to greater and greater degrees of noetic purification, follows the model of the mysteries and of cosmogonical scenarios by imitating the rhythms of the main divine Rite – that of creative irradiation and return to the source. Since cosmogony itself is the ritual act of the Demiurge (who directs and orders the overflowing productive power of the One) both theurgy and philosophy at their proper levels constitute the soul's mimesis of the cosmogonical rite conducted in the cosmos, itself understood as the temple of the eternal gods. The ascending soul, "drunk with nectar" and filled with love for the Good, participates in Intellect's erotic supra-intellectual aspiration for the Good as pure light. Plotinus says:

"But the soul sees by a kind of confusing and annulling of the intellect which abides within it – but rather its intellect sees first and the vision comes also to it and the two become one (*kai ta duo hen ginetai*). But the Good is spread out over them and fitted in to the union of both; playing upon them and uniting the two it rests upon them and gives them a blessed perception and vision..." (*Enn.* VI.7.35.33-41).

This grasp of the ultimate Good is achieved by the soul (carried on the epistrophic wave of the divine *Nous* itself) through the "prime part of intellect" or "that element in *nous* which is not *nous*" but is akin to the One. This "element" is the same as the "flame of intellect" or "flower of intellect" (*anthous non*) of the *Chaldean Oracles* – the most mysterious part of the intellect which is akin to the fiery essence of the Father. Sometimes the language of Chaldean theology is strikingly close to the language of Plotinus' negative theology and dialectic. And when they show certain differences in metaphysical detail, in style of expression and spiritual method, they nonetheless agree regarding the aim of *anagoge* which is the same: mystical vision, illumination, immortality and union with the eternal divine principles or the One which should be described not only as an object of love but also as the lover and the love itself.

Active union with divine principles is accomplished not without intellect and rational abilities. But at the same time this union transcends imagination, discursive thought and even intellect itself. The strength of human intelligence suffices for gaining the vision of Ideas in their noetic union of plurality, but not of their source – the supreme and ineffable God. Therefore immaterial theurgy, regarded as the graceful interference of the henads themselves, at the summit of philosophical ascent provides a supra-rational and supra-intellectual union.

The different kinds of theurgy operate on different levels of reality. Material theurgy employs material objects, because the corporeal world is a field in which the soul's faculties are developed and tested. Therefore theurgy reveals the sacramental virtues and qualities of phenomena which

serve as the unspeakable symbols and ineffable names of the gods. As G. Shaw pointed out:

“The soul could no more realize its salvation without embracing matter than the Demiurge could have created the cosmos without the formless receptacle”.¹⁰⁴

The aporetic approach to philosophy based on reasoned arguments and logic of the lower stages of ascent is not incompatible with the noetic insights and mystical visions of the higher stages. Though our language and thought are unable to reach the One’s ineffable light, philosophy ultimately attains the truth and is able to assimilate us to the divine realm. A. H. Armstrong, the great Plotinian scholar, says:

“An important reason why there is so little about prayer in the *Enneads* of Plotinus is that so much of what he writes simply is prayer, understood according to its admirable catechism definition as ‘lifting up the head and mind to God’”.¹⁰⁵

Plotinus distinguishes three classes of men: 1) those who do not attempt to rise above the physical realm, 2) those who try but cannot, and 3) those who succeed and arrive at the divine realm, “just as a man arrives in his well-governed land after a long journey” (*Enn.* V.9.1.20-21). Here Odysseus is a symbol of the highest class of humanity – those philosophers and mystics who have reached their spiritual Home. Being faithful to Plato’s definition (*Phaed.*67c), both Plotinus and Porphyry regarded philosophy essentially as a preparation for death and escaping from the physical body.

But whereas Plato describes the process of doing good to one’s beloved as “working on a statue” (*agalma tektainetai*: *Phaedr.*252d7), Plotinus exhorts the searcher for the Good to go on working at his own statue (*tektainon to son agalma*: *Enn.* I.6.9.13). Porphyry also proclaims the necessity of returning to the real Self. Since the real Self for Plotinus and Porphyry is the “undescending intellect”, both as the highest element in us and as a component of the hypostasis of Intellect, the goal of life is to live according to intellect, following the Aristotelian maxim (*Nicom. Eth.*118ab). Porphyry says:

“To the extent to which you approach yourself (and yet you are present to yourself and inseparable from yourself) you approach Being as well” (*Sent.*40).

He indicates four “elements” (*stoicheia*), derived from Chaldean sources, as significant and indispensable for the friend of God, that is, faith, truth, love, and hope (*Ad Marcellam* 24). As Porphyry argues, it is necessary to trust that the only salvation (*soteria*) is conversion to God (*he pros ton theon epistrophe*) and knowing the truth about Him. Through toil and steadfastness philosophy accomplishes the blessed journey to Heaven following the example of the Dioscuri, Heracles, Asclepius, and “all other children of the gods” (*Ad Marcellam* 7).

Both Neoplatonists and Hermetists maintain that the only really useful knowledge is that of the way of immortality. Though the idea that one may know God (common in Christian usage) is rare among Hellenic writers, for Iamblichus liberation from fate occurs only through knowledge of the gods (*tau theou gnosis: De myster.* 290.16-17). This knowledge is sometimes equated to union with the gods and is viewed as “the first road to happiness”.

In Neoplatonism, a spiritual master is described as the “divine man” (*theios aner*) which may be regarded as a personification of divine Intellect. Within the elaborated hierarchy of virtues, the agent of theoretic virtue (the soul which beholds *nous* within itself and is fulfilled by it) is given the title “god” and that of the paradigmatic virtue (the soul which is united with Intellect) – “father of gods”, according to Porphyry (*Sent.*32). Following another view, more suited to Iamblichean and post-Iamblichean Platonism, the possessor of philosophical virtue is called “god” (*theos*) and the possessor of theurgical virtue (the liberated soul which is united to the One or resembles it) is called “father of gods” (Psellus *De omnifaria doctrina* 55). Theurgical, or hieratic, virtue is proper to the henadic element of the soul which transcends Intellect and Being.

Each soul, likened to a fruit-producing plant by Iamblichus (Stob. I.373.15), must worship the gods in a manner appropriate to its nature and level of understanding. There are various modes (*tropai*) both of descent and ascent, therefore philosophy (not love of talking but love of wisdom) leads upwards by using all necessary means. For philosophy indeed is the science of living perfectly, according to Iamblichus.

The true philosophical life (*philosophikos bios*) is also the life of loving (*erotikos bios*), for philosophy is the love of wisdom and its goal is the knowledge of all divine things, according to Proclus. Being as it were the benefactor of souls and bringing salvation to mankind, philosophy leads the soul upward by the power of truth – to the unparticipated divine Intellect and eternal Ideas.¹⁰⁶ Platonic dialectic serves this function, namely, to unify the whole realm of human reasoning and proceed from human reason to the divine *Nous* itself. Since the vision of the Ideas (Archetypes, divine Names) is among the most important achievements in the upward journey, the soul of the philosopher is rewarded by that life of contemplation known as the Cronian life (*keronios bios*). Standing at the top of Heaven (on the back of the Egyptian goddess Nut), the soul contemplates the true Being beyond. Philosophy and the power of truth cannot lead further, but only *theourgike technē* and faith. In this respect, which concerns the relationship between philosophy and faith (consisting of being aware of metaphysical depths of reality) F. Schuon asserts as follows:

“One can spend a whole lifetime speculating on the supersensorial and the transcendent, but all that matters is the “leap into the void” which is the fixation of spirit and soul in an unthinkable dimension of the real; this leap, which cuts short and completes in itself the endless chain of

formulations, depends on a direct understanding and on a grace, not on having reached a certain phase in the unfolding of the doctrine, for this unfolding, we repeat, has logically no end. This “leap into the void” we can call “faith”; it is the negation of this reality that is the source of all philosophy of the type that may be described as “art for art’s sake”, and of all thought that believes it can attain to an absolute contact with Reality by means of analyses, syntheses, arrangements, filtrations, and polishings...”¹⁰⁷

While discussing the power of faith (*pistis*) Proclus argues in the same vein:

“For the theologians call the contact and union with the One faith” (*kai he pros auto sunaphe kai benosis hupo ton theologon pistis pokaleitai*).¹⁰⁸

Paradoxically, this faith may be defined as “illegitimate belief” (*nothe doxa*), being like the Buddhist *upaya*, a kind of “soteriological mirage”. Since like is always known by like, the theologians can know the One only by an illegitimate intuition (*nothos nous*). The soul is united with the Good (which is unknowable and unspeakable) through the “flower of the intellect” (*anthos tou nou*) and the “flower of our whole soul” (*pases hemon tes psuches anthos*). The final unity is called the “fire-brand of the soul” (*psuches puros*). Proclus argues that Plato and the theologians before Plato were accustomed to praise a “divine madness” (*mania*) which transcends intellect:

“For the soul must become one in order to see the One, or rather in order not to see the One; for if it saw the One it would do so by intuition and not by that which is above intuition (*videns enim intellectualem videbit et non supra-intellectum*), and it would know a particular unitary thing, but not the One itself” (*Prov. Fato* IV.171-172).

L. J. Rosan distinguishes three stages of this madness: 1) contact (*sunaphe*), 2) approach (*empelasis*), and 3) union (*benosis*). The final union may be described as “becoming Fire” and the road to it as the fiery road, leading to the Father. Those terms reflect not only Chaldean, but also Egyptian images, such as the entourage of flame in the solar barque of Ra. Proclus says:

“Now that we are coming close to the Cause of all things, there must be not only a hush of the opinion, a hush of the imagination, and a cessation of all emotions that prevent us from rising upward to the One, but also a stillness in the air and a stillness of all else. For let all things lead us by the calmness of their power to the presence of the Ineffable. And standing There raised above all that which has being, we kneel to It as to the Rising Sun, blinded in our eyes”.¹⁰⁹

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Glossary

Agalma: (αγαλμα) image, cult-statue, ornament, shrine, object of worship, something in which one takes delight; *theon agalmata* is the common phrase for “images of the gods” and “cult-statues” which may be “animated” by the theurgists; the word *agalma* contains no implication of likeness and is not a synonym of *eikon*; for Plato, the created cosmos is “a shrine brought into being for the everlasting gods” (*ton aidion theon gegonos agalma*: *Tim.*37c); for the Emperor Julian, the visible Sun is “the living *agalma*, endowed with soul and intelligence and beneficent, of the noetic Father” (*Ep.*51.434).

Aisthesis: (αισθησις) sensation, perception, as an opposite of intellection (*noesis*), understanding and pure thought; more loosely – any awareness; for Plato, some *aistheseis* have names, such as sights, sounds, smells, cold and heat, distress, pleasures, fears, but nameless *aistheseis* are countless (*Theaet.*156b); for Plotinus, perceptions in this world are dim intellections (*noeseis*), and intellections in the noetic world are vivid perceptions; Philo of Alexandria postulates an Idea of *aisthesis*, along with an Idea of *nous*, in the Intellect of God (*Leg. Alleg.* I.21-27).

Akḥ: the ancient Egyptian term for intelligence, spiritual light, illumination, irradiation; it may designate both a spiritual being (the winged soul, *ba*, divinized and raised above the Osiris state) and the entire spiritual dimension that corresponds to the Neoplatonic *kosmos noetos*; through the celestial ascent a pharaoh (the prototype of a philosopher-mystic of later times) becomes a “shining one” (*akḥ*), a star irradiating light throughout the cosmos, and is united with Ra (the divine Intellect) as his “son”.

Akhet: the Egyptian term meaning “horizon”, a kind of sun-door for entering into or coming from the Duat (the Osirian Netherworld); the hieroglyphic sign for “horizon” shows the two peaks with the solar disk between them, protected by the *aker*, a double lion; *akhet* is a threshold realm (comparable to the Islamic notion of *barzakḥ*) between the Heaven, the Earth, and the Duat; etymologically it is connected with other words meaning radiance, intelligence, noetic light, spirit, “making into a spirit of light”; *akhet* is symbolized by the pyramid; therefore the pharaoh ascends to Heaven (in order to be included into the circuit of Ra) by way of this *akhet*, i.e., the threshold of light; the *akhet* hieroglyph was applied in Egyptian art, especially in architectural forms: the two pylons which flanked the temple’s entrance represented the two peaks of *akhet*, and the statue of Atum-Ra, or Amun-Ra, was displayed for the god’s epiphany (*kḥaai*) between these mountain-like towers.

Al-insan al-kamik: the Arabic term for the Sufi concept of a Perfect Man which, ultimately, derives from the ancient cosmogonies centred on macrocosmic Man (Vedic *Purusha*, Gnostic *Anthropos*); in the Egyptian solar theology, it is represented by the pharaoh, the son of Ra, who unites in himself both Horus and Seth, or is identified with Thoth in all respects; in Sufism, the Perfect Man is God's deputy on earth, because he manifests perfection of all divine attributes; the Prophet Muhammad, Khidr, Solomon, Jesus and other Islamic prophets belong to this category; the Perfect Man is a manifestation of the Muhammadan Reality (like a manifestation of the Neoplatonic *Nous*); the term *haqiqa muhammadiyah* (Muhammadan Reality) is a term of the first thing that God created (i.e., *Nous*, Atum-Ra), and this Reality is manifested within the world (in terms of finality and *telos*) as the Perfect Man; although each individual thing of the world is God's mirror, the Perfect Man, as an apex of all creation (i.e., the Horus-like royal entity), is the perfect mirror and therefore he is both the goal of creation and the link between God and His creation by which God sees Himself; Ibn al-'Arabi contrasts the Perfect Man with the animal man (*al-insan al-hayawan*).

Anagoge: (ἀναγωγή) ascent, elevation, bringing up; the approach to the divine realm by means of purifications (*katharmoi*), initiations (*teletai*), the Platonic dialectic and allegorical exegesis, contemplation (*theoria*) and the ineffable sacred rites employed in theurgy; it is prefigured by the sacred way which the initiates of mysteries (*mustai*) walk, the path to the mountain (*oreibasia*); typological analogies of the Neoplatonic ascent to the divine may be seen in the *Pyramid Texts* and the accounts of *mi'raj* of the Prophet Muhammad in the later Islamic tradition.

Anamnesis: (ἀναμνησις) recollection, remembrance; in the Orphico-Pythagorean context, it is understood as a remembrance of one's true divine nature, revealed through sacred initiation; the idea of memory and restoration of the soul's true identity is crucial for the Egyptian tradition as reflected in the *Book of the Dead* and later employed by the Pythagoreans and Plato who explains *anamnesis* as the recollection of things known before birth and forgotten (*Meno* 85d); thus Platonic learning is equated to remembering (*Phaed.*72e).

Ankh: the Egyptian term meaning "life"; the hieroglyph *ankh*, originally perhaps representing a knot or a bow, is a symbol for divine life, for the "breath of life", provided by Shu and other gods, and for regenerating the power of water; *ankh* also designates a floral bouquet (offered to the gods) and a mirror, itself an important metaphysical symbol; various items used in hieratic rites (e.g., the hooped sistrum) were fashioned in the shape of this hieroglyph; the *ankh* survived into the Coptic period and was inherited by the Christians as the *crux ansata*.

Anthropos: (ανθρωπος) man; in Gnosticism, the macrocosmic *anthropos* is regarded as the Platonic “ideal animal”, *autozoon*, or a divine *pleroma*, which contains archetypes of creation and manifestation.

Apatheia: (απαθεια) impassivity or freedom from emotions, understood as a philosophical virtue; *apatheia* means not being affected in any way and is applied both to the sages and transcendent entities by the Neoplatonists.

Apeiron: (απειρον) (*apeiros*, *apeiria*): lacking of limit, unlimited, as an opposite to *peras*, a bound; the even as an opposite to the odd; this is a fundamental Pythagorean term, designating one of the main principles of manifested being; the Pythagorean Unlimited is indefinite and in need of Limit, it is infinite in a negative sense as infinitely divisible; in Neoplatonism, *peras* and *apeiron* constitute the primal archetypal duality located somewhere between the ineffable One and the noetic cosmos.

Aporrhotos: (απορρητος) secret, prohibited, unspeakable; the common designation of mysteries and sacred rites of initiation; in Neoplatonism, the term is applied in metaphysics and negative theology, frequently understood as a characteristic of the First Principle.

Apotheosis: (αποθεοσις) divinization; in the esoteric sense it is accomplished by the philosophical purification and theurgical *anagoge* which reveals one's primal and true identity with divine principles; this is not a Homeric conception, because Homer clearly separates the gods and men; however, following the ancient Egyptian spiritual patterns, the Orphic texts already promised *apotheosis* and immortality for the initiated soul who (like the Egyptian *ba* and the *psuche* in Plato's *Phaedrus*) restores her wings and raises herself back to the divine homeland.

Arche: (αρχη) beginning, starting point, authority, government, heart, principle; *archai* are understood as the first principles by Neoplatonists; the term *archetupos*, an archetype, is used by Plotinus in a sense of the divine paradigm or the noetic model of the manifested entity.

Arete: (αρετη) excellence, goodness, virtue; Plotinus makes a distinction between the civic virtues (*politikai aretai*) and the purificatory virtues (*kathartikai aretai*); Porphyry adds two other grades – the theoretic virtues (*theoretikai aretai*) and the paradigmatic virtues (*paradeigmatikai aretai*) – the former being that of the soul which beholds *nous* within itself, the latter being the virtue proper to the divine Intellect, *Nous*, itself; Iamblichus discerns seven grades of virtue which in an ascending order illustrate the anagogic path to the divine: natural, ethical, civic, purificatory, theoretic and paradigmatic virtues are crowned by the hieratic virtues (*hieratikai*

aretai) that are proper to the One – they make the soul godlike (*theoeides*) and unite with the First Principle through theurgy.

Arrhetos: (αρρητος) ineffable, unspeakable; this term is close to *aporrhotos* and is used to designate rites and visions of the mysteries and the transcendent nature of the One in Neoplatonism.

Arithmos: (αριθμος) number; for the Pythagoreans, number is the first principle (Arist. *Metaph.* 986a15); Iamblichus sometimes identifies the gods with *arithmoi*, regarding the first numbers from the monad to the decad as deities and archetypal models of manifestation; the numerical organization of the cosmos requires the organizing principles of bodies to be treated as physical numbers and distinguishes them from mathematical numbers, which are the paradigms of physical numbers, but ideal, noetic, or eidetic (*eidetikos*), numbers transcend even mathematical numbers.

Askesis: (ασκησις) in ancient philosophy, this term designates not an “asceticism”, but spiritual exercises; therefore *philosophia* is understood not as a theory of knowledge but as a lived wisdom, a way of living according to intellect (*nous*); an *askesis* includes remembrance of God, the “watch of the heart”, or vigilance (*nepsis*), *prosoche*, or attention to the beauty of the soul, the examination of our conscience and knowledge of ourselves.

Aten: the Egyptian term for the “sun globe” or “sun disk”, regarded as a visible icon of Ra; represented as the simple sun disk, the disk with uraeus, the disk with rays emanating from it, or as the sun disk containing the scarab beetle (*kheper*) and the ram (*ba*); under the reign of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) the sun disk is worshipped as the solar deity Aten whose rays are depicted as arms proffering *ankh* hieroglyphs.

Atman: the Sanskrit term designating the innermost nature of all divinities, of all living beings, of all manifested forms; according to *Manu Smṛti*: “All the gods are this one *atman*, and all dwell in *atman*” (12.119); this is the universal continuum of consciousness, the Self; as an unqualified consciousness being one with *brahman*, *atman* is self-luminous; it is not “this” nor “that”, unseizable, indestructible, unbound, it is not born, nor does it die when the body is slain; it is hidden in all things, but can be perceived only by the sages with the Eye of Intellect (the Egyptian Eye of Ra) when *atman* reveals itself; as *Paramatma* it is the complete and integral supreme Self (the Egyptian Atum-Ra); the ego-personality, or individual self, called *jiva*, is regarded as a root ignorance and, therefore, contrasted to one’s true identity – the transcendent Self, or *atman*.

Autozoon: (αυτοζων) essential living Being, or noetic Animal, which contains within it Ideas of all living creatures and the Archetypes of the four elements (*Tim.* 30b); it is a completely coherent *archetypus mundus*, timeless, ungenerated, immaterial and the perfect matrix of the psychic and

physical cosmos; for Plotinus, it is a well-rounded-whole, composed of individual intellects, or noetic lights; “a globe of faces radiant with faces all living” (*Enn.* VI.7.15).

Ba: the ancient Egyptian term which means “manifestation” of certain divine qualities, arranged in a descending and ascending hierarchy; in the eschatological and soteriological context, it may be understood as “soul” moving up and down, as an individual in an out-of-body state which is attained through initiation or death, when the physical body (*kebat*, *soma*) is experienced as a corpse; *ba* is the vehicle of ascent, pictured as a human-headed bird which flies into the spheres of light and finally becomes aware of itself as an *akb*; the concept of *ba* influenced the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of soul (*psuche*) who tries to restore her wings through *anamnesis*, initiation into philosophy, and then ascends to the divine realm.

Barzakb: the Arabic term for “isthmus”; an imaginal reality, regarded as a mirror image, is a *barzakb* between the reflected object and the mirror: an imaginal (not imaginary) thing is both the same and different from each of the sides that define it; in Islamic Sufi theology, *barzakb* is taken to mean a certain intermediate state or realm, like the Egyptian Duat, which constitutes a barrier between the two seas of the Quranic cosmology or between any of two different ontological levels of being; it may be compared to 1) a mediating prism which breaks down noetic light into the varied colours of a sensible realm and to 2) a lens which concentrates the rays from above; the period in the *barzakb* (comparable to the Osirian Fields of Rushes) prepares the deceased for the resurrection, just as the time spent in the womb prepares him for birth into this world; according to Ibn al-‘Arabi: “The resurrection is a *barzakb*. There is nothing in existence but *barzakbs*, since a *barzakb* is the arrangement of one thing between two other things, like the present moment [between the past and future]” (*Futubat* III.156.27 W. Chittick); as a mediating instance *barzakb* is equated 1) with the heart (*qalb*) which mediates between the realm of Spirit (*Ruh*) and that of the individual soul (*nafs*), or 2) with the pole (*qutb*) which, in the Sufi hierarchy, functions as the world sustaining and saving *Logos*, i.e., as the Horus-like pharaoh, albeit hidden (because, contrary to the official “state metaphysics” in Egypt, Sufism, often standing against the corrupt official powers, was forced to elaborate the parallel esoteric hierarchy constituted by externally unrecognized “spies of God”).

Ben-ben: the Egyptian word carrying the connotation of “outflow”; the pyramid-like sacred stone or pillar that came to be the cult object of Ra in the Heliopolitan temple represents the primordial *ben-ben*, i.e., the noetic “stone”, or the primeval hill, which emerges from the apophatic abyss of Nun as the first self-projection of Atum (“All” and “Nothing”), as the seed of the Neoplatonic *kosmos noetos*: “Atum-Khepera, you culminate as hill, you raise yourself up as the *bennu*-bird from the ben-ben stone in the

abode of the Phoenix at Heliopolis” (PT 1652); the wondrous *bennu*-bird, sitting on the top of the *ben-ben*, is said to come from the Isle of Fire having filled its body with the demiurgic *heka*-power and may be compared to the self-created original solar Word (*Logos*) which brings light into darkness; this bird of light is the primeval hypostasis of Ra, that is, the light-like intelligible Being; Heliopolis represents the symbolic centre of the manifested world, of all theophanies.

Bios: (βίος) life, or a way of life, analogous to the Hindu *darshana*; therefore one can speak of the Pythagorean way of life, the Orphic way of life; to be a philosopher implies a rupture with daily life (*bios*) and purification of one’s passions in order to experience the transcendence of divine Intellect and the soul with respect to the mortal body.

Bomiskos: (βωμίσκος); *bomos* is the Greek sacrificial altar; being the most important element for the sacred work (more important than the cult stone, tree, and spring) the altar is ritually set up in the *temenos*, the sacred enclosure, when the first sacrifice is performed *in illo tempore* by Heracles or some other hero; the Greek altar is constructed of bricks and white-washed with lime, sometimes decorated with volutes in the middle of which lies the metal tablet on which the fire burns; in Pythagorean philosophy, *bomiskos* designates the irregular volume from which body is produced; the theurgist’s physical body is also regarded as the sacrificial altar on the way to the divine realm.

Brahman: the Sanskrit term for the ultimate non-dual and un-manifest Principle, in certain respects comparable to Nun of the Egyptians or the ineffable One of Neoplatonists; it is the supreme reality without quality or distinction; as *Brahma nirguna* it is the unqualified Beyond-Being; as *Brahma saguna* it is Being, or Ishwara, equivalent to Atum-Khepera-Ra who emerges from the abyss of Nun; when designated as *saccidananda*, *brahman* is the fullness of being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ananda*); however, it is described by negation of everything (*neti-neti*, not this, not that); *brahman* transcends Intellect and everything that is thinkable; it is invisible, inconceivable, “that which speech cannot express, but through which speech is expressed ... that which thought cannot conceive but through which thought is thought ... that which breath cannot breathe but through which breathing is breathed” (*Kena Upanishad* I.4 ff); it is “the light of lights beyond darkness” which dwells in the hearts of all; the human person, who genealogically belongs to the priestly *varna*, is called a *brahman* and conventionally regarded as a legal representative of the *sattva* quality or even as a direct embodiment of this Principle, though, in fact, he may be an ordinary man, actually devoid of any real “divine wisdom”.

Daimon: (δαίμων) in the ancient Greek religion, *daimon* designates not a specific class of divine beings, but a peculiar mode of activity: it is an

occult power that drives man forward or acts against him: since *daimon* is the veiled countenance of divine activity, every god can act as *daimon*; a special knowledge of *daimones* is claimed by Pythagoreans; for Plato, *daimon* is a spiritual being who watches over each individual, and may be considered as his higher self, or an angel; whereas Plato is called “divine” by Neoplatonists, Aristotle is regarded as *daimonios*, meaning “an intermediary to god” – therefore Aristotle is to Plato as an angel to a god; for Proclus, *daimones* are the intermediary beings located between the celestial objects and terrestrial inhabitants.

Demiourgike seira: (δεμιουργική σειρά) the vertical series of gods, irradiating in time from the Creator (*demiourgos*) in his timeless act of creation and crossing different levels of being, is called *demiourgike seira*, a demiurgic chain; therefore a series of philosophers emanating in time from Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato is called *chruse seira*, the golden chain; the appellation “golden” refers to the vertical rays of the divine light and godlike nature of wisdom preserved by a “chosen race” (or “golden race”) of philosophers.

Demiourgos: (δημιουργός) Creator in Plato’s *Timaieus*, literally “craftsman”, who as the Father and King contains in one the perfection of all things; when things are distributed to the particulated or manifested world, they become diversified and come under the power of different ruling principles; the Platonic Creator creates by appealing to a higher Paradigm, *autozoon*, which, for Neoplatonists, lies at the highest noetic level; for Proclus, *demiourgos* is the intellective Living-Being (*noeron zoon*), and the Forms in the Creator’s Intellect are compared to the notions of public offices in the mind of a statesman; He is the efficient (*poietikos*), the formal (*eidetikos*), and the final (*telikos*) cause of the temporal, physical world; initially, the Greek concept of the divine craftsman is related to the Egyptian god Ptah and the Ugaritic Kothar-wa-Hasis.

Dhawq: the Arabic term meaning “tasting”; understood by the Sufis as a direct experience of theophanies, of certain spiritual states and stations (for instance those belonging to the *mundus imaginalis*, the cosmological and psychic realm where invisible realities become visible and corporeal things are spiritualized), or of “that which truly is”, i.e., the Divine Being; in a sense, *dhawq* is analogous to unveiling, or finding (*kashf*), which means at one and the same time to perceive and to be that which is perceived; this direct “tasting” (along with its semi-sensual implications) is aimed at the “true knowledge” which allows the combination of similarity and incomparability, or imagination and reason; the concept of *dhawq*, regarded as heart-vision, heart-savour, or “*aisthesis* of the heart”, is originally Peripatetic; also it may be understood as the creative intuition, or as the first state of mystical intoxication, or as “the first degree of contemplative vision (*shuhud*) of God within God” (Tahanawi, d.1745).

Dhikr: the Arabic (Quranic) term for “remembrance”, “recollection”, “invocation”, by certain metaphysicians is regarded as an equivalent of the Platonic term *anamnesis*; in Sufism, *dhikr Allah* means the constant mentioning of the supreme name of God (*al-ism al-a‘zam*), that is, *Allah*, or of certain other divine names, formulas, and verses of the *Qur’an*; this practice (analogous to the repetition of Hindu mantras and Egyptian “words of power”, *hekau*) consists of invocation of the tongue (*dhikr al-lisan*), invocation of the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*), and invocation of one’s secret innermost self (*dhikr al-sirr*); it is aimed at the sacramental purification, at the overcoming and transcending of one’s lower soul (*nafs*), at the alchemical restoration of *al-fitrah*, one’s primordial nature equivalent to the cleansed mirror able to reflect a radiant image of God; it is thought that *dhikr* (transmitted by the spiritual master through initiation) brings perfection and enables the aspirant to approach God as close as possible; the supreme *dhikr* is regarded as a means of subsistence (after experiencing of annihilation, *fana*) and of mystical union, although the concept of “union” frequently is treated as being suspicious in the Islamic theological milieu.

Diadochos: (διαδοχος) successor, the head of the Platonic Academy in the chain of transmission; however, the *diadoche* is hardly a matter of institutional continuity, and may be understood in the sense of the golden chain of philosophers which serves to transmit the sacred knowledge and principles of pure (*diakekatharmene*) philosophy.

Dialektike: (διαλεκτική) dialectic; for Plato, only those who philosophize purely and righteously bear the title of dialectician (*Soph.*253e); sometimes the method of *sunagoge* (collection) and *diairesis* (division) is identified as dialectic; for Proclus, the Forms at the intelligible (*noetic*) and intellectual level cannot be defined, but they are definable at the level of soul and below; therefore dialectic defines, by *diairesis*, these images of Forms, though the Forms themselves it can only contemplate; there are three processes of dialectic: 1) cathartic, used to purge ignorance, 2) recollective, which raises to the *anamnesis* of true reality, 3) a mixture of the two; usually Proclus makes a sharp distinction between the so-called Parmenidean dialectic, which provides a path to the divine realities, and the dialectical method (*epicheirematike*) of the Peripatetics.

Dianoia: (διανοια) discursive reason, mind; discursive knowledge, located between immediate apprehension and fallible opinion (*Rep.*511d); according to Proclus, the One, when we apprehend its presence in each of the Forms, “ought not to be viewed by the faculty of opinion, nor by discursive reason (*dianoia*), for these kinds of knowledge are not cognate with intellectual monads, which are neither objects of opinion nor of discursive reason, as we learn from the *Republic* (VI.511a). Rather it is

proper to see by intuitive apprehension that simple and unitary existence of Forms" (*In Parm.*880).

Dikaiosune: (δικαιοσύνη) justice; its opposite is *adikia*, injustice; giving to each man his due is just, according to Plato (*Rep.*331e); *dikaiosune* may be understood in a cosmic and divine sense, since to perform the task for which one is naturally equipped is to follow one's divine archetype, one's own *dharmā*, to put it in Hindu terms, which is *lex aeterna*, the eternal law of creation.

Djed: the Egyptian hieroglyph meaning "stability" and representing both the macrocosmic and microcosmic *axis mundi*, the backbone of Osiris; the sign is depicted as a stylized representation of a pillar or a column around which sheaves of grain were tied; during the Old Kingdom, it is associated with Ptah, the chief Memphite Demiurge, called the Noble *Djed*; during the New Kingdom, it is used as a symbol of Osiris and represents his regenerative power; this symbol sometimes was pictured with a pair of eyes and regarded as a receptacle of a living god, as a sacred icon animated through the Opening of the Mouth ritual; the royal ritual of Rising the *Djed* Pillar was aimed at the re-establishment of stability, of the cosmic order, and symbolized the rebirth both of the deceased pharaoh and of the initiate; accordingly, the pillar represents the path of alchemical transformation (passing through death and resurrection) and theurgic ascent, that is, the philosophical way leading to the union of Osiris and Ra; the *djed* pillar, supported by Isis and Nephtys, is analogous to the Tantric *sushumna*, the spinal column, which shows the royal way to immortality, leading to the crown of the head (the golden lotus-flower of Ra-Nefertum); the baboons of Thoth, i.e., the eastern *bau*, who praise the noetic sun rising from the top of the vertically standing *djed* pillar, serve as an indication that the Osirian transformation is accomplished through the wisdom of Thoth, through his supernatural knowledge (*rekh*) and theurgic power (*heka*).

Djet: the Egyptian term related to Tefnut, the daughter of Atum, identified as the principle of the intelligible Order, *Maat* (analogous to the Pythagorean Limit, *Peras*); sometimes rendered as Eternal Sameness, *djet* stands as a complementary opposite term to *neheb*, or Eternal Recurrence, identified as the noetic Life of Shu, the son of Atum; on the lower levels of manifestation, *djet* carries Osirian attributes and signifies certain eidetic completedness; *djet*-time, or *djet*-eternity, is akin to "the enduring continuation of that which, acting and changing, has been completed in time" (J. Assmann), to the cosmic wholeness and plenitude, often explained in categories of space, or understood as the accomplished ideal totality of Forms; if *neheb* carries attributes of Ra and represents a cyclical infinitude of creation, manifested through the breath of Shu (the Pythagorean series of *apeiria*), *djet*, instead, represents an unchanging

permanence (the structure imposed by *peras* and oriented towards an *epistrophe*, therefore related to the mortuary cult and continuation of the completed image).

Doxa: (δοξα) opinion; in Platonism, a sharp distinction is made between the eternal noetic world of Forms (Ideas, Archetypes) of which knowledge (*gnosis*) is possible and the perceptible world of becoming which is only opinable (*doxastos*); for Proclus, the perceptible entities are opinable, but true being is an object of intellect (*Elements of Theology* 123); opinions may be true or false, knowledge only true.

Dunamis: (δυναμις) power, capacity; Aristotle regards *dunamis* as one of his fundamental principles (*archai*); Plotinus describes the One as the seminal power of all things (*dunamis panton*: *Enn.* III.8.10.1); a net of divine powers in their descending and ascending order is a net of theophanies: in this respect *dunamis* is analogous to the ancient Egyptian *sekhem*; the powers of the divine Intellect and Soul appear to be present at every part of the cosmos, but the physical world (and the human body) is unable to receive the full power of incorporeal Reality; *dunamis* sometimes may be equated with daimonic forces.

Eidolon: (εἶδωλον) image, idol, double, apparition, phantom, ghost; in Homer, there are three kinds of supernatural apparitions that are called by the term *eidolon*: 1) the phantom (*phasma*), created by a god in semblance of a living person, 2) the dream-image, regarded as a ghostly double that is sent by the gods in the image of a real being, 3) the *psuche* of the dead; the Homeric *psuche* is not a soul, but a phantom, a thin vapour that proves to be ungraspable; for Pythagoreans and Plato, *psuche* is no longer the *eidolon* of the body, but the immortal soul that constitutes one's real being; for Plotinus, the soul is the *eidolon nou*, a *simulacrum* of *nous*, an image that is already obscured; the conception of *eidolon* is partly related to the ancient Egyptian concept of *ka*.

Eidos: (εἶδος) visible shape, form, a kind of thing, the intelligible Form, or the noetic Idea, of Platonism; the word is etymologically connected with *video*, and the term *idea* also comes from the same root as Greek verb *idein* and the Latin verb *videre*, both meaning "to see"; therefore *eidos* is closely connected with contemplation (*theoria*), transcendental or divine imagination, and mystical vision.

Eikon: (εἰκων) image, icon; a mirror-image as a direct representation of its *paradeigma*; for Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, the sensible world is an image of the noetic world and time is an image of eternity (*Enn.* III.7.11), therefore the lower realities may be contemplated in ascending hierarchy as images, or traces, of the higher paradigms; Proclus makes a distinction between an *eikon* and a *sumbolon*: the Pythagoreans, before

revealing directly the truths of their doctrine, present *eikones* of reality (*In Tim.*1.29.31ff).

Ellampsis: (ελλαμπισ) irradiation, shining forth, manifestation, illumination, flowing from the principle as a cause; for Proclus, “only an illumination (*ellampsis*) from the intellective gods renders us capable of being connected to those intelligible-and-intellective Forms ... For this reason, indeed, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (249d) compares the contemplation of them to mystery-rites (*teletais*), initiations (*muesesi*) and visions (*epopteias*), elevating our souls under the arch of Heaven, and to Heaven itself, and to the place above Heaven” (*In Parm.*949).

Episteme: (επιστημη) knowledge, scientific knowledge of what is unchanging and necessary, e.g. Platonic Forms; since *episteme* is regarded as a certain knowledge of reality, the objects of *doxa* (opinion) cannot be assigned to *episteme*; for Proclus, the task of science is the recognition (*gnosis*) of causes, and only when we recognize the causes of things do we say that we know them (*Elements of Theology* 11); science, or scientific knowledge (*epistemonike gnosis*), depends on the synthesizing power of mind, but “intellect (*nous*) is the proper spectator of the Forms, because it is the same nature as them” (*In Parm.*924.32-37).

Epistrophe: (επιστροφή) reversion, return; in the Neoplatonic threefold scheme of manifestation, a thing, or rather an intelligible entity, proceeds from itself to multiplicity, and returns to itself, while its essential characteristic identity remains unchanged at the initial level; the three moments – remaining (*mone*), procession (*proodos*) and reversion (*epistrophe*) – are phases of a simple continuous and dynamic process (sometimes regarded as simultaneous) that infuses unity-diversity, causation and predication; it is essentially a metaphysical and logical relationship.

Epopteia: (εποπτεια) the most important mystical vision that culminates the Eleusinian mysteries, the beholding of the secret symbols or epiphanies of the gods; *epopteia* is the highest stage of initiation; *epoptai* (beholders) are those who came back to watch the rituals again; in a similar way, the philosophical purification and instruction culminates in *epoptika* – the direct revelation of truth and contemplation of Forms, or divine realities.

Eros: (ερως) love, sometimes personified as a deity, daimon, or cosmogonical, pedagogical and soteriological force, manifested in the process of demiurgy and within the domain of providence; for Plato, philosophy is a sort of erotic madness (*mania*), because Eros, though implying need, can inspire us with the love of wisdom; Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium* describes education in erotics as an upward journey or ascent towards the perfect noetic Beauty; Plotinus uses the union of lovers as a

symbol of the soul's union with the One (*Enn.* VI.7.34.14-16); Proclus distinguishes two forms of love: 1) ascending love which urges lower principles to aspire towards their superiors, 2) descending or providential love (*eros pronoetikos*) which obligates the superiors to care for their productions and transmit divine grace (*In Alcib.* 54-56); for Dionysius the Areopagite, who follows Proclus, the *eros ekstatikos* becomes the unifying factor of the cosmos.

Eusebeia: (εὐσεβεία) piety, meritorious piety; “to change nothing of what our forefathers have left behind” – this is *eusebeia* (Isocr. 7.30); for Platonists, piety means not simply bringing sacrificial offerings and fulfilling cultic duties, but also humility, supported by philosophy and combined with love (*eros*), faith (*pistis*) and knowledge (*gnosis*) that finally leads to assimilation to God.

(For Greek words starting with φ see listing starting ph)

Gnosis: (γνῶσις) knowledge; *gnosis* is contrasted with *doxa* (opinion) by Plato; the object of *gnosis* is *to on*, reality or being, and the fully real is the fully knowable (*Rep.* 477a); the Egyptian Hermetists made a distinction between two types of knowledge: 1) science (*episteme*), produced by reason (*logos*), and 2) *gnosis*, produced by understanding and faith (*Corpus Hermeticum* IX); therefore *gnosis* is regarded as the goal of *episteme* (*ibid.* X.9); the idea that one may “know God” (*gnosis theou*) is very rare in the classical Hellenic literature, which rather praises *episteme* and hieratic vision, *epopteia*, but is common in Hermetism, Gnosticism and early Christianity; following the Platonic tradition (especially Plotinus and Porphyry), Augustine introduced a distinction between knowledge and wisdom, *scientia* and *sapientia*, claiming that the fallen soul knows only *scientia*, but before the Fall she knew *sapientia* (*De Trinitate* XII).

Goeteia: (γοητεία) magic; a sharp distinction is made between 1) the sinister *goeteia* and 2) *theourgia*, the sacramental divine work, by Iamblichus in *De mysteriis*; however, magic is sometimes interpreted as *gnosis*, and *gnosis* pertains to the secret divine names as facilitating the power of magic; the Hellenistic magic (frequently equated with the mysteries and labelled *mysteria*, *musterion*, *musterion tou theou*) is related to the ancient mystery-cult initiation and the Egyptian doctrine of *heka* – the miraculous power of creation, governed by the god Heka, who distributes *bekau*, the cultic words of power (as Hindu mantras) that perform divine liturgies and transformations of the soul; Hermis-Thoth, *Isidos pater*, is regarded as the founder of the holy tradition (*paradosis*) of the magic arts and the author of the secret names “wrote in Heliopolis with hieroglyphic letters”; therefore the magician sometimes is called the mystagogue (*mustagogos*).

Hairesis: (αἵρησις) taking, choice, course of action, election, decision; this term (plural, *haireseis*) refers to any group of people perceived to have a clear doctrinal identity; *hairesis* is a group with fairly coherent and distinctive theories, with an acknowledged founder (*hairesi-arches*) and leaders who articulate their rejection of rival theories through theoretically founded polemics; Diodorus of Sicily complains that the Hellenes, unlike the Orientals, always introduce doctrinal innovations in important matters, thus “founding new *haireseis*” (2.29.6); in the 2nd century A.D., *hairesis* had become a standard term for philosophical schools; the early Christians use *hairesis* to refer to a body of false beliefs.

Heka: although this Egyptian term designates both demiurgic and theurgic power, usually it is rendered as “magic”; in its role as the creative power, the personified god Heka (analogous to Hindu Maha-Maya) stems from the primeval creative utterance of Atum and is contained in the divine *Logos*: being regarded as the father of the gods and of all that becomes manifested, Heka constitutes and permeates every level of manifested reality, be it noetic, psychic, or physical; by the permanent work of Heka the different levels of being are woven into an integral magic carpet, therefore the *heka*-power has the transforming and elevating function on the path of an inner alchemy and ascent of the soul; the conception of *heka* is intimately connected with that of *maat*, right cosmic order and justice; therefore the *heka*-magic is inseparable from the cultic, political, social, economical, scientific, artistic, and philosophical aspects of the Egyptian state-life; in the rite of the pharaoh’s ascent and his assimilation to the supreme divine Principle (that is, his equation to the transcendent and immanent *pantheos*, the Reality of all that exists), the *heka* of the gods is to be sacramentally “eaten” and contained in his “belly”; the possession of magical words of power (*hekan*) is essential for the initiate in the Osirian realm of Duat where the soul (*ba*) is tested, transformed, and (if proved to be *maakheru*) turned into *akh* through *heka*-based theurgic power and knowledge.

Hen (to hen): (εν; το εν) the one, which can mean: 1) Unity or Oneness in general; 2) the unity of anything that has unity or is one thing; 3) that which has unity, anything that is one; 4) the one thing we are speaking of, as opposed to “other ones” (see: F. M. Cornford *Plato and Parmenides*, London, 1969, p.111); for Neoplatonists, the One is the ineffable source of Being, the Supreme Principle, explicitly regarded as God by Proclus; *to hen* transcends demiurgic Intellect and constitutes the first divine *hupostasis* of Plotinus; it corresponds to Nun, the Father of the gods (*netern*) in the ancient Egyptian theology.

Henas: (ενας) henad, unit; the term is taken by Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus from Plato’s *Philebus*, where it is used interchangeably with the

term “monad”; since for every real being there is a unit, and for every unit a real being (Procl. *Elements of Theology* 136), the henads are pure unities, the sources of being’s identity, located between the pure One and the noetic One (or Being); more precisely, the henad is the first principle (*arche*) and the measure (*metron*) of being; the One is unparticipable, but the henads are participable: therefore they correlate with real beings; Proclus divides henads into transcendent or independent units and those that are immanent and belong to their participants and are irradiations of the first; in theurgy, henads constitute a set of theophanies, i.e. divinity in its many different forms at all different levels of reality: therefore the divine henad stands for the god-entity as a whole; the difference between the One and the participable henads (which may be compared with the Egyptian *netern*), opens the theurgic way of adoration, worship and ascent; according to Proclus, “the most divine thing in us is the ‘one’ in us, which Socrates called the illumination of the soul (*Rep.* 540a7), just as he called truth itself light” (*In Parm.* VII.48); since like is apprehensible by like, the “one of the soul” makes union with the ineffable One possible.

Henosis: (ἐνωσις) unity; unity is the characteristic that everything has in common; anything depends on unity and only unity is the goal of all things; in Neoplatonism, the soul’s purification, accomplished primarily through philosophy, culminates in noetic vision and finally in mystical union (Plot. *Enn.* VI.7.36); the divine truth is an indivisible *henosis* of real beings.

Hermaïke seira: (ερμαϊκη σειρά) Hermaic chain (of transmission, or heavenly initiation); the Neoplatonists commonly associated themselves with the Hermaic chain, i.e. vertical “golden” chain of the noetic light and wisdom that emanate through Hermes Logios and other angelic powers from the divine Intellect (*nous*).

Hermeneus: (ερμηνεύς) interpreter; *hermeneus* owes his name to Hermes, the messenger of the gods; *hermeneus* is an interpreter of the hieratic rites and liturgies (in Egypt, such hermeneutical procedures, called “illuminations”, were practised at least from the times of the Middle Kingdom), divine omens, tokens, symbols, oracular utterances, and, in the case of Neoplatonists, the Homeric poems, Plato, Aristotle and the *Chaldean Oracles*; the goal of *hermeneutike* is to reveal the inner meaning (*huponoia*) of the texts and indicate the highest truth that points beyond the discourses, thus elevating the soul to the first principles themselves; there is an ontological hierarchy of interpreters and interpretations: therefore each lower language of theophany functions as the *hermeneus* of the higher one and renders it comprehensible at a lower level at the expense of its coherence.

Hieratike technē: (ιερατική τέχνη) sacred art, hieratic art, namely the priestly art, theurgy, accomplished by the gods themselves through different degrees of initiation, transformation, elevation (*anagoge*) and ineffable mystagogy; it represents the ascending path to unification with the One through scientific training (*agoge epistemonike*) on certain henadic qualities, ontological symbols, sacred rites, divine names and theurgic powers; according to Proclus: “the theurgists established their sacred knowledge after observing that all things were in all things from the sympathy that exists between all phenomena and between them and their invisible causes, and being amazed that they saw the lowest things in the highest and the highest in the lowest” (*Hier. Art* 148).

Hierophantes: (ιεροφάντης) hierophant, priest of Eleusis, he who shows sacred things; since the language of mysteries was employed by Plato and the later Platonists, philosophy is often regarded in terms of a mystery initiation, and a true philosopher or a spiritual leader of *hairesis* is equated to the hierophant of mysteries.

Hieros logos: (ιερός λόγος) sacred tale, sacred word or book (e.g. possessed by the initiation priests of Dionysus and Pythagoreans); there were *logoi* (accounts, explanations) within practical mysteries and additional *logoi* adduced from outside; they were both exoteric and esoteric, about the mysteries and within the mysteries, developed on three different hermeneutical levels: those of myth, allegory, and metaphysics.

Homoiosis theō: (ομοιωσις θεῷ) likeness to God; the phrase is derived from the famous passage of Plato’s *Theaetetus* 176bc; it is understood as the end (*telos*) of life which is to be attained by knowledge (*gnosis*); for Iamblichus, “knowledge of the gods is virtue and wisdom and perfect happiness, and makes us resemble the gods” (*Protrep.* ch.3).

Huparxis: (υπαρχίς) pure existence of a thing, an essential foundation; the term covers the level of pure unity (which is the foundation of all manifested realities) and the divine; for Proclus, being’s pure essence is no actual being, but a unity (*henas*) with existence (*huparxis*), and this unity is the spark of divinity; the *huparxis* of henads is not existence of certain concrete subjects, but unqualified existence, unconditioned even by being.

Hupodoche: (υποδοχή) reception; the receptacle underlying all the world of becoming; for Plato – the material principle, the mother and receptacle of the whole visible cosmos (*Tim.*51a); *hupodoche* is equivalent to space (*chora*) and nurse (*tithene*); according to Iamblichus, pure and divine matter receives and reveals the gods in cosmogony (*De myster.*232.17); each level on the Neoplatonic chain (*seira*) of theophany is regarded as the receptacle of its superior (which functions as a “form” in respect to “matter”); the embodied soul is a *hupodoche* of the god due to the soul’s

capacity or theurgic suitability (*epitedeiotēs*); in theurgy, minerals, plants, animals, divine statues and icons, temples and sacred landscapes can be regarded as the receptacles of the descending divine light or power; initially, this is the Egyptian doctrine of *descensio* and *translatio*: the gods and divine powers descend into their images (*akhemu*) and animate the material world, understood as an *imago caeli*.

Hupostasis: (υποστασις) standing under, sediment, foundation; in Neoplatonism, *hupostasis* is a synonym of *ousia*, that means being, substance, existence; the three *hupostaseis* of Plotinus are three fundamental levels, or dimensions, of divine reality: the One, Intellect, and Soul.

Hypothesis: (υποθεσις) proposal, intention, argument, hypothesis, the premiss of a syllogism; the nine hypotheses of dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides* are regarded by the Neoplatonists as the nine *hupostaseis*, or levels of reality, extending from the ineffable One to pure matter, or non-being.

Idea: (ιδεα) in non-technical use the term refers to the visual aspect of anything; for Plato and the Platonists, it is the highest noetic entity, the eternal unchanging Form, the archetype of the manifested material thing; in Plato, *idea* is a synonym of *eidōs*, but in Neoplatonism these two terms have a slightly different meaning.

Imago dei: “the image of God” in Latin, the Egyptian *tut neter*; the numerous conceptions of likeness (*homoiosis*) to God were elaborated in the Platonic philosophical tradition and Scripture-based Christian theology, namely, that man (though shaped from the earth and therefore a mortal, passible, shortlived being) is honoured with God's own image which (sometimes equated with the microcosmic *nous*) reflects the immortal, pure, and everlasting divine nature; accordingly, as the image of God, the immortal human soul (or heart-intellect) is viewed as a mirror of God, both to others and to itself; in the case of Christ (analogous to the Horus-like pharaoh, *Ra sa*, Osiris resurrected, the Perfect Man of Sufi metaphysics), the overwhelming cosmological “image” (*eikon*) stands for living and active essence, thereby establishing a dominion over all creatures; being made in the image of God, man (who recovered his pure primordial nature and realized his final spiritual perfection) is the vicegerent of the Lord; though ultimately of Egyptian origin, “this very concept of the *Imago Dei* which formed a synthesis between the Platonic-Aristotelian-Stoic view and the Christian view of man, ... dominated the whole of the Patristic period and the Christian Middle Ages” (E. Brunner).

Isefet: the Egyptian term which designates “lack”, or “deviation” from the meaningful divine order (*maat*), that is, all negative Sethian qualities, such as falsehood, violence, sickness, enmity, and so on; the meaning of creation (constituted by the different levels and modes of manifestations,

keheperu) lies in its noetic plenitude, that which yields being, order, life, and justice; therefore all suffering, rebellion, crime, and injustice (the symptoms of lack, delusion, and non-being) are indications of the world's loss of its original intelligible plenitude for the reason of its moving away from the primeval noetic source and, as a consequence, of its deviation from the correct archetypal patterns; the sacred institution of kingship is revealed and established as a means to overcome *isefet* and reconstitute the disfigured *imago dei*, that is, to recover one's true spiritual identity, according to Egyptian theology: "Ra has placed the pharaoh in the land of the living, forever and ever, judging humankind and satisfying the gods, realizing maat and destroying *isefet*".

Ka: the Egyptian term for one's vital power, or for one's "double", which also may be understood as an abstract principle symbolizing an individual's psychic tendencies, moral qualities, and appetites; *ka* may indicate male potency and the sustaining power of life; the *ka* hieroglyph represents two extended arms, perhaps suggesting the gesture of praise, prayer, or one of embrace (since the hieratic power of *ka* is ritually transmitted through the priestly embrace – that is, through embracing statues and spiritual disciples – which imitates the archetypal "event" when Atum embraced Shu and Tefnut *in illo tempore*); the *ka*-double is fashioned along with the material human body by the ram-headed god Khnum on his potter's wheel; to "go to one's *ka*" meant to die; however, the *ka* (when located in the vital realm of the dead ancestors) needed continuing nourishment provided in the funerary sanctuaries-residences to the animated statues: the food-offerings themselves are designated as *kau* and are thought as being imbued with the life-power of *ka*; the fundamental qualities attached to the notion of *ka* included subsistence, nutrition, penetration, force, splendour, magic, worth, radiance, greenness, vassalage (that of serving an official, or a spiritual master, who often occupied the rank of official or administrator of the pharaonic state); all ancestors are regarded as *kau*, therefore to beget a child is to re-establish a vital link with them; Osiris is viewed as the *ka* of Horus (in the role of his father and the source of his fortune), and Horus is viewed as the *ka* of Osiris when he embraces and revives his father Osiris; the pharaoh's *ka* is the source of prosperity to the whole world and to all inhabitants of the theocratic state.

Katharsis: (καθαρσις) purification, purgation of passions; the term occurs in Aristotle's definition of tragedy (*Poetics* 1449b 24) and seems to be borrowed from medicine, religious initiations and magic.

Keheper: the Egyptian hieroglyph, depicting the sacred scarab (*Scarabaeus sacer*), represents this insect itself and metamorphoses or transformations involved in all possible "becomings"; *keheper* means coming into being, manifestation, development, changing, and so on; different ontological

manifestations (such as one's corpse, shadow, *ka, ba, akh, sah*) are regarded as *kheperu*; Atum, as the source of all existence, is the "lord of *kheperu*"; Atum is described as developing "in this your identity of the Scarab", that is, in his hypostasis of the noetic sun at the dawn of creation; Ra emerged from the abyss of Nun in his identity of Khepera; therefore Atum (*neb tem*, the lord of totality) is the transcendent completeness and the supreme noetic source of being, Khepera (Kheprer) is the proximate cause of all manifestations (*kheperu*), and Horus is the final cause; while Khepera is the entity embodied in the sun as it rises in the morning; it is the symbol of the initiate's rebirth.

Kosmos noetos: (κοσμος νοητος) the intelligible cosmos of divine Forms and intellects, located between the One and the Soul; it embraces the hierarchy of different levels and orders (*taxeis*) of divine reality (such as Being, Life, and Intellect), filled with the various triads of the intelligible (noetic), intelligible-intellective (noetic-noeric) and intellective (noeric) gods; among the metaphysical categories and triads of *kosmos noetos* are such as: existence (*huparxis*) – power (*dunamis*) – activity (*energeia*), remaining (*mone*) – procession (*proodos*) – reversion (*epistrophe*), symmetry (*summetria*) – truth (*aletheia*) – beauty (*kallos*).

Logismos: (λογισμος) numerical calculation, the power of reasoning, reason.

Logos: (λογος) the basic meaning is "something said", "account"; the term is used in explanation and definition of some kind of thing, but also means reason, measure, proportion, analogy, word, speech, discourse, discursive reasoning, noetic apprehension of the first principles; the demiurgic *Logos* (like the Egyptian *Hu*, equated with Thoth, the tongue of Ra, who transforms the Thoughts of the Heart into spoken and written Language, thus creating and articulating the world as a script and icon of the gods) is the intermediary divine power: as an image of the noetic cosmos, the physical cosmos is regarded as a multiple *Logos* containing a plurality of individual *logoi* (*Enn.* IV.3.8.17-22); in Plotinus, *Logos* is not a separate *hupostasis*, but determines the relation of any *hupostasis* to its source and its products, serving as the formative principle from which the lower realities evolve; the external speech (*logos prophorikos*) constitutes the external expression of internal thought (*logos endiathetos*).

Maat: the ancient Egyptian term for measure, harmony, canon, justice and truth, shared by the gods and humans alike; *maat* is the essence of the sacred laws that keeps a human community and the entire cosmic ordered; it establishes the link between above and below; "letting *maat* ascend" is a language offering during the hieratic rites and interpretation of the cosmic process in terms of their mystic and salvational meaning; for Plato, who

admired the Egyptian patterns, the well-ordered cosmos, truth, and justice are among the main objects of philosophical discourse.

Mania: (μανία) madness, frenzy; the state of frenzy is connected with the psychic state called *entheos*, “within is a god”; being possessed by a god means a loss of one’s understanding (*nous*); the god Dionysus is the Frenzied One: therefore some kind of enthusiasm, madness and inspiration is related to the prophecy and mystical experience; Plato distinguishes the prophetic *mania* of Apollo from the telestic *mania* of Dionysus, adding two other types of *mania* – the poetic and erotic or philosophical enthusiasm (*Phaedr.*244a-245a); the philosopher is the erotic madman, but his divine erotic madness and divine *sophrosune* (temperance, virtue, prudence) are to be united in the successful experience of love which elevates through *anamnesis* towards the divine realm.

Mathema: (μαθημα) any study which a person may learn (*manthanein*); later the term is confined to the mathematical sciences, harmonics and astronomy.

Maya: the Sanskrit term related to the root *ma* (measure, fashion, making); it is a divine property or power involved in the creation of the world and, therefore, regarded both as demiurgic wisdom and (when compared to the supreme Principle *per se*) as the universal delusion; thus, creation is viewed as a product of *maya*’s art and, ultimately, is an illusion, if regarded as self-sufficient, i.e., as separated from its source; the power of *maya* is analogous to the power of *heka* which is either combined with *maat* (order, justice, proper measure, truth), or misused in the context of *isefet* (which includes an irrational passion) and thereby turned into a dream-like illusion and magic; the cosmic play (*lila*) is based on the inexhaustible power of divine Maya which is transcended only by the ineffable union with the supreme Principle, the archetypal Thaumaturgus himself; in Platonic epistemology, the realm of *maya* should be equated to the realm of human opinion, *doxa*, contrasted to true knowledge, *episteme*.

Me: the Sumerian term (rendered as *parsu* in Akkadian) designates the properties and powers of the gods close to those both transcendent and immanent archetypes which are called Forms, or Ideas, in Platonism; however, the concept of *me* is expressed in the language of myth; it covers the ideas, models, things, and activities that are central to the theocentric universe and the civilized human life; the related term *gish-bur* (demiurgic plan, design) denotes how these noetic prototypes are manifested in an orderly way in the realm of the state-based economical, social, cultic, and spiritual life; when the *me* are forgotten (or the *dharmā* neglected, in Sanskrit terms), the well-attuned political, social, and religious cosmos falls into disorder.

Medu neter: “divine words”, “divine speech”, i.e., the Egyptian hieroglyphs; in a certain respect, they may be regarded as the visible symbolic images, if not “incarnations”, of the Platonic Forms, that is, of the intelligible Hieroglyphs which are the archetypes of manifestation; all *medu neter* (in their noetic *akhu* aspect) originated from that which was thought of by the heart of Ptah and commanded by his tongue, i.e., by Thoth; the manifested universe is an articulation of the noetic hieroglyphs; the Memphite theology argues that Ptah created all things and all hieroglyphs, after he formed the gods; the concept of *medu neter* is based on the theory of creation by the Word (*Hu, Logos*); therefore the sacred script (which is also the chief form of the Egyptian sacred art) on its own level reflects the structure of reality, the configuration of the noetic archetypes.

Methexis: (μεθεξις) participation; for the Pythagoreans, things are imitations of numbers, but for Plato, particulars participate in their Forms; Iamblichus extended “participation” into a general term for the informing of lower principles by higher ones and thus established the triad of transcendent Form, immanent universal and material particular; this general scheme of unparticipated (*amethekton*), participated (*metechomenon*) and participant (*metechon*) terms may be applied to different levels of manifestation; the unparticipated terms operate on lower realities only indirectly, through the intermediary of the participated terms which they produce; thus the ontological levels are multiplied and divine transcendence is preserved.

Mimesis: (μιμησις) imitation, representation; in the *Poetics* 1447a-b Aristotle includes all the fine arts under *mimesis*, among them epic, tragedy, comedy, painting and sculpture; the images produced by *mimesis* are not at all like photographic images; according to H. Armstrong, the classical Hellenic artists’ images are mimetically closer to those of the traditional arts of the East than to those of nineteenth-century Europe: “If we establish in our imagination the figure of the masked singing actor as our image of *mimesis* we shall not do too badly” (*Platonic Mirrors*, p.151); however, in the vocabulary used by Proclus the terms *mimesis* and *mimema* are usually reserved for art of an inferior type, though Proclus says that “the congenital vehicles (*ochemata*) imitate (*mimēitai*) the lives of the souls” (*Elements of Theology* 209) and “each of the souls perpetually attendant upon gods, imitating its divine soul, is sovereign over a number of particular souls” (*ibid.*, 204).

Mī'raj: the Arabic term for ascent, elevation (analogous to the Greek term *anagoge*); if the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) constitutes, metaphysically speaking, the descending cosmogonical path of manifestation and revelation, the Night of Ascent (*laylat al-mī'raj*) constitutes the ascending path of return (Greek *epistrophe*, *anodos*),

exemplified by the Prophet's ascent from Mecca via Jerusalem to the highest heaven and the Divine Presence; from the time of Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d.875) onwards, this *mi'raj* of the Prophet Muhammad is explicitly taken as a prototype for the Sufi ascent through the seven heavens to the Garden (*janna*), located between the eighth and the ninth heavens, that is, the Footstool and the Throne; thereby the Muslim mystics move beyond human qualities and are reborn into a higher realm of existence; according to Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz: "Just as heaven is the staircase of the *mi'raj*, so the frames of form are the ladder into the heart's world"; although most of the Sufis accepted the bodily nature of the Prophet's *mi'raj*, they thought that in the microcosm (whose summit is a place of the spirit, contrasted with all the negative traits associated with the passionate soul, *al-nafs al-ammara*) the "friends of God" make their non-bodily ascents in imitation of the Prophet.

Morphe: (μορφή) shape; e.g. *kata somatos morphen* – "in a bodily shape" (*Phaedr.*271a); sometimes *morphe* is used as a synonym of *idea* and *eidōs*.

Mundus imaginalis: "imaginal world", the world of the Imaginable; the conception of *mundus imaginalis* was popularized by the French scholar Henry Corbin as a possible rendering of the Arabic *al-alam al-mithal*; this *alam* is the world of symbolic visions and of typifications, viewed as an intermediate isthmus (*barzakh*) between the intelligible and the sensible, i.e., the world in which spirits are corporealized and bodies spiritualized; this realm is prominent in the later Sufi cosmologies, though some contemporary scholars argue that the faculty of imagination (compared to the mirror which reflects both noetic and sensible sides of reality) was turned into the separate ontological world (the whole dream-like universe of symbols and animated mythological figures, established within that initially was the hypostasis of Soul in Plotinus) due to the creative misinterpretations of al-Ghazali's texts and the Peripatetic misreadings of the Neoplatonic meta-cosmic hierarchy; however, one of its prototypes may be found in Plato's description of the "real earth" which is full of "sanctuaries and temples truly inhabited by gods, and oracles and prophecies and visions and all other kinds of communion with the gods which occur there face to face" (*Phaedr.*111c ff); according to the philosophy of Ishraq, developed by al-Suhrawardi and his Persian followers, it is called the "intermediate Orient" (*al-mashriq al-awsat*) of Angels-Souls (those who move the heavens and are endowed with pure active Imagination), preceding the pure Orient of the higher pleroma; Ibn al-'Arabi describes it as the plane of images (*amthal*) and imagination (*khayal*) which is located between the plane of the sensible experience and the plane of the Presence of Lordship (*rububiyah*); to regard it as a world *sui generis* of eternal archetypes would be (according to the Greek Neoplatonists) akin to locating these archetypes at the level of

mathematical *phantasia* which, in the case of Ishraqis, assumes the mythological status of the living wonderland in which noetic Ideas present themselves in imaginal forms and in which material things appear as subtle bodies; however, far from being the realm of intelligible archetypes, this is the dream-world of magicians, the twilight realm of Osirian Duat, or of Anima Mundi, integrated into the Islamic Sufi theory of prophetic and visionary experiences; the imaginal faculty (*khayal*) works by an inner perception that perceives ideas in sensory form; in the school of Ibn al-‘Arabi, imagination is considered 1) as the universe itself, 2) as an intermediate macrocosmic world, and 3) as an intermediate microcosmic world.

Mustagogia: (μυσταγωγία) an initiation into a mystery; leading and guidance of the initiate (*mustes*, plural, *mustai*) to the *telesterion* where initiations take place; a mystagogue is the introducer into the mysteries, the leading priest, instructor or spiritual guide; Proclus viewed the philosophy of Plato as a “mystagogy” an “initiation into the holy mysteries themselves” (*Plat. Theol.* I.1); for the Byzantine Christians, a mystagogy means a liturgical contemplation of the mystery of the Church.

Musteria: (μυστηρια) the proceedings of initiation and sacred rites are called mysteries; the Eleusinian festival is known simply as *ta musteria* or *arrhetos teletai*; the initiates – *mustai* and *bacchoi* – walk a sacred way, the goal of which is inner transformation and eternal bliss: “happy and blessed one, god will you be instead of a mortal”; the Orphic mysteries have striking parallels in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and the *Coffin Texts*; the mysteries are characterized as an esoteric, secret, forbidden (*aporrheton*) and unspeakable (*arrheton*); the special states, attained through initiation (*telete*), are claimed to be valid even beyond death; the mystery-language is adopted by Plato and used by his followers; even the Stoic Seneca speaks of the initiatory rites of philosophy, “which open not some local shrine, but [the] vast temple of all the gods, the universe itself, whose true images and true likeness philosophy has brought before the mind’s eye” (*Ep.*90.28).

Muthos: (μυθος) myth, tale; *legomena*, “things recited”, in the Eleusinian mysteries, i.e. the recitations of the *hieros logos*, belong to the sphere of myth; the one-sided opposition between an irrational *muthos* and rational *logos* in Hellenic philosophy and culture, established by modern scholarship, is wrong, because even in Plato, myths constitute the essential part of philosophy; all true myths require a proper cosmological and metaphysical *exegesis*; according to Proclus, the hieratic myths have a certain inner meaning (*huponoia*) and conceal secret or unspoken (*aporrheton*) doctrines, sometimes inspired or revealed by the gods themselves; Sallustius associates the highest level of myth with transcendent divine reality and the lowest with deceptive perceptions

within the realm of the senses; thus a Myth (like Hindu *Maya*) is analogous to the manifested cosmos itself, understood as the visible veil of the hidden invisible truth.

Neheh: the Egyptian term related to the ontological series of Shu and sometimes rendered as Eternal Recurrence; *neheh*-eternity, or *neheh*-time, perhaps should be conceived as the cyclic time of Ra which is reflected as our everyday time of constant rhythmic change: therefore it is not completed in the sense of the Osirian *djet*-time; this is time of eternal return which is emphasized by the regular repetition of temple rituals.

Neter, *neteret* (pl. *neteru*, *neterut*): the Egyptian term for “god” and “goddess” respectively; the *neter* hieroglyph depicts a figure sitting in profile while knees bent and feet drawn back toward the body; another related hieroglyph looks like a staff wrapped with cloth, or like a cultic flag; in both cases an association with wrapping and binding (*ut*) is evident, and the mummy-like nature of the tightly wrapped body of the sitting figure indicates an idea of deification (or that of an immanent participation in the divine) through soul-transforming death and rebirth; in the Ptolemaic period, the hieroglyph of a star also signified “god”; the series of all gods are viewed as manifestations or hypostases of the supreme Principle (“Lord of All”, “Sole Lord who bore all by means of Heka”) which Itself may be called by different names; *neteru* may be also rendered as “divine principles”, “archetypal names”, “hieroglyphs”, “paradigms and energies of the manifested being”; the totality of divine forces that constitute the Egyptian universe is summarized by the term “Ennead” (*psdt*), that is, “group of nine” which means both the chief noetic meta-structure of archetypes and the indeterminate amount of divine forces, the plurality of gods; in the *Instruction for Merikare* the Creator is referred simply as *neter* and human beings regarded as images (*smn*) of this God; the gnostic identification with *neteru* was indispensable if the initiate wished to attune oneself to the power of a particular divine principle and to re-establish one’s true identity through sacred hermeneutics, purification, integration, assimilation, illumination, and theurgic union.

Noesis: (νοησις) intellection, thought, intellectual intuition, pure intuitive apprehension which transcends discursive reason and is related to *nous*; unified noetic intuition at different levels of reality; for Proclus, intelligible and at the same time intellective (*noeton hama kai noeron*) Life, which is characteristic of self-substantiated henads, exemplifies *noesis* as a process; at the highest ontological level, *noesis* provides union with the intelligible (*noeton*) world through the so-called “flower of intellect” (*anthos nou*); for Iamblichus, the unifying power of the gods transcends all human *noesis* (which appears to resemble Plotinian *dianoia*), but this human *noesis* is a necessary part of ascent and co-operation with the divine; the supreme

noesis is attainable only through the working of theurgy by the grace of god.

Nous: (νοῦς) intelligence, immediate awareness, intuition, intuitive intellect; Plato distinguished *nous* from *dianoia* – discursive reason; *Nous* is the second hypostasis of Plotinus; every intelligence is its own object: therefore the act of intellection always involves self-consciousness: the substance of intelligence is its noetic content (*noeton*), its power of intellection (*nous*), and its activity – the act of *noesis*; in a macrocosmic sense, *Nous* is the divine Intellect, the Second God, who embraces and personifies the entire noetic cosmos (Being-Life-Intelligence), the Demiurge of the manifested universe; such *Nous* may be compared to Hindu *Isvara* and be represented by such solar gods as the Egyptian Ra; *nous* is independent of body and thus immune from destruction – it is the unitary and divine element, or the spark of divine light, which is present in men and through which the ascent to the divine Sun is made possible.

Ochema: (ὄχημα) vehicle; a boat which conveys the souls of the dead, the soul's chariot in Plato's *Phaedrus*; by Aristotle, *ochema* is understood as *pneuma* – the seat of imagination (*phantasia*), analogous to that element of which the stars are made; the *ochema-pneuma* as an astral body functions as a quasi-immaterial carrier of the irrational soul; daimons have a misty *pneuma* which alters its form in response to their imaginings and thus causes them to appear in ever changing shapes; for Iamblichus, the aetherial and luminous vehicle (*aitherodes kai augoeides ochema*) is the recipient of divine *phantasiai*; *ochema* carries soul down to the state of embodiment and is darkened until it becomes fully material and visible: the material or fleshly body is also a sort of *ochema*; Proclus distinguished 1) the higher immaterial and luminous *ochema* into which Plato's Demiurge puts the soul (*Tim.*41e) and 2) lower, *pneumatikon ochema*, which is composite of the four elements and serves as a vehicle of irrational soul – it survives bodily death, but finally is purged away.

Onoma: (ὄνομα) word, name; a noun as distinct from a verb; for Proclus, a name is an *eikon* of a *paradeigma*, a copy of a model; the words (*onomata*) are *agalmata*, the audible “icons” or “statues” of higher divine realities; therefore true names are naturally appropriate, like images that reflect the form of the object, or like artistic icons that reflect Platonic Forms rather than objects of the sensible world.

Ousia: (οὐσία) being, substance, nature, essence; as P. Hadot pointed out: “If we consider the series formed by *ousia* in Plato, *ousia* in Aristotle, *ousia* in the Stoics, *ousia* in the Neoplatonists, and the *substantia* and *essentia* in the church Fathers and the Scholastics, we shall find that the idea of *ousia* or essence is amongst the most confused and confusing notions” (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p.76); since true being is permanent and

intelligible, the substance (*ousia*) of beings is their *logos* and their essence, according to Plato (*Phaed.*65d-66a); Proclus identifies pure Being (*on*) with Essence and Substance itself (*autoousia*); for Neoplatonists, being, real existence and essence are inseparable: beings exist insofar as they are accessible to intellect and have a fixed definition: in the intelligibles the essence is never distinguished from real being.

Paideia: (παιδεία) education, culture; the programme of traditional Hellenic education based on imitation of Homeric exemplars; Plato initiated a philosophically oriented *paideia* that challenged the traditional pattern of poetically sanctioned culture and shifted the emphasis from body to soul (see: W. Jaeger *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1943, 3 vols.).

Paradeigma: (παράδειγμα) exemplar, paradigm, archetype, pattern, model; according to Plato, a paradigm of his perfect state is laid up in Heaven (*Rep.*592b); the noetic Paradigm is regarded as the model for the creation: the visible world is a living creature made after the likeness of an eternal original, i.e. the ideal Living Animal in the world of Forms; thus the world is an image of eternal paradigms (*paradeigmata*); therefore the Demiurge makes the cosmos as an *agalma* (hieratic statue, cultic image, ornament) and sets up within it the *agalmata* of the individual gods.

Paradosis: (παράδοσις) transmission, tradition; e.g. *Orpheos paradosis* – the Orphic tradition.

Per ankh: the Egyptian term meaning the House of Life, i.e., the temple scriptorium and a high school for esoteric training whose priests maintained an oral tradition of initiation and also produced writings in different branches of knowledge, including theology, mathematics, ritual expertise, hieratic liturgy, hermeneutics, genealogy, astrology, sacred geography, mineralogy, medicine, mythography, architecture, the science of theurgic talismans and image-making; the staff of every *per ankh* was constituted by the lector-priests (*heri heb*) whose role was associated with sacred books and the *heka*-power, as well as with preservation of *maat*, the cosmic order, and maintaining the theurgic tradition of mystical ascent and assimilation to the gods; only through esoteric knowledge and initiation into the invisible realm, that is, through symbolic death and rebirth, accomplished in the House of Life, was one able to reveal one's *akh*-identity and be united with immortal divine principles; in the diagram of the *per ankh* (*Pap. Salt* 825) it is depicted as a symbolic mandala with Osiris at the centre: Isis and Nephthys occupy the corners at the side of his feet, Horus and Thoth – the corners at the side of the head, Geb represents the ground, Nut – the sky; the priests of the House of Life follow “the secret way of Thoth”; one of the chief lector-priests (*heri tep*) said regarding the formula imbued with the *heka*-power: “Do not reveal it

to the common man – it is a mystery of the House of Life” (*Pap. Leiden* 344r).

Peras: (περας) limit, boundary; the fundamental cosmological principle of the Pythagoreans; the Unlimited (*apeiron*) is indefinite and in need of Limit which in the table of opposites is related to Odd, One, Right, Male, Rest, Straight, Light, Good, Square; the principles of Limit and the Unlimited (discussed in Plato’s *Philebus*) are the Pythagorean monad and dyad that constitute the order of henads in Proclus and play a central role in the constitution of reality; limit and unlimited serve as two principles (*archai*) of mathematical reality (*ousia*).

Phantasia: (φαντασία) imagination; for Plato, *phantasia* belongs to the realm of appearance and illusion; for Aristotle, *phantasia* is neither perception nor judgment but a distinct capacity of the soul, the capacity which responds to appearances derived from memory, dreams and sense-perception; the 2nd century A.D. sophist Philostratus was the first to call the faculty of producing visual images *phantasia* which is contrasted with *mimesis*: “For *mimesis* will produce only what she has seen, but *phantasia* even what she has not seen as well; and she will produce it by referring to the standard of the perfect reality” (*Life of Apollonius* 6.19); the Neoplatonists lack the concept of creative imagination, though the Neoplatonic *phantasia* can reproduce images of higher principles in mathematics and language; therefore *phantasia*, as a mirror, is placed at the junction of two different levels of being: the mirror of imagination not only reflects images of phenomena but also images of noetic Forms, Ideas, thus translating revelations and divine epiphanies into visible icons and symbols of the higher realities; at the junction of *phantasia* (which is identified with *nous pathetikos* by Proclus) rational and irrational meet; the objects of *phantasia* are *tupos* (imprint), *schema* (figure) and *morphe* (shape).

Philosophia: (φιλοσοφία) love of wisdom; the intellectual and “erotic” path which leads to virtue and knowledge; the term itself perhaps was coined by Pythagoras; the Hellenic *philosophia* is a prolongation, modification and “modernization” of the Egyptian and Near Eastern sapiential ways of life; *philosophia* cannot be reduced to philosophical discourse; for Aristotle, metaphysics is *prote philosophia*, or *theologike*, but philosophy as *theoria* means dedication to the *bios theoretikos*, the life of contemplation – thus the philosophical life means the participation in the divine and the actualization of the divine in the human through personal *askesis* and inner transformation; Plato defines philosophy as a training for death (*Phaed.* 67cd); the Platonic *philosophia* helps the soul to become aware of its own immateriality: it liberates from passions and strips away everything that is not truly itself; for Plotinus, philosophy does not wish only “to be a discourse about objects, be they even the highest, but it wishes actually to lead the soul to a living, concrete union with the

Intellect and the Good”; in late Neoplatonism, the ineffable theurgy is regarded as the culmination of philosophy.

Phronesis: (φρονησις) thought, understanding, practical wisdom, sagacity, prudence; according to some modern scholars, *phronesis* is closer to the English “wisdom” than *sophia*, because “wisdom” is, in standard English, applied to practical matters; but this is still a disputed issue, since, for Aristotle, *sophia* covers bodily, aesthetic, political, theoretical, and religious or metaphysical areas of human activity (*On Philosophy*, fr.8).

Physis (φυσις) (*physis* in a more conventional English transcription): nature (of something), nature as opposed to the artificial; for Proclus, it is the last immaterial reality or power that exists immediately prior to the material world and is responsible for all the motion and change within it.

Pragmata: (πραγματα) things; in Proclus *ta pragmata* also mean transcendent realities, noetic entities, real beings.

Pronoia: (προνοια) providence; the well ordered arrangement of things in the cosmos is based on a guiding and planning providence; the concept is developed before Socrates; according to Proclus, since all proceeding things in their essential aspect “remain” in their higher causes, or archetypes, the higher causes not only contain their lower effects but they know, or fore-know (*pro-noein*), these effects; foreknowledge is also a kind of love – the providential love (*eros pronoetikos*) by which higher causes care for their effects.

Proodos: (προοδος) procession; the metaphysical term in the Neoplatonic scheme of *mone-proodos-epistrophe* (primarily a non-phenomenal process) that means manifestation; the noetic Life covers multification, the unlimited, and potency or power (*dunamis*) that leads to *proodos*; for Proclus, remaining-procession-reversion apply to every form, property, or entity, except the One and matter.

Psuche (ψυχη) (usually transcribed as *psyche*): soul; breath of life, life-stuff; Homer distinguishes between a free soul as a soul of the dead, corresponding with *psuche* (and still regarded as an *eidolon*), and body souls, corresponding with *thumos*, *noos* and *menos*: following the Egyptian theological patterns, the Pythagoreans constituted the *psuche* as the reflection of unchanging and immortal principles; from Plato onwards, *psuchai* are no longer regarded as *eidola*, phantoms or doubles of the body, but rather the human body is viewed as the perishable *simulacrum* of an immaterial and immortal soul; there are different degrees of soul (or different souls): therefore anything that is alive has a soul (Aristotle *De anima* 414b32); in *Phaedrus* 248b the soul is regarded as something to be a separate, self-moving and immortal entity (cf. Proclus *Elements of Theology* 186); *Psuche* is the third *hupostasis* of Plotinus.

Rekh: the Egyptian term for “knowledge” which, first and foremost, is the knowledge of spiritual realities, divine names and hieroglyphs, of the sacred cosmic topography, mythical iconography, and all beings of the Netherworld; this elaborate store of knowledge, including scientific observations and theological interpretations, had a cultic function and culminated in *gnosis*, that is, in realization of one’s different archetypal identities and in the restoration of one’s divine nature; knowledge of the Duat conferred a nether-worldly identity on the initiate as “a holy *neter* in the following of Thoth”; Thoth (Djehuty), regarded as Hermes Trismegistus by the Hellenes, and his consort Sesheta, or Maat, are the chief guardians and providers of all knowledge and wisdom; knowledge of Ra, or of his images and noetic rituals expressed in the sun’s daily course, conferred on the sage or the initiate a noetic identity: “He who knows it is a *ba* of the *ban* with Ra”; “He who knows these mysterious representations (or symbols) is a well-provided *akel*”; the pharaoh, standing at the apex of all creation, is the Gnostic *par excellence*: he knows the theurgic way of ascent and his own metaphysical identity, knows the mysterious words that the eastern *ban* (the “angels” of Thoth) speak, knows the cosmogonical birthings of Ra and his self-generations in the waters of Nun; in the *Amduat*, the pharaoh, or the priest who represents him in the cult (and, consequently, every initiate, sage, or philosopher), knows the mysterious *ban* of the Netherworld, the gates and the roads Ra (the solar *Nous*) travels, knows “what is in the hours and their gods”, the transfigurations of Ra and his images; the spiritual knowledge of the Netherworld determines one’s “Osirification”, alchemical transformation, and immortalization, thereby allowing one to face Ra or to be united with Atum-Ra.

Rem: the Egyptian term for “name”; the divine light, or the sacred, may be present in the divine names as it is present in the hieratic statues and all divine manifestations (*khaperu*): therefore it is maintained that an essential relationship exists between the name and the named; accordingly, the sacred language is regarded as a dimension of divine presence; the Egyptian hymns with name formulas (analogous to the *dhikr*-formulas in Sufism and Hindu mantras) themselves are called “transfigurations” (*sakhu*) and are related to the root *akh*, meaning to radiate, to illuminate, to be a divine spirit or an intelligible light; therefore *akhu* (radiant noetic quality) refers to the theurgic power of the sacred word which is able to illuminate, elevate, or to reveal the divine realities as well as their hidden meaning; in the cult realm, the sacred language is viewed as the language of deities themselves, since only deities make use of the theurgic power of names, along with the pharaoh (the son of Ra) and the initiated priests to whom the pharaoh delegates his priestly and “philosophical” function.

Sab: the Egyptian term for one's "golden" spiritual body which serves as a vehicle of the *akh*-intellect; the idealized shape of the mummy (viewed as an icon and receptacle of the animating divine forces) is a visible symbol of the immortal *sab* body and itself is called *sab*; the "germination" of the spiritual body constitutes a long path of initiations and alchemical transformations based on metaphysical knowledge and correct hieratic rites; the initiate is to be identified with the sacred Scarab, the god of self-renewal, who represents the cosmogonical emergence of Being from the ineffable Beyond-Being: "I am the god Khepera, and my members shall have an everlasting existence..."; the germination of the spiritual body, that is, of the noetic body of light, follows the patterns of the member-based body-structure and the member-based archaic psychology: all the members of one's body need to be turned into their spiritual equivalents; the re-membering of the Osirian body (i.e., the restoration of the members of the dismembered body) as well as the passage beyond the Osirian realm to that of Ra, are the essential components of the germination of the immortal *sab*-body; the initiate himself (as the radiant *akh* saturated by the rays that irradiate from the intelligible Demiurge) claims to be both the primordial lotus (a symbol of self-transformation and rebirth) which shines in the Land of Purity, and the golden child, Ra-Nefertum, who emerges from the divine lotus-flower or from the Lake of Flames in his glorious solar form; *khat* (or *shat*) is one's mortal body, one's corpse, and *sab* (or *sahu*) is one's immortal spiritual body.

Sekhem: the Egyptian term designating "power", an active emanation of deity or the divine power which (as a sort of *shakti*) can be attached to any god; in a certain respect, *sekhem* is made visible in the *sekhem* sceptre held by the Egyptian officials as a symbol of royal authority; the initiate or the deceased, who is united with noetic principles, also acquires the quality of *sekhem* which, however, may differ in its measure and intensity; the receptacle of a god (its sculptured or painted image) is called *sekhem* as well: therefore the numerous texts describe the *ba* of the god which alights on his *sekhem*: thereby the image is animated and is able to reveal the divine presence, provide oracles, or irradiate divine grace (like the Sufi *barakah*) and glory; the *sekhem*-power is often associated with Hathor, known as "Eye of Ra", the whole (restored) *Iret*-eye, the vehicle of divine energy projected into the world; this power has both demiurgic and theurgic, as well as destructive and salvific aspects.

Seira: (σειρα) chain, series; the term, derived from Orphism and Homer, refers to the vertical series, consisting of a single principle, monad or henad, and repeated at different levels of reality; *seira* and *taxis* are both transverse and vertical series; each level of *seira* (which may be compared to a ray of light) reproduces those above it: therefore the gods' names refer not only to the henad as the source of each procession, but also to

all the members of that procession: “For each chain bears the name of its monad and the partial spirits enjoy having the same names as their wholes. Thus there are many Apollos and Poseidons and Hephaestuses of all sorts” (Proclus *In Remp.* I.92.2ff); thus the manifested reality is arranged as the hierarchy of chains that embrace divine, angelic, daimonic, heroic, human and irrational levels (including animals, plants and minerals), all dependent on their proper divine henad, in the sense of being in its *seira*; in some respects *seira* is equivalent to the Arabic Sufi term *silsilah*.

Sema: the Egyptian term for “union”; the *sema* hieroglyph represents two lungs attached to the trachea and symbolizes the unification of equal parts (e.g., the union of Two Lands – Upper and Lower Egypt – or of two gods such as Horus and Seth, Horus and Thoth); the *sema* hieroglyph reflects the royal prerogatives of union; however, in funerary and esoteric initiatory contexts it may signify the initiate’s becoming a royal *ba*, or a *netēr*, that is, to indicate a kind of mystical union, or union between different divine principles themselves.

Shakti: the Sanskrit term for “power” and the name of the goddess; while the Advaita Vedānta considers *shakti* as material and different from the spiritual *Brahman*, certain Tantric schools regard Shakti as being identical to the supreme Principle (*Parama Shiva*, whose possession of *Svatantrya Shakti* indicates his absolute integral nature which acts through his power of action, *kriya shakti*); accordingly, the manifestation of the universe is a mode of the supreme Lord’s self-revelation through his own Shakti which functions on the different levels of being and acquires different qualities; as a feminine aspect of the divine, *shakti* is both creating the universe of theophanies (functioning as *spanda-shakti* or ultimate vibratory energy) and revealing the divine glory (*aishvarya*); shakti is both “closing” (*nimesha*) and “opening” (*unmesha*), that is, involved in the process of progressive manifestation, characterized by obscuring or concealing spiritual realities, and in the process of spiritual realization and the dissolution of the cosmos either macrocosmically (at the end of a world cycle), or microcosmically (by the annihilation of one’s lower nature); the *shri-yantra* which depicts the complementary relationship between Shiva and Shakti, consists of the five upward-pointing triangles which represent Shiva, and the four downward-pointing triangles which represent Shakti: their interweaving stands for cosmic existence as a whole; as the primordial life force (*mukhya-prana*) shakti is universally present in the cosmos; as the serpent power (*kundalini-shakti*) it is depicted as being coiled around a *shiva-lingam* or as ascending through the spinal column, *sushumna*, and leading the initiate (*sadhaka*) to immortality and enlightenment; thus, it is analogous to the power of the Egyptian goddess Hathor.

Skopos: (σκοπος) aim, purpose, target; Iamblichus developed the doctrine that each philosophical source work, especially in the case of Plato's dialogues (since the dialogue is regarded as a microcosmic reflection of the divine macrocosm) must have one basic subject matter, or *skopos*, to which all parts of the text are related; consequently, the introductory portion of the dialogues now assume an allegorical and metaphysical significance.

Sunthema: (συνθημα) token, passport, parole, symbol (in most cases meaning the same as *sumbolon*); a plaited basket (*cista mystica*) of the Eleusinian mysteries is called the "watchword" (*to sunthema Eleusinion musterion*: Clement of Alex. *Protrep.*2.21.2); the *sunthemata* of the *Chaldean Oracles* are considered as the "thoughts of the Father" and have a cosmogonic role similar to that of the Forms in Middle Platonism; they have an anagogic function: when the soul remembers the paternal *sunthema*, it returns to the paternal Intellect; according to Iamblichus, the gods create all things by means of images and signify all things through *sunthemata* (*De myster.*136.6.ff); there are material *sunthemata* and immaterial *sunthemata* (among them – stones, shells, parts of animals, plants, flowers, sacred statues and icons, sounds, rhythms, melodies, incantations, lights, numbers, ineffable names of the gods); the material objects that preserve the power of the gods are regarded as *sunthemata* by the theurgists and function as receptacles for the gods; the *sunthema*, understood as the impression and power of the god (similar to Hindu *yantra*), awakens soul to the divinity which it presents or symbolizes.

Sumbolon: (συμβολον) symbol (*sumballein* means "to join"); a fragment of a whole object, such as a *tessera hospitalis*, which can be joined with the other half; *sumbolon* suggests both incompleteness and the partial revelation of secret meaning; the so-called Pythagorean symbols are maxims (*akousmata*, "things heard") representing in an enigmatic and archaic form the basic teachings on the proper conduct of life; only in the allegorical tradition of Neoplatonic hermeneutics the theory of metaphysical, cosmogonic, and theurgic symbolism was elaborated, and *sumbolon* achieved the status of a major critical concept; in the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *sumbola* are sown throughout the cosmos by the Paternal Demiurge and serve as the essential means of ascent and return to the gods; every soul was created by the Demiurge with harmonic ratios (*logoi*) and divine symbols (*sumbola theia*: Proclus *In Tim.* I.4.32-33); the *logoi* that constitute the soul's essence are *sumbola* and may be awakened through theurgic rites; for Proclus, the inspired myths of Homer communicate their truth not by making images (*eikones*) and imitations (*mimemata*), but by making symbols (*sumbola* or *sunthemata*), because "symbols are not imitations of that which they symbolize" (*In Remp.* I.198.15-16).

Sophia: (σοφία) wisdom; the term covers all spheres of human activity, all ingenious invention aimed at satisfying one's material, political and religious needs; Hephaistos (like his prototypes – the Ugaritian Kotharwa-Hasis and the Egyptian Ptah) is *poluphronos*, very wise, *klutometis*, renowned in wisdom – here “wisdom” means not simply some divine quality, but wondrous skill, cleverness, technical ability, magic power; in Egypt all sacred wisdom (especially knowledge of secret divine names and words of power, *hekau*, or demiurgic and theurgic mantras, which are able to restore one's true divine identity) was under the patronage of Thoth; in classical Greece, the inspired poet, the lawgiver, the politician, the magician, the natural philosopher and sophist – all claimed wisdom, and indeed “philosophy” is the love of wisdom, *philo-sophia*, i.e. a way of life which requires effort in order to achieve its goal of wisdom; the ideal of *sophos* (sage) in the newly established Platonic *paideia* is exemplified by Socrates; in Neoplatonism, theoretical wisdom (though the term *sophia* is rarely used) means contemplation of the eternal Forms and becoming like *nous*, or a god; there are characteristic properties which constitute the divine nature and which are transmitted to all the divine classes: good (*agathotes*), wisdom (*sophia*) and beauty (*kallós*).

Taxis: (τάξις) order, series; any level of reality, constituted by *seira* in which the distinctive property of a particular god or henad is successively mirrored; the chain of being proceeds from simplicity to complexity and subsequently from complexity to simplicity; the hierarchy of *taxeis* establishes the planes of being or world-orders (*diakosmoi*).

Telestike: (τελεστική) one of the Neoplatonic names for theurgy and hieratic rituals; the animation of statues; *telestike mania* of *Phaedrus* 244e employs purifications and rites; according to *Hermeias* (*In Phaedr.* 92.16-24), telestic madness is ranked above all the others inasmuch as it gathers all the others together and possesses them (that is, theology, all philosophy and erotic mania); there are different kinds of *telestike*.

Telete: (τελετη) initiation, the rite of initiation; to initiate is *telein* or else *muein*; the initiate is called *mustes*, the ritual of initiation – *telete*, and the building where initiation takes place – *telesterion*; *telete* is also used for religious celebration generally; the mysteries are called *teletai*; in Neoplatonism, souls follow the mystery-rites (*teletai*) and prepare for the beholding of the realities of Being; according to *Proclus*, faith (*pistis*) is the cause of the ineffable initiation: “for on the whole the initiation does not happen through intellection and judgment, but through the silence which is unifying and is superior to every cognitive activity” (*Plat. Theol.* IV.31.8-16).

Theios aner: (θεῖος ἀνὴρ) divine man, a god-like sage; the Neoplatonic ideal of “sainthood”.

Theologia: (θεολογία) divine science, theology, *logos* about the gods, considered to be the essence of *teletai*; for Aristotle, a synonym of metaphysics or first philosophy (*prote philosophia*) in contrast with physics (*Metaph.*1026a18); however, physics (*phusiologia*) is sometimes called a kind of theology (Proclus *In Tim.* I.217.25); for Neoplatonists, among the ancient theologians (*theologoi*) are Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod and other divinely inspired poets, the creators of theogonies and keepers of sacred rites.

Theoria: (θεωρία) contemplation, theory; the contemplative virtue is called *theoretike*; like the beholding of festivals of the gods and their epiphanies, philosophy introduces the beholding of the well ordered cosmos, still called by the same word, *theoria*; in Neoplatonism, the creative power of the cosmos is contemplation (*theoria*) and intellection (*noesis*): therefore divine *praxis* is *theoria*; for Plotinus, on every level of reality creation is the result of the energy produced by contemplation (*Enn.*8.3-4); every intellect contemplates directly itself; contemplation may be compared to the mystery-rites (*teletai*).

Theos: (θεός) god; the term sometimes is used in a wide and loose sense; “everything is full of gods” (*panta plere theon*), according to Thales; the cosmos may be regarded as a theophany – the manifestation of the One (likened to the supreme transcendent Sun) and the divine *Nous* that constitutes the different levels of divine presence concealed by screens or veils (*parapetasmata*); in ancient Greece, speaking of *theos* or *theoi*, one posits an absolute point of reference for everything that has impact, validity, and permanence, while indistinct influences which affect man directly can be called *daimon*; for Plato and Plotinus, *nous*, the universal soul, the stars, and also the human soul are divine; thus there are invisible and visible gods, arranged in a hierarchy of henads which follows the arrangement of nine hypotheses of Plato’s *Parmenides*; *theoi* are the first principles, henads (as *protos theoi*), intellects and divine souls, but the supreme God is the ineffable One, or the Good; in some respects, *theos* is an equivalent of the Egyptian *neter*; *neteru* are the gods, the first principles, divine powers, manifestations – both transcendent and immanent.

Theourgia: (θεουργία) theurgy; the rites understood as divine acts (*theia erga*) or the working of the gods (*theon erga*); theurgy is not intellectual theorizing about God (*theologia*), but elevation to God; the term is coined by the editors of the *Chaldean Oracles*, but the ancient practice of contacting the gods and ascent to the divine goes back to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian hieratic traditions; Neoplatonic theurgy is based both on the Chaldean patterns and the *exegesis* of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, and other dialogues, and thus regarded as an outgrowth of the Platonic philosophy and the Pythagorean negative

theology; therefore the theurgical *praxis* do not contradict the dialectic of Plato; theurgy deifies the soul through the series of ontological symbols and *sunthemata* that cover the entire hierarchy of being and lead to unification and ineffable unity with the gods; theurgy is based on the laws of cosmogony in their ritual expression and imitates the orders of the gods; for Iamblichus, it transcends all rational philosophy (or intellectual understanding) and transforms man into a divine being.

Tep sepi: the Egyptian term for the metaphysical notion of the First Time (*in illo tempore* of traditional cosmogonies and ritual practices), that is, for the noetic realm of all archetypal precedents; as the First Occasion, *tep sepi* means the coming into being from the abyss of Nun (*deus absconditus*), the passage from the Beyond-Being to Being, symbolized by the emerging of Atum-Ra from the primordial Waters; *tep sepi* is the mythical and ageless age of the gods where all paradigmatic events of Egyptian theology (such as death and resurrection of Osiris) are located in the eternal “now”.

Upaya: the Sanskrit term meaning “way”, “path”, “method”, “means of approach”; F. Schuon regards the exoteric forms of all religions as a sort of *upaya*, that is, both as an indispensable means for one’s spiritual life and as a “soteriological mirage” – a providential formal veil of the “formless truth”.

Yantra: the Sanskrit term for the symbolic geometric design which functions as a means of different ritual practices, contemplation, visualization, concentration, theurgic ascent and assimilation to divine principles; *yantra* is a hieratic instrument, a device for immortalization which saves (*trayate*) all beings from the Lord of Death; if *mantra* is regarded as the soul of the initiate’s chosen deity (*ishta-devata*), *yantra* is the deity’s receptacle, its sacred body; in a certain respect, *yantra* is a graphic image of the entire universe, viewed as a well-structured play of theophanies; usually *yantra* is a simplified geometric representation of the *mandala*-like palace which has four gates and the central dot (*bindu*); the so-called *puja-yantras* are the cultic instruments of worship, and the *raksha-yantras* are the protective amulets; the *sbri-yantra* is a geometric representation of the Macranthropos (*purusha*); *yantras* belong to the same kind of hieratic items as the theurgic *sumbola* and *sunthemata* employed by the Hellenic Neoplatonists and the Egyptian priests skilled in sacred geometry, contemplative mathematics, and talismanic lore.

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Algis Uždavinys

Prof. Dr. Algis Uždavinys (born 1962) is a senior research fellow at the Lithuanian State Institute of Culture, Philosophy, and Arts (Vilnius), and the Head of Department of Humanities at the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts (Kaunas Faculty). From September 2007 to March 2009 he was a research fellow at La Trobe University in Bendigo, Australia.

The author graduated in 1987 from the Soviet Lithuanian State Institute of Fine Arts as an art critic and historian of art (his diploma work: *Semantics of Persian Carpet in the Context of Medieval Culture*). His doctoral thesis on Proclus was defended in 2000 and the academic procedure of habilitation accomplished in 2008 at the Lithuanian State Institute of Culture, Philosophy, and Arts. In 2005 he was awarded the Andrew Mellon Fellowship by the American Centre of Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan. The author's research includes work on Hellenic philosophy, especially Platonism and Neoplatonism, and on Sufism, as well as the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian religious mythologies and ritual practices in relation to the later Hellenic, Jewish, and Islamic spirituality. He is a published scholar in English and his native Lithuanian.

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